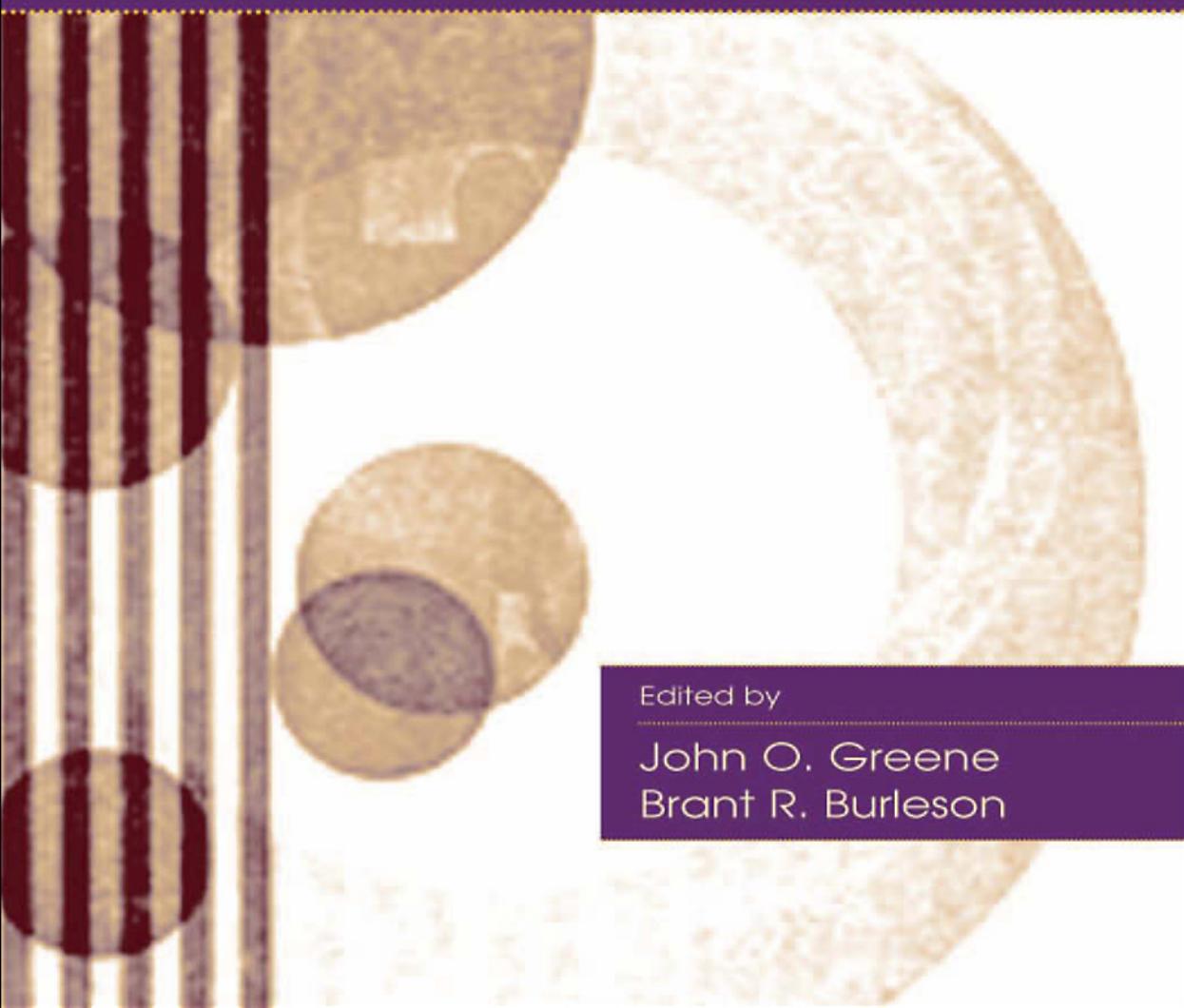


# Handbook of Communication and Social Interaction Skills



Edited by

John O. Greene  
Brant R. Burleson

# HANDBOOK OF COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS

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EDITED BY

JOHN O. GREENE AND BRANT R. BURLESON  
*PURDUE UNIVERSITY*



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## FOREWORD

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*University of California, Santa Barbara*

Readers of this book almost certainly agree that many of the most important activities in which we engage are communicative. Our ability to create and sustain our social world depends in large measure on how well we communicate. People's social skills are crucial to their well-being—individually and collectively. The importance of understanding skillful behavior in all its complexities cannot be overstated.

This *Handbook* is a milestone in the study of communication skills. In its depth and breadth, it is a remarkable work that both chronicles the field and provides a framework for the next generation of theory and research. When such an important milestone has been reached, it is useful to reflect on the journey thus far.

The history of the discipline of communication (broadly conceived) is the story of identifying, investigating, and teaching social skills. There is also an ethical aspect to communication skills in that they can be used for good or ill; the playground bully and the political demagogue may use certain communication skills that accomplish their goals and motivate others to act on their behalf, but bring evil results. The roots of understanding and teaching social skills were decidedly in the service of the public welfare, however. The earliest teaching of oratory was motivated by the need for citizens to be competent to participate in democratic governance (and even today, local, national, and international participation requires that citizens learn to speak effectively to others).

Over time, of course, our understanding of what it means to be a socially skilled citizen has broadened. Not only do people need to deliver public speeches effectively, they also need to manage social and intimate discourse, as well as to use and respond to various technologies. Moreover, we have realized that adults are not the only ones needing social skills; children also need a repertoire of sophisticated social skills to interact effectively in their families, peer groups, and schools. Recognizing this, the National Communication Association has devoted resources to the assessment and development of communication skills in children from kindergarten through high school. In fact, pedagogical concerns and the expansion of communication curricula into the interpersonal domain were among the factors that sparked interest in communication competence in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Research examining communication and social skills extends to the mass media as well. Media researchers have long been interested in strategies for effectively informing people and changing attitudes and behaviors through news reports, advertising, public information campaigns, and documentaries. Today this interest extends to “new media,” for instance, in areas such as the design of web pages that effectively inform and persuade.

Research in interpersonal communication typically has been directed at understanding how communication is used in forming relationships and making them happier. I find this centuries-old concern with the commonweal one of the heartening characteristics of the study of communication. It is one of the reasons that focusing on what people actually do is so important.

To be sure, the focus of inquiry in communication research has undergone periodic shifts. At times, skillful behaviors themselves have been the primary focus of the discipline. At other times, greater emphasis has been given to the cognitive and social-psychological processes assumed to underlie these behaviors. Although approaches emphasizing the behavioral aspects of social skill have not always dominated the research scene, scholars have continued to find that a concern for skilled behavior is necessary for progress in their understanding of communication at every level of analysis. Skills-based work remains a central focus of communication scholars, one that has the potential to integrate various perspectives because it demands a focus on what people do in real life. Through such research, we have come to understand how psychological, cognitive, and emotional processes all contribute to communication behavior. We have made great progress in showing how people’s motivations and goals are realized through social interaction.

The integration of behavioral and psychological approaches (broadly construed) has been, and continues to be, one of the greatest challenges in the study of communication and social interaction skills. In the 1950s and 1960s, when scholars in various disciplines (e.g., sociolinguistics, social psychology, and sociology, as well as communication) developed a renewed interest in social skills, the multi-front attack on the problem eventually led to remarkable progress. Not surprisingly, allegiance to one’s own approach sometimes hampered integration of this work. Another, more interesting impediment to integration was the “problem of context.” Behavior is situated in context and so is the study of behavior and the psychological processes that accompany it. The problem of context is how to transcend it without losing the richness of information that context provides both the actors being studied and the scholar doing the studying.

In the mid-1970s, my attempts (e.g., Wiemann, 1977) to integrate the work of various disciplinary perspectives and deal with what I saw as the problem of context led me to link contextualized behavior to trans-contextual functions (control, affiliation, and task). By doing so, I hoped that a theory of communication competence could be developed that was robust, yet could be used to understand communication behavior in a specific situation. As work in this area progressed beyond simple distinctions between “skilled” and “unskilled” behavior, the importance of individual and relational goals, strategies and motivations for achieving these goals, planning routines, emotions, and cognitive abilities became evident. It also became clear that prescriptive conclusions about which skills “worked” or which were “good,” encouraged by the very pedagogical concerns that motivated much of the work in the discipline at that time, were not going to be very useful.

Each advance in research required a new round of integrative theoretical work that, in turn, spurred a new wave of empirical investigation. These advances required

scholars to put aside their own disciplinary and methodological allegiances (a move that I know from personal experience is, at times, difficult to make!) to take advantage of the knowledge that was being produced.

Along the way, we have become more sophisticated about what it means to be competent or skilled. The move from focusing on individuals to relationships has been very important because through it we learned that the sheer number of “skills” (the ability of an individual to produce desired behavioral routines) did not necessarily predict happy, successful, productive—that is, competent—relationships. Some scholars (see Cupach & Spitzberg, 1994) began to examine how skilled communicators could intentionally produce very negative outcomes for their partners. For example, maintaining an “enemy relationship” without driving the other person away requires a great deal of skill and such a relationship might even be called “competent” (if only in a twisted sort of way) if both partners were achieving their goals, no matter how destructive.

I am pleased to see that work under the rubrics of communicative competence, social interaction, social skills and the like has continued to prosper. The comprehensive theory I was looking for is not yet developed, but as this book indicates, we are closer to achieving that goal.

As the various chapters in this *Handbook* demonstrate, there are a variety of useful ways to approach communication and social interaction skills. The gathering together of these various perspectives in one place underscores the power of the collective work of the discipline over time. It also encourages new combinations and syntheses of these approaches. The synthetic possibilities are timely. Distinctions among what some have called “levels of analysis” of communication (interpersonal, mass, organizational, etc.) become less meaningful as new technologies, globalization, and even our own understanding of communication processes call for theory and research that is integrative—research that recognizes that traditional ways of thinking about scholarship no longer capture the complexities of our experiences.

As this *Handbook* presents the many aspects of social skills, it should also serve as a springboard for future research and theory development. Current research into the use of new communication technologies, for example, might benefit from the collective wisdom of this book. Today, prescriptive approaches to communication using technology could be more integrative and sensitive to the context-dependent applications of social skills in mediated situations.

The scholars contributing to this *Handbook* are an impressive lot. They represent the many perspectives that have developed in social skill research, and they synthesize decades of research on social skill acquisition and performance in different relationships and multiple contexts. This work provides a backdrop for understanding relationships now, and sets the stage for future advances in social skill research, as we continually seek better ways to create and sustain our social world.

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## PREFACE

Communication processes are a source of fascination for scholars and laypersons alike. Our collective penchant for inspecting, explicating, and critiquing this uniquely human activity is remarkable, on one hand, for its enduring character (being the object of two millennia of recorded intellectual scrutiny), and on the other, for the panoply specific phenomena, philosophical perspectives, and theoretical frameworks brought to bear in this endeavor. And yet, there is a thread that runs through all this work—over the centuries and across the spectrum of thought. This unifying theme is a concern with *skill*—the notion that communication may be done “well” or “poorly”—and *skill enhancement*, the idea that individuals, properly informed or trained, might come to “do it better.”

The focus on communication skill is doubtless due, in part, to the fact that much communication is a pragmatic enterprise—directed at accomplishing an array of practical tasks (e.g., negotiating treaties to resolve armed conflicts between nations, conveying information clearly in the classroom, winning votes in popular elections, consoling a sad friend, preserving one’s property and freedom in courts of law, enhancing cohesiveness in work teams, settling on a price for potatoes in the village marketplace). But the importance of communication skills does not stem entirely from the influence they exert in accomplishing such specific, situation-bound objectives. Beyond these narrower ends, professional success, relationship satisfaction, personal fulfillment, psychological well-being, and even physical health depend upon the social interaction skills of the individual—and those of his or her associates and interlocutors.

In light of the importance of communication skills, it is hardly surprising that they have been a continuing object of study by scholars and researchers from numerous disciplines, including virtually every branch of communication (e.g., interpersonal, group, organizational, health, public, mass), several areas of psychology (cognitive, social, clinical, developmental, and industrial), as well as a variety of other disciplines, including education, family studies, business management, and nursing. Scholars investigate public speaking, group discussion, listening, persuasion, conflict management, explaining, organizational leadership, social support, relationship

management, and on and on, frequently with an eye toward helping people to learn to do these things more effectively.

The enduring and widespread concern with communication skill and skill enhancement suggested to us that a survey of work in these areas would have broad appeal for scholars and students across the spectrum of disciplines devoted to the study of social interaction. Equally important, we became convinced of the practical value of reviews of current research and theory on social skill for clinicians, therapists, trainers, and laypersons. These complementary concerns, scholarly and practical, led us to undertake the project that culminated in the production of this volume.

The initial impetus for the book, then, was simply the idea that social skills are important, and that, for this reason, there is real value associated with being conversant with the work on skilled performance, skill development, and skill assessment. As the project took shape, however, we articulated four ancillary features that we felt would make the book particularly useful.

First, the contributors to this volume were selected because they had established reputations as preeminent researchers and writers in their respective domains of study. These authors, drawn from several different academic disciplines, were invited to contribute to this project because their expertise and professional standing made them particularly well qualified to prepare chapters in their respective areas of specialization.

Second, this volume provides a broad, comprehensive treatment of work on social interaction skill and skill acquisition. We originally identified approximately 30 topic areas and research traditions for inclusion, and, thanks to the efforts of the contributors, we obtained chapters for 24 of these areas. Thus, the chapters in this book reflect a breadth of scholarly work pertinent to communication and social interaction skill.

Third, the emphasis for each chapter is on providing an up-to-date review of research in the area. In some cases, previous reviews of the topics addressed in this book are now 10 to 20 years old, and for other topic areas, there simply have been no prior reviews.

Finally, each chapter emphasizes, at least to some extent, empirically supported strategies for developing and enhancing specific skills. All theoretical orientations are not equally congenial to the notion of skill development, and prescriptions for skilled conduct are better supported in some literatures than in others. Still, each of the chapters suggests important implications for improving communication effectiveness. In the end, then, our aim was to produce the most comprehensive, authoritative source available on communication skills and skill enhancement—a volume with both practical and theoretical significance.

The chapters comprising this volume are organized into five major units: (1) general theoretical and methodological issues (e.g., models of skill acquisition, methods of skill assessment, techniques for social skill training), (2) fundamental interaction skills (i.e., those that are transfunctional and transcontextual, e.g., nonverbal skills, message production skills, message reception skills), (3) function-focused skills (e.g., informing, persuading, managing conflict, providing emotional support), (4) skills used in the management of personal relationships (e.g., friendships, dating relationships, marriage, parenting), and (5) skills employed in various public and professional contexts (e.g., negotiation, group decision making, teaching).

The authors of each chapter were asked to address a set of core questions or issues. It was not our intention that these questions serve as the organizational scheme for the chapters; rather they were intended to assist the authors in producing more

comprehensive reviews and to provide greater coherence across the various domains being surveyed (recognizing, of course, that the status of the literature in particular areas dictated that certain chapters would touch on only some of these questions). The core questions posed for our contributors, then, were as follows:

1. What is the nature of the skill (or skills) with which you are concerned? How should these skills be conceptualized and defined? What does it mean to be skilled with respect to this area?
2. What is the practical significance of possessing this communication skill? What enablers or advantages does this skill provide? What are the consequences of low skill in this area?
3. What methodological issues are encountered in assessing and/or studying this communication skill? What are particularly good ways of assessing this skill?
4. What individual-difference variables have been found to be related to this communication skill? How do these variables contribute to competence in or enactment of this skill?
5. In what contexts or domains is this skill typically used? With what effect?
6. What are the implications of research on this skill for training and development? How can people become more proficient with respect to this skill?

Taken as a whole, this book reveals that social scientists have made considerable progress in probing the dynamics of skillful interaction and skill acquisition. In these chapters the reader will find summaries of programmatic research, sophisticated conceptual frameworks for organizing and making sense of those research findings, and practical guidelines for social conduct and training that are based on theory and data. At the same time, a look to the future suggests the need for further work to address a number of issues:

- In many of the domains surveyed here, there is a need for better, theoretically grounded, models of skilled performance. What counts as “skillful” communication in a particular domain and why? What empirically based criteria should be used in assessing skillfulness in varied forms of communication?
- What are the personal, relational, social, and organizational consequences of skilled and unskilled communicative performances in various domains? Why do communication skills matter and just how do they matter?
- How do people learn or acquire various communication skills “naturally” over the course of development? How can parents, teachers, consultants, trainers, and therapists enhance various communication skills more effectively? What theoretical models of skill training and development do the best job of informing educational efforts? What instructional or training methods are most effective with particular skills?
- What strategies should be utilized in more thoroughly evaluating skill training efforts? What are the most sound approaches for assessing whether (a) programs actually teach intended skills (instructional fidelity), (b) students or clients learn the skills taught (instructional effectiveness), (c) students actually utilize the skills they have been taught in real-world situations (skill transfer and generalization), (d) learned skills continue to be used over time (skill persistence) and (e) students achieve desirable personal, relational, and instrumental outcomes when using the skills they have learned (skill effectiveness)?

Beyond these directions for future work, it should also be apparent that, despite our intention to produce the most comprehensive survey of social interaction skills possible, there are communication skill domains that are not represented in this book. We wanted to include a handful of other chapters, including ones on computer-mediated communication, listening, social perception, interaction management, and presentational skills. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, we were unable to include reviews on these topics (perhaps we were lacking in requisite communication skills!). Their absence should not be construed as any indication that we consider them somehow less important, and, indeed, we hope to include such chapters in subsequent editions of this book.

We wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the people who've played such important roles in this project: to Karin Wittig Bates at Lawrence Erlbaum for all her work in managing the details associated with the production of a book this size, and especially to Linda Bathgate, who believed in this project from the start, and supported us throughout its completion. Finally, we are indebted to the authors of the chapters who shared our commitment to the importance of this undertaking and so generously contributed their time and expertise in bringing it to be.

John O. Greene  
Brant R. Burleson

# HANDBOOK OF COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS



PART

# I

## GENERAL THEORTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES



CHAPTER

1

## EXPLICATING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AS A THEORETICAL TERM

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There is a vast research literature on communicative competence. By searching the PsyInfo database in January 2000, using only the terms *communicative competence* and *communication competence*, we generated a list of 570 dissertations, articles, books, and book chapters. Although our list includes entries dating back to the mid-1950s, more than 90% of the works have been published since 1980, and 50% have appeared since 1990. A parallel search of PsyInfo using the broader term *social competence* produced 2,616 relevant works.

Research on communicative competence is diverse. Works on our list are authored by scholars from communication, psychology, sociolinguistics, human-computer interaction, child development, gerontology, education, speech disorders, social work, medicine, management, and marketing. Some investigate communicative competence within professional roles and relationships, such as competencies for teachers (e.g., Rubin & Feezel, 1986), health care providers (e.g., Cegala, Coleman, & Turner, 1998), patients (e.g., McGee & Cegala, 1998), organizations and their members (e.g., Jablin & Sias, 2001), and conflict mediators (e.g., Donohue, Allen, & Burrell, 1988). Others explore competence within personal relationships such as friendships (e.g., Collier, 1996) and families (e.g., Lindsey, Mize, & Pettit, 1997). Some specify competencies for students from preschool (e.g., Stohl, 1983) to college (National Communication Association, 1998). A burgeoning literature highlights competencies that facilitate intercultural interaction (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1996; Wiseman & Koester, 1993).

Why have so many scholars, from so many fields, studied communicative competence within so many relational, institutional, and cultural contexts? Our hunch is that scholars, as well as the contemporary Western societies in which most live and work, widely accept the following tacit beliefs: (a) within any situation, not all things that can be said and done are equally competent; (b) success in personal and professional relationships depends, in no small part, on communicative competence; and (c) most

people display incompetence in at least a few situations, and a smaller number are judged incompetent across many situations. Reflecting these beliefs, several introductory texts aim to help students assess and enhance their communicative competence (Berko, Rosenfeld, & Samovar, 1997; Cupach & Canary, 1997; O'Hair, Friedrich, Wiemann, & Wiemann, 1995; Trenholm & Jensen, 2000; Verderber & Verderber, 1998).

Despite the intuitive importance of communicative competence, scholars studying the concept frequently voice two concerns. One concern is that it is difficult to define exactly what constitutes communicative competence. Definitional concerns take several forms. For example, communicative competence has been defined in widely divergent ways. In their review of competence and organizations, Jablin and Sias (2001) noted, "there are almost as many definitions of communication competence as there are researchers interested in the construct" (p. 820). Wiemann and Bradac (1989) identify two schools of thought in defining competence. Scholars from the "structuralist" school emphasize that communicators normally are competent in the sense that they succeed "in making their intentions understood, in seeming coherent, in seeming communicatively usual, in eliciting communicatively relevant responses from others, in distinguishing random movement from purposeful action, etc." (p. 265). The central problem for this school is explicating the structures that make communication possible and, in most cases, nonproblematic (see Sanders, this volume). Scholars from the "functionalist" school emphasize that communicators vary considerably in their success at accomplishing goals such as gaining another's compliance or creating a desired impression; hence, "relative competence" is the modal state of affairs. Functionalists seek to identify skills and strategies that enhance a communicator's likelihood of accomplishing goals. As Wiemann and Bradac (1989) noted, these two schools of thought contain "a number of assumptive disparities" (p. 262) about competence.

Definitional concerns also arise when scholars attempt to explicate subcomponents of communicative competence (e.g., empathy, flexibility), whether through literature review or data reduction. After reviewing 30 lists of attributes that facilitate intercultural competence, Spitzberg (1989) argued that these works fail to (a) define attributes with the same label (e.g., empathy) consistently and (b) conceptualize interrelationships among attributes on each list.

Definitional concerns arise even when scholars search for consensus. As an example, Rubin (1990) argued that "virtually every definition of communicative competence includes the mandate that communication be both appropriate and effective" (p. 108). Yet areas of surface agreement such as this dissipate once explored in detail. Should appropriateness and effectiveness be weighted equally when assessing communicative competence? What about other possible criteria for evaluating competence, such as efficiency (Berger, 2000) or ethicalness (Jablin & Sias, 2001)? And, of course, appropriateness and effectiveness themselves must be defined (Rawlins, 1985). Appropriate by what standards, according to whom? Effective in whose eyes, over what time frame? Chen and Starosta (1996) noted that "although researchers conceive of communication competence as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with others, their definitions betray greater or lesser degrees of ambiguity, confusion, and imprecision" (p. 358).

Aside from definitional vagaries, a second concern is that the literature on communicative competence lacks theoretical grounding. Two decades ago, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) described most competence research as "variable analytic," arguing that there existed "a painful paucity of research aimed at constructing or testing

theoretical explanations of competent and incompetent interactions” (p. 75). Ten years later, Greene and Geddes (1993) observed that the competence literature still was “characterized by frequent calls for ‘more theory’: for more adequate explanations, for broad integrative conceptual frameworks, for heuristically rich perspectives” (p. 44). Calls for theory reflect that discussions of communicative competence often are not grounded firmly within specific theoretical frameworks that offer principled answers to questions such as the following: What qualities are necessary for communicating competently? Why do individuals or relationships display incompetence? What units of analysis are fruitful for conceptualizing communicative competence? Absent theoretical grounding, we are left without a “road map to the often bewildering range of activities associated with communicative competence” (Parks, 1994, p. 612). Or as Spitzberg (1993) wrote in more dire terms, “The concept of interpersonal competence has wandered the scholarly landscape for several decades. Finding permanent shelter in neither a home discipline nor a grounding comprehensive theory, it continues to lack coherent direction and focus” (p. 137).

Definitional problems and lack of theory are common laments by scholars studying communicative competence. What is recognized less often, or at least less explicitly, is that these two concerns are intimately interrelated. Our primary claim in this chapter is that we, as a community of scholars, will gain deeper and more useful insights if *communicative competence* is defined within the parameters of specific communication theories. We advocate treating it as what Kaplan (1964) called a “theoretical term” rather than as a construct. Many stumbling blocks to defining communicative competence become nonissues or are redefined in productive ways once competence is conceptualized within multiple theories.<sup>1</sup>

We develop our argument for treating communicative competence as a theoretical term in three sections. Section one clarifies the distinction between a theoretical term and a construct, arguing that communicative competence typically has been explicated as a construct. Section two explicates communicative competence within five families of communication theory. Section three discusses implications of conceptualizing communicative competence as a theoretical term.

## TWO WAYS OF EXPLICATING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

### Constructs Versus Theoretical Terms

Abraham Kaplan (1964) proposed a pragmatic perspective on methodology for the social sciences (for a discussion of Kaplan in relation to pragmatism as a philosophy of science, see Diesing, 1991). Rather than asking how to verify the truth of a proposition, pragmatists begin by asking what difference it would make if the statement were true (Kaplan, p. 42). For the pragmatist, scientific inquiry begins with questions or problems—practical problems of living as well as technical problems of theory and method. A concept’s utility thus depends on its use. Printers and freight agents classify books by size and weight even though these concepts are of limited use to librarians and most readers (Kaplan, p. 51).

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<sup>1</sup>To place feasible boundaries on our discussion, we focus strictly on conceptions of *communicative* competence. However, related terms such as *social*, *interpersonal*, or *relational* competence also can be conceptualized within multiple theoretical frameworks, and it likely will be difficult to define them clearly and precisely outside specific theories.

As part of this pragmatic perspective, Kaplan (1964) distinguished two types of scientific concepts: constructs and theoretical terms. Kaplan described constructs as “terms which, though not observational either directly or indirectly, may be applied and even defined on the basis of observables” (p. 55). *Government*, *money*, and *taboo* are examples of constructs, because each has been defined individually, in isolation from larger theories. As Kaplan wrote, “we may speak of government in a variety of political theories, and *perhaps without explicitly theorizing about it at all*” (p. 57; emphasis added). Constructs are defined by, and their meaning arises from, vertical connection with observables (i.e., measurement procedures).

In contrast, a theoretical term derives its meaning not just from summarizing observables, but primarily “from the part it plays in the whole theory in which it is embedded, and from the role of the theory itself” (p. 56). Kaplan (1964) offered *castration complex*, *marginal utility*, and *Protestant ethic* as examples of theoretical terms. Such terms cannot be understood in isolation, for a theoretical term such as *castration complex* is “meaningless if dissociated from psychoanalytic theory” (p. 57). Theoretical terms possess *systemic meaning*; that is, the “theory as a whole is needed to give meaning to its terms, even those parts of the theory in which the terms in question do not explicitly appear” (p. 65). Theoretical terms are defined primarily through horizontal connection with other concepts in a larger theory. Of course, at least some terms in an empirical theory eventually must be connected with observables if we are to assess its utility. The systemic meaning of a theoretical term, however, mandates that to define it, “we must be prepared to send not a single spy but whole battalions: what begins as the effort to fix the content of a single concept ends as the task of assessing the truth of a whole theory” (Kaplan, p. 57).

Examples from communication theories may clarify the distinction between constructs and theoretical terms. Within action assembly theory (AAT), Greene (1984, 1997a) proposed the concept of *procedural records* as one of several theoretical terms. One can try to define procedural records in isolation; for example, Greene and Geddes (1993) describe them as “modular memory structures which . . . preserve relationships between three types of symbolic elements: (1) behavioral features, (2) outcomes associated with those features, and (3) situational and intrasyntematic features that have proven relevant to the action-outcome relationship stored in the record” (p. 30).

Yet one cannot adequately define nor understand procedural records in isolation from other terms in AAT (e.g., activation and assembly processes, coalitions, the output representation) as anyone not already familiar with the theory will attest. Procedural records represent action-relevant information in multiple formats, from propositional codes underlying abstract ideas to sensimotor codes for muscle movements. This makes sense only in light of other assumptions from AAT, such as that any behavior is composed of a large number of elemental units from multiple levels of abstraction. Greene also does not directly “measure” procedural records; rather, he makes predictions about the content and paralinguistic features of messages produced under varying conditions based on the relationship between procedural records and other terms in AAT. These same points are evident if one tries to define *the maxim of quantity* without also discussing other terms in Grice’s (1975) theory of conversational implicature, or *multivocality* without other terms in Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) theory of relational dialectics. The meaning of theoretical terms such as maxim of quality or multivocality can “be specified only as they are used together with other terms” (Kaplan, 1964, p. 63).

## Communicative Competence as a Theoretical Term

Communicative competence, to date, typically has been treated as a construct rather than a theoretical term. Scholars have spent much time trying to define communicative competence (for a sampling, see Parks, 1994) and developing measures that assess competence (see Spitzberg, this volume). Most work of this type lacks any explicit theoretical grounding. Other works draw loosely from several different theoretical traditions. Bochner and Kelley (1974), in formulating their definition of interpersonal competence, drew from the humanistic psychology of Rogers, the neo-Freudian writings of Adler and Erikson, Lewin's field theory, and Watzlawick et al.'s analysis of relational communication. Wiemann (1977), in creating his definition and measure of communicative competence, drew from self-presentational (Goffman, 1959), T-group (Argyris, 1965), and social skill (Argyle, 1969) approaches. Works such as these seem to assume that if scholars could develop a clear, comprehensive, and consensually agreed upon definition of communicative competence, and create reliable and valid measures of that concept, then we could get about the business of developing an encompassing theory of communicative competence.

Viewing communicative competence as a theoretical term flips such thinking on its head. A call to explicate communicative competence no longer is satisfied solely by a conceptual definition, nor even by an accompanying measurement procedure. Rather, a call to explicate communicative competence is an appeal to analyze its meaning and role within a theory of communication (i.e., its horizontal connections). Theory is the starting point, not the destination, for such a journey. From this view, the question "what is communicative competence?" seems incomplete or ill formed because one necessarily must know from within what larger theory of communication the term is being analyzed to answer it.<sup>2</sup> "How should communicative competence be measured?" posed in the abstract, suffers the same problem.

Keeping with Kaplan's (1964) pragmatism, we argue that treating communicative competence as a theoretical term rather than a construct will result in greater progress in solving problems, both theoretical (e.g., understanding the roots of incompetence) and practical (e.g., helping people achieve competence). A few works have begun the task; for example, Parks (1985, 1994) explicated communicative competence within cybernetic control theory, and Baxter and Montgomery (1996) explored competence within their theory of relational dialectics. We now analyze communicative competence within multiple families of communication theory.

## EXPLICATING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE WITHIN COMMUNICATION THEORIES

This section explicates communicative competence within five groups or "families" of communication theory (see Table 1.1). We acknowledge, at the outset, that these

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<sup>2</sup>Some examples from this section may have created the mistaken impression that a theoretical term must be part of one and only one theory (or a single family of theories), in the way that *castration complex* is associated with psychoanalytic theories. What makes something a theoretical term, however, is not its association with a single theory but rather its definition through horizontal connection with other terms within whatever theory it appears. Kaplan (1964, p. 73) noted that *culture* is a theoretical term within many social-scientific theories. We see no problem in treating communication competence as a term within multiple, distinct communication theories. One consequence of doing so, however, is that the precise meaning of communicative competence will vary somewhat when conceptualized as part of different theories of communication. We return to this point in the final section of our chapter.

**TABLE 1.1**  
Five Theoretical Perspectives on Communication Competence

<i>Points of Comparison</i>	<i>Psychological Perspectives</i>				<i>Social Perspectives of Relationships</i>
	<i>Theories of Message Processing</i>	<i>Attribution Theories</i>	<i>GPA Theories</i>	<i>Hierarchical Theories</i>	
Central theme	Competent communicators are responsive to expectations	Competent communicators are optimistic yet realistic about success	Competent communicators possess an anticipatory mind-set	Competent communicators implement action programs skillfully and gracefully	Competent interactions are sensitive to the demands and possibilities of contradiction
Key concepts for understanding communication competence	1. Expectancies for verbal/nonverbal behavior 2. Attributional style 3. Overattributing negative intent 3. Source reward valence	1. Attributions for success/failure 2. Attributional style 3. Overattributing negative intent 3. Source reward valence	1. Multiple goals 2. Situational ambiguity 3. Plans (complexity) 4. Online planning 5. Plan modification	1. Levels of procedural knowledge 2. Integrating knowledge 3. Self-directed attention 4. Executive processes	1. Dialectical tensions (contradictions) 2. Change/process 3. Multivocality/dialogue 4. Praxical patterns
Qualities needed for competence					
Knowledge	1. Situationally and culturally relevant expectancies 2. Factors affecting own reward valence	1. Factors influencing success/failure (obstacles) 2. Behaviors that increase chance of success 3. Possible mitigating information	1. Factors relevant to forming goals 2. Obstacles to achieving goals 3. Plans for achieving goals (contingencies) 4. Plans for integrating multiple goals	1. Programs/plans for achieving goals 2. Concrete behaviors to enact programs 3. Conditions under which to enact programs	1. Personal, relational, and cultural standards for judging competence (evolving)

Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To create/maintain positive impression</li> <li>2. To understand and adapt to expectancies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To succeed at a task</li> <li>2. To persist in face of initial failure (hope)</li> <li>3. To understand others' perspectives/feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To accomplish goals</li> <li>2. To reconcile conflicting goals</li> <li>3. To develop/adjust plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To continue relating</li> <li>2. To appreciate/respond to contradictions</li> <li>3. To listen to multiple voices, balance power</li> </ul>
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifying relevant expectancies</li> <li>2. Recognizing strategic violations</li> <li>3. Following or positively violating expectancies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recognizing when obstacles are/aren't controllable</li> <li>2. Enacting behaviors that increase chance of success</li> <li>3. Recognizing multiple potential interpretations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifying "situationally relevant" goals</li> <li>2. Enacting plans</li> <li>3. Monitoring and adjusting plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recalling/integrating levels of procedural knowledge</li> <li>2. Implementing programs quickly, smoothly without error</li> <li>3. Adjusting attention based on task</li> </ul>
Potential sources of incompetence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of knowledge about expectancies</li> <li>2. Inaccurate assessments of reward valence</li> <li>3. Conflicting expectancies</li> <li>4. Narrow latitude of acceptable behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Learned" helplessness</li> <li>2. Lack of knowledge/skill about behaviors that lead to success</li> <li>3. Depression/stress</li> <li>4. Attributional biases(automaticity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Forming "inappropriate" goals</li> <li>2. Lack plan alternatives</li> <li>3. Impaired online planning focus</li> <li>4. Cognitive load</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Power discrepancies</li> <li>2. Disapproval by larger social network</li> <li>3. Relationship reconfigurations</li> <li>4. Individual qualities (need to control others; attachment)</li> </ul>
Strategies for improving communication competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching behavioral expectancies</li> <li>2. Training to recognize strategic violations</li> <li>3. Advocating expectancy change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attributional retraining</li> <li>2. Teaching/practicing behaviors that increase chance of success</li> <li>3. Alleviating stress/depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarifying "situationally relevant" and appropriate" goals</li> <li>2. Learning and practicing new plans</li> <li>3. Removing impediments to monitoring/adjusting goals and plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seeking advice from third parties</li> <li>2. Strengthening supportive social networks</li> <li>3. (Re)training skills/values</li> </ul>

are not the only theories within which communicative competence can be explicated.<sup>3</sup> We have chosen these five families of theory for two reasons. First, they offer multiple perspectives on the nature of communication and hence nicely display how competence takes on systemic meaning when explicated within different theories. Theories shown in the first four columns of Table 1.1 are “psychological” (Craig, 1999; Fisher, 1978) in that they emphasize mental processes underlying communicative behavior. Communication theories in the psychological tradition are not homogenous, and hence the four are further subdivided into (a) theories of message processing that focus on how people attend to, interpret, and evaluate their own and others’ behavior; and (b) theories of message production that focus on how people generate and enact communicative behavior in pursuit of interaction goals (Littlejohn, 1999). Because critics charge that the study of interpersonal communication is overly dominated by psychological theories (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Burgoon & Buller, 1996; Burgoon & White, 1997; Lannamann, 1991, 1995; Shepherd, 1998, 1999), we also explicate communicative competence within Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) theory of relational dialectics (see column five in Table 1.1). By discussing a more “social” approach to communicative competence,<sup>4</sup> we show how the analytic framework outlined in this chapter can be applied to highly diverse genres of communication theory.

Second, these five families of theory, although diverse, each embody what might be termed a *process* perspective. That is, these five families draw attention to psychological and interactional processes, such as message production or relationship definition, that have implications for communicative competence in virtually any context. When applied thoughtfully, process theories offer insights and suggestions for enhancing competence in a host of specific relationships, institutions, and cultures. Moreover, as will become apparent, these insights are not limited to the individual unit of analysis; rather, process theories highlight individual, relational, organizational, and societal factors that undermine or promote competent communication. Adopting a process perspective thus is advantageous in terms of theoretical scope.<sup>5</sup>

We compare these five families of communication theory in several respects (see Table 1.1). Initially, we present a central theme about the meaning of communicative competence when explicated within each theoretical family. The second row of Table 1.1 describes key concepts for each family of theories. These concepts represent the “other terms” that must be understood to grasp the meaning of communicative competence within that theory.

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<sup>3</sup>As one example, competence might be envisioned within theories of mutual influence, such as Burgoon and White’s (1997) interaction adaptation theory or Giles and colleagues’ communication accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991).

<sup>4</sup>Encompassing a broad range of theories, social approaches typically (a) focus largely on behaviors occurring between people, rather than on individual perceptions of behavior; (b) treat communication as a process of constructing and negotiating reality; (c) emphasize cultural and social identities and contexts; and (d) adopt a reflexive stance about the interplay of observer/observed and theory/practice (Craig, 1995; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>Aside from process theories, communicative competence alternatively might be explicated within theories that foreground specific relationships (e.g., Rawlin’s [1992] dialectic analysis of friendship), institutional contexts (e.g., Babrow and Mattson’s [in press] analysis of unique topoi for health communication theories), or cultures (e.g., works in the “ethnography of communication” tradition; see Philipsen, 1992). We encourage others to explicate the meaning of communicative competence within alternative forms of theory as long as such efforts genuinely treat competence as a theoretical term. Scholars who instead generate ad hoc lists of qualities that describe or facilitate communicating competently in specific relationships, institutions, or cultures will only reinforce the prevailing tendency to treat competence as a construct.

Row three describes each theoretical family's view about key qualities that facilitate communicative competence. Following Spitzberg and Cupach (1984, 1989), we group these qualities under the global categories of knowledge, motivation, and skill. *Knowledge* refers to information that an individual, a dyad, or a group needs to communicate in ways perceived as competent, such as knowing what one is expected to say, how others are likely to feel and behave, which different courses of action might be taken, which factors affect the likely outcomes of various actions, and so forth. *Motivation* refers to an individual's or a group's desire to communicate in ways that will be seen as competent, such as wanting to approach or avoid particular situations or accomplish specific goals. *Skill* refers to an individual's or a group's ability to carry out processes that promote perceptions of competence, such as distinguishing between one's own and another's perspective under stress or enacting a newly learned behavior in a timely and smooth fashion.

Each family of theories presents a distinct view about causes that underlie incompetent communication. We compare sources of incompetence in the fourth row of Table 1.1. Finally, we analyze what each family suggests about enhancing competent communication in row five.

## Psychological Theories: Theories of Message Processing

**Expectancy Theories.** Communication expectancies "are enduring patterns of anticipated verbal and nonverbal behavior" (Burgoon, 1995, p. 195). People hold expectancies about how others will communicate during any encounter, including norms for nonverbal behaviors (e.g., gaze, distance) and language (e.g., verbal aggressiveness). Expectancies specify what typically occurs (descriptive) as well as what should occur (prescriptive). At first it might seem that competent communicators would say and do what is expected, and hence persons who violate expectancies would appear incompetent. Both Burgoon's (1995) expectancy violations theory (EVT) and Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature, however, suggest that the relationship between expectancies and competence is more complicated.

According to EVT, expectancies for any interaction are derived from information about communicator characteristics, relational characteristics, and context. As an example, norms for conversational distance vary depending on participants' age and gender, how well they know each other, and where they interact (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Communication expectancies also vary across culture. Societies varying along the cultural dimension of individualism—collectivism, for example—hold different preferences for direct versus indirect forms of communication (Kim 1994; Kim & Bresnahan, 1996). Co-cultures also may hold unique expectancies about which behaviors create perceptions of communicative competence (Bradford, Meyers, & Kane, 1999).

Expectancy violations are "actions sufficiently discrepant from the expectancy to be noticeable and classified as outside the expectancy range" (Burgoon, 1995, p. 200). According to EVT, when an interaction partner engages in unexpected behavior, our arousal increases. Arousal leads to an "orienting response" in which we shift attention away from the topic of conversation to the interaction partner in an attempt to interpret and evaluate the unexpected behavior.

According to EVT, violations may be either positive or negative. Positive violations occur when communicators are judged to have produced more favorable effects by deviating from, rather than adhering to, expectancies. Deviations that produce less

favorable outcomes are negative violations (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Reactions to expectancy violations depend on both the nature of the violation and the violator. Some violations are likely to produce negative outcomes regardless of who commits them. Reactions to ambiguous violations, however, vary depending on communicator valence, which refers to "whether, on balance, a communicator is deemed rewarding or not and, by extension, whether an interaction with that person is expected to be pleasurable or not" (Burgoon, 1995, p. 201). Judgments of another's reward valence may be based on that person's attractiveness, expertise, gender, socioeconomic status, perceived similarity, and communication style (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). A key prediction of EVT is that communicator valence moderates reactions to ambiguous expectancy violations.

M. Burgoon, Birk, and Hall's (1991) application of EVT to the health care context illustrates how source valence can moderate expectancy violations. Although physicians as a group are held in high regard in this society, Burgoon et al. argued that male physicians typically are viewed as more credible than their female counterparts because until recently men have dominated the role (see Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). According to EVT, male physicians thus should have greater latitude than female physicians to deviate from expectancies. To test this thinking, Burgoon et al. (1991) had adults in one study rate the degree to which they expected male and female physicians to use a variety of compliance-seeking strategies. Participants in a second study read a hypothetical scenario in which a male or female physician used either nonaggressive, moderately aggressive, or highly aggressive compliance-seeking strategies. These participants then rated (a) the likelihood that they would comply with the doctor's recommendations and (b) the appropriateness of the doctor's communication. Female more than male physicians were expected to use nonaggressive compliance-seeking strategies, and the female physician was rated as most effective at gaining compliance when she conformed to this expectancy (i.e., used only nonaggressive rather than moderately or highly aggressive strategies). Male physicians were expected to use moderately aggressive strategies, but the male physician actually was rated as most effective when he deviated from this norm (i.e., used nonaggressive or highly aggressive strategies). Findings for perceived appropriateness of the doctor's communication followed a similar, albeit weaker, pattern. None of these findings were qualified by participant gender, and the basic findings have been replicated (Klinge & Burgoon, 1995).

As these findings illustrate, the EVT framework highlights a *paradox of presumed communicative (in)competence*. Specifically, persons presumed communicatively competent—because they possess specific socio-demographic characteristics or already have demonstrated desirable qualities—in some cases can enhance their perceived competence further by violating communication expectancies.<sup>6</sup> Male physicians who use aggressive compliance-seeking strategies may be interpreted as demonstrating concern for their patient, which in turn enhances their perceived competence. In contrast, persons presumed less communicatively competent may

<sup>6</sup>One limitation here is that EVT does not provide precise, a priori predictions about exactly when source reward valence will moderate the effects of expectancy violations on outcomes. Although high-valence communicators in some cases benefit from violating expectations and low-valence communicators suffer from the same violations, in other cases communicator valence has no moderating effect (e.g., Burgoon & Hale, 1988) or moderates interpretations but not the outcome of violations (e.g., Burgoon, Walther, & Baesler, 1992). Clarifying the conditions under which source valence does (not) moderate the outcomes of expectancy violations is critical for understanding the role of communicative competence in EVT.

be evaluated favorably only when they conform to communication expectancies. Thus, a female physician may find that she receives the most favorable reactions when using nonaggressive compliance-seeking strategies, even though such behaviors inadvertently reinforce expectancies (i.e., gender stereotypes) that lower her perceived communicative competence in the first place.

Aside from EVT, Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature suggests that competent communicators must be able to both follow and strategically violate communicative expectations. Grice presumes that conversation is a "cooperative" activity, meaning that it requires at least minimal levels of collaboration and coordination. Given this, conversationalists are expected to follow the *cooperative principle*, namely; "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 45). Grice proposes four *maxims*, the following of which lead to behavior consistent with the cooperative principle. The quantity maxim, which pertains to the expected amount of talk, is violated when speakers are over- or under-informative. The quality maxim involves the truthfulness of talk, such as expectations that speakers will avoid deception, hearsay, or gossip. The maxim of relation says that speakers should make relevant contributions given the current topic and purpose of talk. The manner maxim involves the clarity of talk, such as expectations that speakers will avoid obscurity, ambiguity, and other factors that may hinder understanding. These maxims specify what "participants must do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, co-operative way" (Levinson, 1983, p. 102).<sup>7</sup>

Grice (1975) readily admitted that people often do not follow these maxims, to the letter, during conversation. But when a speaker does not follow the maxims at a literal level, our initial impulse is to assume that, contrary to appearances, the speaker still is adhering to them at some deeper level. This general expectation about cooperation creates an opportunity for what Grice calls "flouting" the maxims. Speakers flout when they purposefully and blatantly violate a maxim to achieve some communicative purpose understood by both participants. Many nonliteral forms of speech, such as irony, metaphor, sarcasm, tautology, and transparent questions can be understood as flouts (see Bowers, Elliot, & Desmond, 1977; Levinson, 1983).

Grice's theory of conversational implicature offers several insights about communicative competence. First, speakers who violate maxims seemingly without purpose are perceived as incompetent. In a detailed comparison of discourse patterns exhibited by mild versus advanced Alzheimer's patients, Ellis (1996) illustrated how patients in the advanced stages of the disease often are unable to order information temporally when recounting events (manner), connect a preceding clause with pronouns in a subsequent clause (relevance), or complete scripts that provide a larger coherence to individual events (manner and relevance). Such instances "provide explicit linguistic evidence of the [advanced patients'] decreasing ability to engage the necessary components of the language system for competent communication" (Ellis, 1996, p. 491).

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<sup>7</sup>Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature could be taken to represent a uniquely Western perspective on communication in which concerns for clarity and efficiency are valued over relational harmony. Yet surely all cultures share expectations about what is an appropriate amount of talk within specific situations, what counts as a relevant contribution, and so forth, even if the precise content of these expectations varies. Grice's theory thus provides a useful perspective for studying communication competence across cultures as well. His analysis of conversational implicature, for example, clarifies why communicating competently in a second language involves much more than simply learning the meaning of words (Bouton, 1994).

Second, communication competence requires the ability to recognize when others are flouting maxims. With maturation, children become increasingly adept at interpreting nonliteral speech such as irony, metaphor, and sarcasm (Ackerman, 1982; Andrews, Rosenblatt, Malkus, Gardner, & Winner, 1986). Speakers learning a second language, including those who have mastered basic vocabulary, struggle for years before being able to interpret specific implicatures in fashion similar to native speakers (Bouton, 1994).

A third insight is that communicative competence entails knowing when and how to violate expectations covertly. In an extension of Grice's framework, McCornack's (1992) information manipulation theory (IMT) conceptualizes deception as messages that covertly violate one or more conversational maxims. Deceptive messages purposefully lead hearers to believe that a speaker is adhering to conversational expectations (i.e., the cooperative principle and maxims) when in fact the speaker is not. Completely disclosive messages, although honest, are not always seen as the most competent responses to sensitive situations. When confronted by a romantic partner regarding one's opinions about the partner's family, a speaker who adhered to all the maxims was rated as less appropriate than a speaker who omitted (quantity) or ambiguized (manner) some negative information (Hubbell, 1999). Although IMT has little to say about when deceptive messages will be perceived as competent, these data suggest that competent communicators at times only create the appearance of adhering to conversational expectations.

Although different in orientation, Burgoon's (1995) EVT and Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature suggest complementary insights about qualities that facilitate communicative competence (see Table 1.1). *From this view, competent communicators are responsive to expectations.* They understand which verbal and nonverbal behaviors are (un)expected within specific situations and cultures. They know when to follow, to appear to be following, and to violate expectancies. They make accurate assessments of their own reward valence and hence anticipate likely consequences of violating expectancies. They recognize when others strategically violate expectancies. Sources of perceived communicative incompetence, from this view, include that a speaker (a) lacks knowledge about relevant expectancies, (b) lacks motivation to learn or act on relevant expectancies, (c) makes inaccurate assessments of his or her own reward valence, (d) faces conflicting expectancies (e.g., the employee evaluated by multiple supervisors from different cultures), or (e) rejects a narrow range of expected behaviors (e.g., the female physician who resists using only nonaggressive compliance-seeking strategies).

Expectancy theories suggest multiple avenues for enhancing communicative competence (see Table 1.1). Chen and Starosta (1996) argued that persons can enhance their intercultural communicative competence by being culturally aware, which refers to

an understanding of the conventions of one's own and others' cultures that affect how people think and behave.... Based on some of the universal commonalities of human behavior, such as eye contact, turn taking, gesturing, and the use of politeness norms, an individual can begin to understand how people from diverse cultures adapt such universal behaviors to the unique expectancies of intercultural communication settings. (p. 365)

Chen and Starosta also stressed the importance of affective qualities, such as being open-minded and nonjudgmental, that promote motivation to learn about others'

expectancies. Aside from implications for individuals, expectancy theories also suggest that we, as a society, at times need to rethink expectancies. Burgoon et al.'s (1991) study of female and male physicians illustrates how societal expectancies may limit opportunities for whole groups of people (i.e., women) to be perceived as competent in particular roles. In such cases, communication scholars should promote societal scrutiny of expectations.

**Attribution Theories.** Attributions are causal judgments for behaviors or events. Actors make attributions about their own communication, which may lead to feelings of (in)competence that impact their subsequent performances. Actors make attributions about their interaction partner's behavior, which may lead them to respond to the partner in ways that others judge (in)competent. Actors, partners, and third parties may make discrepant attributions for an actor's behavior and thus divergent assessments of the actor's competence. Here we review the meaning of communicative competence within Weiner's (1986, 1996) attributional theory of motivation and emotion and Milner's (1993, 2000) information-processing model of abusive parenting.<sup>8</sup>

Weiner's (1986) theory explains people's reactions to success and failure. Consider a female student who received a poor grade on her first public speech. Given the outcome, she likely will experience negative affect (e.g., sadness, frustration). When an outcome is negative, unexpected, and important, the student also is likely to consider why she did poorly on the first speech. She might attribute her poor performance to a host of specific causes, for instance, she did not prepare adequately, the assignment was unclear, she did not feel well that day, or she lacks talent at public speaking. According to Weiner, specific causes can be arrayed along three causal dimensions: (a) locus (i.e., does the cause lie within or outside the actor?), (b) stability (i.e., is the cause always present, or does it vary over time?), and (c) controllability (i.e., is the cause controllable by anyone?). Additional affective reactions, expectations about future performance, and subsequent behavior all depend on the student's attribution along these three dimensions.

Imagine that our student attributes her poor performance to lack of ability; she is "not good at public speaking," and thus feels incompetent as a public speaker (Weiner, 1986, p. 163). Put differently, she perceives the cause of her initial failure as internal, stable, and uncontrollable. Operating under this perception, the student is likely to (a) feel that her poor performance reflects on her self-worth (because the cause is internal), (b) feel hopeless about doing better on future speeches (because the cause is stable), and (c) feel ashamed, but not guilty, about her performance (because the cause is beyond anyone's control). Given these conditions, the student is not likely to engage in extra preparation and practice that actually might improve her future performance. She grows anxious and depressed as the next speech approaches.

In contrast, imagine that our student instead attributed her poor performance on the first speech to inadequate preparation and poor strategy (e.g., she practiced

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<sup>8</sup>These theories are not the only possible avenues for framing competence within attributional perspectives. Canary and Spitzberg (1990), for instance, drew on the actor–observer differences literature to explain discrepancies in conflict participants' judgments of communicative competence. The attributional theories of Weiner and Milner, however, are complementary in that the former focuses on people's attributions for their own behavior, whereas the latter explores people's attributions for the behavior of their interactional partner.

silently rather than out loud). Both causes are internal, unstable, and controllable. Because she attributes her poor grade to unstable causes, she is reasonably confident about succeeding on future speeches; she remains hopeful. Although her self-esteem temporarily may be lowered, she also knows that her instructor is not satisfied with her first effort and feels somewhat guilty about not having spent enough time preparing. Given these facts, she selects the topic for her next speech much earlier, completes more library research, and practices the speech out loud. She wants the chance to perform better.

A good deal of research supports these depictions. Both adults (Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1979) and children (Graham, Doubleday, & Guarino, 1984) reported feelings of pride and personal competence when they attribute success to internal causes. College students, after experiencing initial failure, maintain higher future expectations and thus persist and succeed more often when they attribute the initial failure to unstable and controllable rather than stable and uncontrollable obstacles (Anderson, 1983; Anderson & Jennings, 1980; Wilson, Cruz, Marshall, & Rao, 1993). Finally, both affective reactions and expectancies of future success mediate the effects of attributions for an initial failure on the quality or effectiveness of subsequent performance (Covington & Omelich, 1984; MacGeorge, 2001). Several other programs of research also have generated findings compatible with Weiner's theory, including studies of "mastery-oriented" versus "helpless" motivational patterns in children (Dweck, 1998), as well as attributional perspectives on hopelessness and depression (Peterson & Seligman, 1984).

As is apparent, Weiner's (1986, 1996) theory highlights the potentially *self-perpetuating nature of communicative incompetence*. Individuals who perceive themselves as communicatively incompetent tend to attribute specific difficulties in communicating to internal, stable, and uncontrollable causes. Because they feel hopeless, these individuals often avoid or withdraw from similar situations in which they otherwise might improve their competence. Attributional principles also clarify how failure in a particular context (e.g., giving a public speech) can lead to generalized feelings of communicative incompetence across contexts (see Parks, 1994, p. 608).

Aside from self attributions, communicative competence also is revealed in a person's attributions about others. Scholars explicating competence from diverse perspectives (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, pp. 200–201; Parks, 1994, pp. 189, 211) concur that intimate violence nearly always should be regarded as communicatively incompetent. Given this, Milner's (1993, 2000) social information-processing model of child physical abuse also is relevant here. According to this model, abusive parents possess preexisting schemas that bias their attributions and responses to child behavior. Bavelok (1984) argued that abusive parents hold four dysfunctional beliefs about childrearing: unrealistic developmental expectations, lack of awareness about children's emotional needs, strong belief in the necessity of physical punishment, and inappropriate expectations about children's abilities to provide social support.

Preexisting schemas impact four stages of information processing. At Stage 1 (Perception), physically abusive parents are thought to be less attentive to and aware of child-related behavior. For example, abusive parents decode their child's emotional states less accurately than nonabusive parents (Kropp & Haynes, 1987). At Stage 2 (Interpretation and Evaluation), physically abusive parents judge their child's behavior less charitably. For example, abusive parents often make internal, stable, and controllable (i.e., intentional) attributions for their child's negative behavior (Bauer & Twentyman, 1985; Larrance & Twentyman, 1983) and view themselves

as less responsible than nonabusive parents for unpleasant interactions with their child (Bradley & Peters, 1991; Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989).<sup>9</sup>

At Stage 3 (Information Integration and Response Selection), abusive, relative to nonabusive, parents may fail to adequately integrate information and may possess less complex plans for regulating child misbehavior. For example, parents at high risk for child physical abuse are less likely than low-risk parents to alter their attributions in light of mitigating information (Milner & Foody, 1994). At Stage 4 (Response Implementation and Monitoring), abusive compared with nonabusive parents are thought to be less skilled at implementing, monitoring, and modifying responses. For example, abusive parents are more likely to display noncontingent responses to their child's positive behavior (Cerezo, D'Ocon, & Dolz, 1996).

Milner's model (1993, 2000) assumes an ecological context in which child, family, community, and cultural-level factors influence abusive parents' attributions and behavior. Factors such as young parental age, limited education, single parenthood, and unemployment may be associated with preexisting schemas that bias attributions and responses to perceived child misbehavior (Wilson & Whipple, 2001). Such factors also can increase levels of parenting stress and depression (Whipple & Webster-Stratton, 1991), which in turn may shift parents increasingly toward automatic as opposed to controlled processing at each stage of the model. Thus, parents who normally would pay attention to circumstances surrounding their child's behavior may fall prey to attributional biases due to external stressors in their lives.

Physically abusive parents display several signs of communicative incompetence that are interpretable within Milner's model (see Cerezo, 1997; Wilson, 1999; Wilson & Whipple, 2001). For example, physically abusive parents tend to rely on power-assertive forms of discipline regardless of how their child has misbehaved, whereas nonabusive parents use different combinations of inductive and power-assertive discipline depending on the nature of their child's misbehavior (Trickett & Kuczynski, 1986; Wilson, Whipple, & Grau, 1996). Abusive parents rely rigidly on power-assertive discipline, in part because they overattribute negative intent to their child while discounting mitigating information. Physically abusive parents also resort to verbal and physical aggression more quickly than nonabusive parents in the face of child noncompliance (Reid, 1986; Whipple & Richey, 1997). Child noncompliance creates parenting stress, and this leads parents at risk for abuse to make increasingly biased attributions relative to low-risk parents when faced with repeated child resistance (Dopke & Milner, 2000).

As is apparent from this discussion, Weiner's (1986, 1996) attributional theory of motivation and emotion and Milner's (1993, 2000) social information-processing model of child physical abuse suggest complementary insights about communicative competence (see Table 1.1). *From an attributional perspective, competent individuals are optimistic yet realistic about factors that impact communicative success.* Competent communicators set challenging but realistic goals and expectations, both for themselves and for others. They are sensitive to unstable, controllable obstacles

<sup>9</sup>Readers may wonder whether abusive parents' attributions reflect that their children actually are more difficult to manage than children in nonabusive families (Cerezo, 1997). Abusive parents do perceive their children to be more aggressive, hyperactive, and problematic than nonabusive parents; however, these perceptions appear exaggerated because independent raters in some cases do not detect behavioral differences when observing the same groups of abused and nonabused children (e.g., Reid, Kavanagh, & Baldwin, 1987). More important, physically abusive parents' indiscriminate and inconsistent communication practices inadvertently reinforce child noncompliance and thereby help create child behavioral problems.

that impede their success (Ifert & Roloff, 1998; Marshall & Levy, 1998) and seek information about how to overcome such obstacles. They are resilient in the face of failure. They understand when to persist, to try something different, to bide their time, or to throw in the towel. When evaluating another's performance, competent individuals are sensitive to mitigating information that may account for the other's shortcomings. Competent communicators feel a sense of personal control (Parks, 1985, 1994): They perceive themselves as able to exert at least some impact on the likely outcomes of many interactions and view themselves—and not just their interaction partner—as having some ability to alter unpleasant interaction patterns.<sup>10</sup> Sources of communicative incompetence, from this view, include: (a) making attributions for initial failure that undercut one's confidence; (b) lacking knowledge or skill needed to enact behaviors that might overcome obstacles; (c) falling back on well-learned patterns of biased attributions about oneself or one's interaction partner, especially during stress or depression.

Attribution theories suggest several routes for improving communicative competence. Interventions designed to prevent or alleviate problems such as academic failure or child abuse often incorporate "attributional retraining" or "cognitive restructuring" (see Goddard & Miller, 1993; Parks, 1994; Weiner, 1986). Students are taught to shift from making negative attributions about their own abilities to developing positive expectations and alternative problem-solving strategies, just as parents are trained to shift from making negative assessments of their child's attributes to exploring their child's circumstances and perceptions, avoiding snap judgments, and emphasizing positive child behaviors. Although helpful, research indicates that attributional retraining is most successful when incorporated within a multicomponent curriculum that also includes skills training and relief of affective distress (Allen, Hunter, & Donohue, 1989). For example, one successful child-abuse prevention program provides multiple services such as parent education, child-based interventions, social support groups for parents, access to health care, and adult education and employment training (Lutzker, 1994).

## Psychological Theories: Theories of Message Production

Discussion to this point has focused on how individuals attend to, interpret, and evaluate both their own and others' communicative behavior. In the last two decades, communication scholars have moved from focusing only on such "input" processes toward describing mental processes that give rise to communicative behavior (Berger, 1997; Greene, 1997b; Wilson, 2002; Wilson, Greene, & Dillard, 2000). Communicative competence can be envisioned within two families of "message production" theories: (a) those falling within a goals-plans-action (GPA) framework and (b) those emphasizing multiple hierarchical levels of procedural knowledge.

**Goals-Plans-Action (GPA) Theories.** Many contemporary theories assume that speakers produce messages to accomplish goals and thus develop and enact plans for pursuing goals (Berger, 1997; Dillard, 1990; Schrader & Dillard, 1998; Wilson,

<sup>10</sup>We acknowledge exceptions to this latter statement. For example, a woman who is being terrorized by a violent partner has no ability to alter unpleasant and dangerous interaction patterns. The only way she may regain a sense of personal control is by leaving the relationship, even though this itself is difficult and potentially dangerous. But in most cases, individuals do have some ability to alter unpleasant interaction outcomes. Parent education programs presume that abusive parents play an important role in creating and perpetuating unpleasant interactions with their child, and hence parents can alter the outcomes of such interactions by changing their own behavior (e.g., Reid, Taplin, & Lorber, 1981).

1997, 2002). Here we discuss communicative competence within Wilson's (1990, 1995) cognitive rules (CR) model of interaction goals as well as Berger's (1997) and Waldron's (1997) work on planning.

Interaction goals are states of affairs speakers desire to attain or maintain through talk (Dillard, 1997). Speakers often attempt to pursue and coordinate multiple goals during conversation (Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989; Hamble & Dallinger, 1987, O'Keefe, 1988), and their goals often change quickly during the course of conversation (Waldron, 1997; Wilson & Putnam, 1990). Communicative competence is evident in the number and types of goals that speakers spontaneously form and pursue (Clark & Delia, 1979; Tracy, 1989). Thus, we may gain insights about communicative competence by exploring how individuals form interaction goals.

Wilson's (1990, 1995) CR model provides one account of the mental processes underlying goal formation. Briefly, the CR model assumes that people possess cognitive rules, or associations in long-term memory, between representations of interaction goals and numerous situational features. For example, a parent might associate the goal of "giving advice" with features such as "my child is contemplating a problematic action," "my child has not considered alternative actions sufficiently," and "I care deeply about my child's well-being." The CR model assumes that a spreading activation process operates in parallel on this associative network, such that cognitive rules can be compared with ongoing perceptions of situations without substantial demand on processing capacity and situations can activate rules for forming multiple goals simultaneously. However, a cognitive rule must reach a certain activation threshold before it is triggered and forms a goal. The probability of a rule being triggered is a function of three criteria: fit, recency, and strength. Individuals are more likely to form a goal when they perceive that many rather than only a few conditions represented in the rule are present in the current situation (the fit criterion). Yet many situations are ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations and hence partially match and activate a large number of cognitive rules. Within ambiguous situations, cognitive rules are more likely to be triggered if those rules have been activated recently (the recency criterion) or frequently in the past (the strength criterion).

Several insights about goals and competence are interpretable within the CR model. For example, speakers may be judged incompetent for pursuing goals that others evaluate as "inappropriate" by some standard. Intercultural interactions may prompt such occurrences. Persons entering a new culture may give advice when native speakers view it as inappropriate or fail to give advice when doing so is obligatory (Fitch, 1998; Kim, 1993, 2001). From the CR perspective, acculturation necessitates associating goals with new sets of situational features.

Even within a single culture, speakers may be judged incompetent for pursuing goals that others view as inappropriate. Consider O'Keefe's (1988) analysis of regulative communication situations, in which a speaker must correct another's problematic behavior. Undergraduates imagined they were working on a group project with another student (Ron) who, after repeatedly failing to do his part, called to say that he would be late again with his work. O'Keefe coded some responses to this scenario as "goalless" because "the message producer ha[d] an unclear or empty set of goals" (p. 90).<sup>11</sup> Consider two examples of "goalless" messages (p. 100):

<sup>11</sup>O'Keefe (1988) coded written regulative messages for the "design logic" or system of means–ends reasoning underlying the message, as well as for the number of goals pursued by the participant. Regarding the latter dimension, "multifunctional" messages were seen as pursuing two or more competing goals, "unifunctional" messages seemed to pursue one goal to the exclusion of others, and "goalless" messages did not seem to pursue any situationally relevant objective.

1. Look, I can't handle this any more. Why do you keep doing this to me? Just go away!
2. You a-hole. I knew you wouldn't do your work. I am going to see that you are fired.

Readers no doubt can infer goals that could have motivated these messages. Both participants surely wanted to let Ron know they were angry and frustrated. The first also may have wanted to calm down before planning further actions, whereas the second seems to have decided that collaborating with Ron was more problematic than trying to have him removed from the group. O'Keefe coded these messages as goalless because they failed to pursue goals that are "conventionally relevant to the regulative task" (p. 100). That is, neither message does anything to encourage or help Ron to finish his part of the group assignment. Yet these messages are "goalless" only in relation to O'Keefe's analysis of which interactional goals are "conventionally relevant" (i.e., ought to be pursued) in regulative communication situations. These messages were coded as goalless and also judged by peers as less competent than other responses (O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987), because the students who wrote them chose to pursue the wrong goals.

According to the CR model, why would a speaker form and pursue goals that others judge to be inappropriate? One possibility, already noted, is that the speaker possesses an especially strong rule that is easily triggered (i.e., chronically accessible; Grant & Dweck, 1999; Wilson, 1995). The participant who generated Message 2 above, for example, might strongly associate the situational feature of "being taken advantage of" with goals such as "not looking weak" or "getting even." According to the CR model, differences in rule strength should be especially apparent in the goals people form within ambiguous situations. Consistent with this claim, Dodge (1993) reported that aggressive and nonaggressive adolescent boys differ primarily in their retaliatory responses in situations in which a peer's intent is ambiguous.

Aside from pursuing inappropriate goals, speakers also may seem communicatively incompetent for failing to pursue goals that others view as desirable or obligatory. Actions such as asking for assistance, giving advice, attempting to change another's political views, or offering criticism create potential threats to both the speaker's and the hearer's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). To appear oblivious to such threats is to risk appearing communicatively incompetent. The professor who writes critical feedback with no apparent regard for a student's feelings may seem needlessly harsh, just as the student who asks, "are we going to be doing anything important in class today?" may seem hopelessly inept. Speakers who attend to the face wants of both participants while pursuing their primary objective typically are viewed as more communicatively competent than those who appear concerned only about the primary goal (Adams & Shepherd, 1996; Bingham & Burleson, 1989; Kline & Floyd, 1990; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987; O'Keefe & Shepherd, 1987, 1989; Schrader, 1999; Tracy, Van Dussen, & Robinson, 1987).

Why would speakers fail to form and pursue goals that others, given the situation, view as desirable or obligatory? Speakers may (a) lack perspective-taking skill needed to recognize psychological implications of their actions; (b) associate goals such as providing face support with an insufficient number of situational conditions; (c) possess rules for forming supportive goals that, because they reside at a low level of activation, are triggered only by an almost complete match with perceived situational conditions; or (d) fail to mentally link rules for different goals, so that the triggering of one rule (e.g., for the goal of giving advice) does not automatically spread activation to the rule for a second goal (e.g., the goal of not appearing nosy). Other possibilities fall beyond the CR model—speakers simply may not care whether

they appear competent or may want to support face but be unable to generate or implement actions that integrate this concern with their primary goal given time constraints (Berger, 1997; Kellermann & Park, 2001).

Finally, speakers may be judged communicatively incompetent for failing to alter their interaction goals across situations. For example, Wilson (1990) found that persons high in interpersonal construct differentiation (see Burleson & Caplan, 1998), when attempting to convince a target person to fulfill an obligation, varied their supportive interpersonal goals depending on why the target had failed to fulfill an obligation as well as on how close they were to the target. Less differentiated persons did not vary their supportive goals in response to manipulations of attributions or intimacy. Adaptability and flexibility often are described as critical components of communicative competence (Parks, 1994; Rubin, 1990; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). The CR model suggests several explanations for failing to adapt interaction goals, including that speakers may (a) associate interaction goals with only a small number of situational conditions; (b) fail to develop subcategories of a goal that apply to different situations; or (c) overemphasize base-rate data and underemphasize individuating information, especially under conditions that promote heuristic processing (see Wilson, 1995).

Although the CR model offers insights about communicative competence, it clearly is not a sufficient explanation. Speakers differ not only in their goals, but also in their procedural knowledge (plans) for coordinating multiple goals as well as skill at enacting plans (Berger, 1997; O'Keefe, 1988). Plans are knowledge structures representing actions necessary for overcoming obstacles and accomplishing goals (Berger, 1997). A teacher's plan for talking to a student dissatisfied with a grade on a paper might include actions such as "set up an appointment during office hours, explain any written feedback that is unclear, and discuss how the student can perform better on the next assignment." Plans are mental representations of actions, whereas strategies are overt behaviors exhibited by individuals (Greene, 1990).

Plans for accomplishing social goals vary in complexity and specificity (Berger, 1997; Dillard, 1990; Waldron, Caughlin, & Jackson, 1995). Complex plans include a larger number of action units than simple plans. The aforementioned plan for talking to a student dissatisfied with a grade included three distinct actions and thus is more complex than the plan "explain how the grade was assigned." Complex plans also include contingencies; thus, a plan that includes "if the student appears upset, reinforce that I know a lot of hard work went into the paper" is more complex than a plan with no contingencies. Specific plans are fleshed out in detail, whereas abstract plans provide only vague guidelines for action. An example of a vague plan for dealing with a dissatisfied student is "talk about the grade."

Plan complexity and specificity should facilitate communicative competence in many situations. Persons with complex plans have multiple alternatives should their initial efforts fail; those with specific plans already have considered how to implement abstract acts during conversation itself. Berger and Bell (1988) found that lonely and shy college students had less complex plans for social goals such as asking for a date or impressing a new roommate than did students who were not lonely or shy. Plan complexity in turn was positively associated with others' perceptions of whether a plan was likely to succeed. Waldron and Lavitt (2000), in a study of women transitioning from welfare to paid work, showed that participants who articulated specific and complex plans for a job interview were more likely to be employed full-time 2 to 3 months later relative to women who articulated vague and simple interview plans.

Although these and other studies (Jordan & Roloff, 1997; Waldron & Applegate, 1994; Waldron et al., 1995) indicate that plan complexity and specificity facilitate communicative competence, several qualifications should be noted (Berger, 1997; Wilson, 2000). First, a complex plan is neither necessary nor sufficient for competent performance. In the former case, a simple plan may include an appropriate and effective action that obtains the desired results. In the latter, speakers still need skills to enact a complex plan in an efficient, smooth, and error-free fashion (Berger, 1997; Greene & Geddes, 1993). Second, planning too many alternatives in advance itself can undermine fluid speech performance (Knowlton & Berger, 1997). Third, the relationship between plan specificity and competence may vary depending on whether a culture values detailed, short-range plans versus flexible, long-range plans (Cai, 1998). Finally, complex and specific plans still must be adapted in light of changing circumstances and unforeseen opportunities during interaction (Hayes-Roth & Hayes-Roth, 1979) even though such changes are cognitively taxing (Berger, Knowlton, & Abrahams, 1996; Knowlton & Berger, 1997). Given such considerations, communicative competence is evident not simply in the complexity of a person's plans, but perhaps most important in planning processes themselves.

Planning is the set of psychological and communication processes involved in generating, selecting, implementing, monitoring, adapting, and coordinating plans (Berger, 1997; Dillard, 1990; Waldron, 1997). Planning occurs in advance of many interactions, but a good deal also occurs "online" as a conversation unfolds (Waldron, 1990; Waldron et al., 1995). Competent communicators are adept at monitoring and adjusting their plans online during conversation.

Along these lines, Cegala and Waldron (1992) explored how perceived communication competence is evident in people's online planning. The authors reanalyzed data from two earlier studies of recalled thoughts and feelings during get-acquainted conversations. Undergraduate participants in these studies sought information about their new partner's religious or political background. Coders analyzed the degree to which participants used effective and appropriate information-seeking strategies. Based on these two criteria, students were subdivided into high, medium, and low competence groups. Students rated as highly competent in these studies, compared with moderate and low competence participants, had a larger percentage of plan-oriented thoughts during conversation (e.g., thoughts about indirect means for acquiring information from their partner). In contrast, students rated as low in competence reported a larger percentage of self-assessment cognitions. Cegala and Waldron (1992) speculated that incompetent communicators, because of low self-esteem, experience many conversations as stressful events, which leads to an "inward orientation [that] probably accounts, in part, for their ineffectiveness at accomplishing task goals" (p. 119).

Aside from stress, problems with executive control also may hinder a person's ability to monitor plans during conversation. Executive control processes are a set of higher order mental activities, including decisions about (a) selection (e.g., which knowledge to access from memory given the current situation), (b) regulation (e.g., how much time or attention to devote to processing information), and (c) monitoring (e.g., whether current conditions warrant a change in processing) (Jordan, 1998). Individuals differ in the efficiency of their executive control processes, with inefficiency being reflected in performance errors, slips of the tongue, and lapses (Reason, 1990). Drawing on this idea, Jordan (1998) showed that people's cognitive efficiency is positively associated with the ease with which they can develop a preinteraction plan for persuading others, and hence with their own confidence that the plan will

succeed. Plan confidence in turn predicts whether individuals actually carry out their plans. In sum, communication competence is evident in people's ability to deploy, monitor, and adjust plans efficiently during interaction.

Although Wilson's (1990, 1995) cognitive rules model and Berger's (1997) and Waldron's (1997) work on conversational planning focus on different aspects of the message production process, they offer complementary insights about communication competence (see Table 1.1). *From the Perspective of the GPA framework, competent communicators possess an anticipatory mind-set.* They foresee likely implications of their actions for both their own and their interactional partner's identities, as well as potential obstacles to their plans for accomplishing goals. Competent communicators understand the goals that particular audiences will view as (in)appropriate, desirable, or obligatory within a specific situation. They typically pursue multiple goals, and possess plans with multiple options for pursuing and integrating goals. Competent communicators adjust both their goals and their plans in light of situational, relational, and cultural circumstances. They devote periodic attention to monitoring their goals and plans online, avoid mulling over negative thoughts and feelings about themselves and others, and adjust initial goals and plans when necessary. Sources of communicative incompetence, from this perspective, include (a) overly accessible or inaccessible rules for forming goals (in)appropriate to the current situation, (b) lack of knowledge about alternative means for pursuing or integrating goals, and (c) impairment of one's ability to monitor and adjust goals or plans, whether due to personal anxiety, fatigue, or competing situational demands on processing capacity.

The GPA framework suggests several avenues for improving an individual's communication competence. Training might focus on teaching people to identify "situationally relevant" goals (O'Keefe, 1988). As an example, a training session for new graduate teaching assistants (TAs) might discuss how any interaction with a student regarding the student's grades has implications for both the student's and the TA's face, as well as how threats to either party's face can divert attention from the issue of helping the student develop plans to improve future performance (Sabee, 2000). Such discussion might lead TAs to associate providing face support with a broader range of situational conditions, or strengthen the connection between situational conditions and the goal of supporting face. Discussions of this sort may be especially important for international TAs teaching students from the United States for the first time (and for U.S. students who are likely to have international TAs). Training also could focus on helping TAs learn and practice a broader range of actions relevant to pursuing goals (e.g., means for providing face support). TAs with high levels of state anxiety could benefit from techniques for managing their own apprehension and defensiveness, thus allowing them to focus on monitoring and modifying goals and plans during potentially difficult discussions with their students. TAs also might be taught to identify signs that their initial plans are not working and encouraged to interpret such signs as evidence that they need to "try something different" (Wilson, 2000). After a time, giving additional reasons why a student received a poor grade on a recent assignment may only upset or demoralize the student. The same points might be made more effectively in the context of discussing how the student can improve on future assignments. Finally, TAs could be taught to identify, and when possible alter, situational impediments to monitoring goals and plans. For example, new TAs might be instructed to ask a student who wants to discuss a disappointing grade to make an appointment to do so during office hours rather than trying to talk with the student, in front of others, immediately after the class in which the grade was received.

**Hierarchical Theories.** Hierarchical theories, although still stressing that message production is a goal driven, differ in several ways from the GPA framework. Hierarchical theories emphasize that communicating competently requires procedural knowledge at multiple levels of abstraction, including low-level knowledge typically ignored by the GPA framework (Greene, 1990; Wegner & Vallacher, 1986). Competence also requires coordinating multiple levels in a smooth and timely performance. To clarify these points, we discuss communicative competence within cybernetic control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and action assembly theory (Greene, 1997a).

Cybernetic control theory is a general approach for understanding self-regulating systems (Littlejohn, 1999). Key concepts include the negative feedback loop, hierarchical organization, and self-directed attention. The basic unit of a cybernetic system is the negative feedback loop, which includes an input (perception) function, a comparison value (goal), and an output (behavior) function (Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960). When traveling on a two-lane highway in the United States, for example, a driver attempts to keep his or her vehicle within the middle of the right-hand lane (comparison value). If the road curves to the left, the driver eventually notices that the car is moving toward the right shoulder (input). This position deviates from the standard of comparison; hence, an experienced driver turns the steering wheel slightly to the left (output) in order to reduce discrepancy between the desired and actual position of the car (Carver & Scheier, 1982, p. 112). Although this driving example involves a single individual acting in isolation, Cappella and Greene (1982) invoked the “negative feedback loop” in their discrepancy-arousal explanation for mutual influence processes during infant–caretaker and adult–adult interaction.

Within cybernetic control theory, individuals are portrayed as hierarchically organized systems with superordinate and subordinate goals (i.e., standards of comparison). Goals at various levels of abstraction are monitored via an interconnected set of negative feedback loops. Drawing on the work of Carver and Scheier (1982), Parks (1985, 1994) conceptualized personal action as a process of self-regulation across nine levels of abstraction. According to Parks,

each level operates by sensing the condition in the level below it, comparing it with some “reference” value from the level above it, and then acting so as to reduce any discrepancies. . . . As a result, widely varying behaviors are marshaled into a coherent performance in which, if we are competent, we are constantly adjusting our muscles to help us say and do the things that serve the goals and understandings that are in our heads. (1994, pp. 596–597)

The most concrete levels of self-regulation in this hierarchy are labeled intensity control (Level 1), sensation control (Level 2), configuration control (Level 3), and transition control (Level 4). Intensity control involves the world “just inside the skin” (Parks, 1994, p. 597), such as rudimentary information about the intensity of sensation or muscle movement. Competence at this level might be impaired by physiological damage such as hearing loss. Sensation control is where diverse bits of sensory information are gathered and directed. Competence at this level includes the ability to package specific muscle movements into larger verbal and nonverbal cues. Small packages of muscle movements and sensory inputs are organized into broader configurations at the third level. Competence here includes the ability to decode verbal and nonverbal cues of emotion accurately. Transition control allows persons to perform

an organized movement such as waving hello or pronouncing a word. Incompetence here might be revealed through “verbal slips” such as mistakenly substituting one word for another.

Sequence control (Level 5), relationship control (Level 6), and program control (Level 7) represent moderate levels of abstraction in the hierarchy. The fifth level is where perceptions and actions are organized into sequences that serve higher order goals. Competence here includes the abilities to select conversational topics that are relevant and appropriate for the moment and to synchronize the tempo of one’s own speech and gestures with those of one’s interactional partner. Relationship control involves judgments about how one’s own actions relate to the actions of others and to the larger context, including judgments of proximity, inclusion–exclusion, covariation and causality, and so forth. Competence at this sixth level includes the abilities to predict and explain another’s behavior, to interpret actions from multiple perspectives, to recognize multiple goals that plausibly might be pursued in a situation, and to adapt one’s messages to the background and interests of an interactional partner. Program control involves broader structures and sequences underlying action, including decision rules about how to act under specific circumstances. The concept of “plan” from the GPA framework falls at this level. Competence here includes the abilities to draw on preplanned actions and to enact behaviors so as to maintain one’s own and others’ public identities or face.

Principle control (Level 8) and system concept control (Level 9) lie at the highest levels of the control hierarchy. Principles guide decisions about which programs to execute, how to monitor programs, whether to generate new programs, and how to respond when one’s own or another person’s programs fail. Incompetence at this level may occur because individuals lack programs to actualize their principles, mistakenly believe that their programs are effective, lack creativity needed to generate or adapt programs, or fail to engage with others in collaborative repair activities when programs fail. The highest level of the control hierarchy involves idealized self-concepts. As an example, an individual who believes “I am a responsible person” might act on this belief by drawing on the principle that a person should “follow through on commitments made to others,” which in turn might set programs into motion (Carver & Scheier, 1982, p. 115). Competence at this highest level includes the abilities to translate idealized selves into principles and to project public identities that others plausibly can support.

Although positing nine distinct levels of control ranging from muscle movements to idealized selves, cybernetic theorists do not assume that every level is involved during all acts of behavioral self-regulation. To understand this point, the concept of self-directed attention must be introduced. According to Carver and Scheier (1982), “the highest level of control operating at any given moment corresponds to the level at which the person is focally attentive at the moment” (p. 118). For example, if a person is attending to the program level of control without awareness of higher order goals, then for the time being the program level is “functionally superordinate.” Carver and Scheier claimed that the program level often is functionally superordinate, because even “scripted” conversations such as informal initial interactions contain sufficient variation such that participants must make ongoing decisions about which action programs to enact at specific points in time (see Kellermann, 1995). However, a person’s attention also shifts periodically to other levels in the control hierarchy. Attention may be drawn momentarily to a lower level; for instance, a speaker, on visually encountering an acquaintance whose name is difficult to pronounce, might concentrate momentarily on the transition control level. Attention may be drawn

upward, to the principle and system concept levels, when circumstances occur that encourage persons to reflect on “who they are” and “in what they believe” (Snyder, 1982).<sup>12</sup>

One implication of this discussion is that communicative competence may be reflected in how an individual allocates attention across levels of the control hierarchy. Carver and Scheier (1982, p. 130) proposed that for any given activity there is an *optimal level of self-regulation*. Support for their speculation can be found in action identification theory (Wegner & Vallacher, 1986). Briefly, this theory assumes that a person can identify anything he or she does in many different ways, and possible identities for an act are organized hierarchically. Low-level identities specify how one does the act; for example, “lifting a glass” is a low-level act identity for “drinking alcohol.” Higher level identities express why or with what effect one does the act; for instance, “relieving tension” is a higher level identity for “drinking alcohol” (Vallacher, Wegner, McMahan, Cotter, & Larsen, 1992). When actions are complex, unfamiliar, and so forth, Vallacher et al. argue that actors who identify those actions at a low level (e.g., by concentrating on how to perform them) will perform most effectively. In contrast, simple, familiar actions are performed most effectively when actors conceptualize them at a higher level (e.g., by concentrating on why they are performing those actions). Results from several experiments are consistent with their claims (Vallacher et al., 1992; Vallacher, Wegner, & Somoza, 1989).

In sum, cybernetic control theory suggests that competent persons vary their attention across levels in the control hierarchy depending on the communicative task. In contrast, incompetent communicators may focus attention rigidly on higher levels in the control hierarchy during novel or difficult tasks (e.g., interviewing for a job), even though focusing on the process of enacting programs would be more beneficial. Attending primarily to the upper levels of the control hierarchy during difficult tasks is not just ineffective, it has “the added consequence of repeatedly (and painfully) reminding [incompetent communicators] of their inability to reduce the discrepancies” (Carver & Scheier, 1982, p. 125). In this way, self-directed attention may reinforce an incompetent communicator’s feelings of frustration and despair (Parks, 1994).

Action assembly theory (Greene, 1984) also falls in the realm of hierarchical theories. Our description draws heavily on Greene’s (1997a) “second-generation” action assembly theory (AAT2). From the perspective of AAT2, any behavior is “an inherently creative, multifunctional complex comprised of a very large number of elemental units” (Greene, 1997a, p. 152). AAT2 assumes that procedural knowledge underlying behavior is stored within an associative network model of long-term memory. The basic network unit is the procedural record, which, as we noted in the first section of this chapter, is a structure composed of interconnected nodes representing features of actions, outcomes, and situations. A single procedural record represents action-relevant information that may pertain to abstract plans, concrete muscle movements, or anything in between these levels. Procedural records are formed and strengthened without awareness when the environment activates nodes simultaneously and

<sup>12</sup>This discussion is not meant to imply that persons spend a great deal of conscious attention during interaction contemplating their goals, plans, principles, or ideal selves. According to Carver and Scheier (1982), the terms *self-directed attention* or *self-focus* “mean little more than the momentary shifting of attention to the salient standard and the standard-relevant aspect of one’s present behavior . . . we assume the discrepancy-reduction process [itself] to be relatively automatic. We do not assume that the person necessarily thinks the matter through in verbal or near-verbal terms. . . . We assume only that the reference value and the perception of present behavior are temporarily focal and that one is used to guide the other” (p. 120).

are formed with awareness when persons consciously contemplate relations among actions, situations, and outcomes.

Given this picture of a long-term memory store with an almost countless number of procedural records, how is the subset of records that underlies a person's current behavior actually selected? AAT2 addresses this question by specifying an activation process. At any point in time, each node in a procedural record is characterized by some level of activation. Nodes representing situational conditions and desired outcomes are activated when they match a person's perception of the current state of affairs. A node representing a specific behavioral feature (e.g., the speech act of "promising") thus receives activation through its connection with already activated nodes representing situational features, outcomes, and other behavioral features. One key assumption of AAT2 is that activated nodes decay rapidly with shifts in a person's perception of the current situation. The theory "assumes a very large decay parameter which rapidly drives the activation of a node back to resting levels" (Greene, 1997a, p. 158).

How are activated procedural records integrated together, before they decay, into an output representation that comprises a person's current behavior? Aside from activation, AAT2 also specifies an assembly process based on the metaphor of "coalition formation." A coalition is "a momentary assemblage of activated behavioral features that could be said to "fit" together. Thus, a behavioral-feature node representing a syntactic frame with slots for a noun and a verb might coalesce with a particular activated noun and verb" (p. 159).

Coalitions have both vertical and horizontal dimensions: They may integrate procedural records in the same code temporally (e.g., a string of words) or records in different codes at various levels of abstraction (e.g., the words *I promise* and the motor program for pronouncing those words).

AAT2 assumes that coalition formation helps offset the rapid decay of activated nodes. Procedural records that are temporarily integrated do not decay as rapidly as those that do not find their way into coalitions. Greene (1997a) described the process as follows:

The image of behavioral production in AAT2, then, is of a very rapid process of coalition formation where multiple, and potentially competing, coalitions "recruit" activated features, each additional feature resulting in a more extensive output specification and incrementing the activation level of the coalition. A person's behavior at any moment . . . is nothing more nor less than the constellation of coalitions operating at that time. (p. 160)

Aside from activation decay and coalition building, executive processes and conscious awareness also are important in AAT2. As we noted in the section on planning, executive processes are higher order mental activities such as behavioral rehearsal, editing, and monitoring. Within AAT2, executive processes are assumed to occur through the application of procedural records activated by situational and intraindividual conditions. Becoming momentarily aware of a goal, for example, may activate procedures for planning how to accomplish it. Because executive processes are initiated by activated procedural records, these processes help maintain the activation level of coalitions to which they are applied. Because executive processes arise via the same mechanisms as other action-relevant processes, however, they are subject to the same limitations (e.g., rapid decay in response to changing activating conditions). By enhancing the activation level of specific coalitions, executive processes also may "overwhelm" other coalitions. Put simply, planning or monitoring for one

task may impair a person's ability to simultaneously perform a second task (Greene, 1997a, p. 164).

Finally, AAT2 explicitly considers the role of physiological constructs in the production of communicative behavior. Greene (1997a) discussed the effects of momentary changes in arousal levels as well as long-term changes in synaptic density that occur during later life. Increased physiological arousal, for example, is posited to heighten the activation of all nodes in long-term memory. Up to a point, arousal should further heighten the activation of behavioral features that already match the present situation so that coalitions form around them. Too much arousal, however, also heightens the activation of irrelevant behavioral features to the point that competing or inappropriate coalitions may be formed.

AAT2 portrays people as extremely rapid yet fallible information processors (Greene, 2000). People are capable of reacting quickly (activation speed) and creatively (coalition formation) in response to a host of activating conditions. Yet we also are prone to loose track of what we are saying (activation decay) and to experience difficulty integrating our goals, thoughts, words, and movements (problems with coalition formation, executive processes, or arousal).

AAT2 offers specific insights about the production of (in)competent communicative behavior. For example, the theory helps explain why behavior acquired in one setting may not transfer automatically to other settings. A couple who learns active-listening techniques during a counseling session still may fail to use these techniques, because practicing the techniques during counseling may associate them with a set of situational conditions quite different from those that typically exist at home (see Greene & Geddes, 1993, pp. 34–35). AAT2 also helps account for the *potential paradoxes of behavioral rehearsal*. In general, speakers can improve their speed and fluidity by planning and rehearsing in advance. Rehearsal allows speakers to assemble at least the abstract elements of a message plan; these elements, then, are more likely to be activated together again and thereby facilitate coalition formation in the moment (see Greene, 1995). By the same token, however, rehearsing in advance can hinder competent performance under some conditions (see Greene & Geddes, 1993, p. 37). Relational partners who each mentally plan and rehearse arguments to support their own position in an anticipated dispute, for instance, increase the chance that those arguments actually will be activated and shape coalition formation during interaction. Both partners thus may have difficulty breaking out of a pattern of destructive “serial arguing” even though each may realize, after the fact, that discourse beyond arguing is needed to manage their disagreement (Johnson & Roloff, 1998). In all of these cases, AAT2 suggests reasons persons may be motivated to communicate competently and “know what to do” but still enact incompetent behavior.

As is apparent from our discussion, cybernetic control theory and AAT2 suggest complementary insights about communicative competence (see Table 1.1). From the viewpoint of hierarchical theories, *competent communicators implement action programs skillfully and gracefully*. Competent communicators possess procedural knowledge ranging from programs for achieving social goals to ideas, words, and movements needed to implement programs. More important, competent communicators integrate everything from action programs to muscle movements into a smooth, well-timed performance. They find appropriate words to express ideas, use gestures and vocal tones to clarify (or ambiguise) meanings and emotions, and talk without excessive speech errors or hesitations. Competent communicators possess a keen sense of timing. Their behavior flows smoothly and seamlessly into the unfolding interaction, being relevant to the current topic, interpretable in light of their own programs, coordinated with the temporal pattern of their partner’s behavior, and

responsive to their partner's likely goals and plans. Competent communicators also select and implement action programs in a fashion that promotes, or remains consistent with, their principles and idealized selves. Finally, competent communicators are sensitive to the communicative task, altering their levels of arousal and self-directed attention depending on the task's complexity and familiarity.

Sources of communicative incompetence, from this perspective, are factors that inhibit smooth, timely performance (see Table 1.1). Incompetence may arise when individuals lack action programs; for example, a person wants to be liked but does not know what to say to be likable. Incompetence also may occur, however, when an individual possesses action programs but cannot enact them skillfully in the moment. During face-to-face conversation, pauses between turns produced by different speakers in most cases are less than 1 second (McLaughlin, 1984, pp. 111–112). Speakers thus may have difficulty deciding what to say, and how to say it, before the relevant moment passes. This is especially likely to occur when speakers attempt to enact newly learned programs, fail to anticipate their partner's moves, experience too much arousal, or attempt to address multiple tasks simultaneously.

Hierarchical theories suggest several strategies for helping people enhance their communicative competence. Behavioral rehearsal, via role playing and coaching, takes on special significance from this point of view (see Greene, this volume). Individuals need opportunities to practice enacting newly acquired action programs during interaction to master issues involving transition, sequence, and relationship control. Rehearsal needs to occur under conditions similar to those for which the programs are intended. To achieve smooth, well-timed performances, persons may need many more practice trials than typically are provided in skill-based communication courses (Greene, Sassi, Malek-Madani, & Edwards, 1997). Along with rehearsal, individuals need feedback on adopting optimal levels of self-directed attention when they undertake difficult communication tasks with major obstacles or conflicting goals, because people's natural proclivity is to focus (unproductively) on higher levels of the control hierarchy at such times (Vallacher et al., 1992). Individuals also may need instruction in techniques for optimizing levels of arousal in relation to the complexity of the communicative task (Greene, 1997a).

We have now explicated the meaning of communicative competence within four families of communication theory. Although each provides unique insights about competence, they all share assumptions that differ from a more "social" perspective on competence.

## Social Theories: A Theory of Relational Dialectics

Psychological perspectives highlight qualities that enable people to communicate competently (see Table 1.1). Social approaches, in contrast, draw attention away from individuals as the primary unit of analysis, posing questions about competent relationships, groups, or interactions. As an exemplar, we analyze Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) treatment of interactional competence within their larger "relational dialectics" theory.<sup>13</sup> Their thinking draws heavily on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian

<sup>13</sup>Relational dialectics is not a "theory" in the sense of being an interrelated set of propositions developed with the goals of prediction and causal explanation. More broadly, however, "it is a theory in the sense of a coherent vocabulary and a set of questions to bring to the understanding of communication" (Baxter in Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 236). As with any theory, these questions and vocabulary "are not without tendency . . . asking dialectic questions about communication focuses the attention on some things as opposed to other things" (Baxter in Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 236).

philosopher who wrote extensively about the centrality of dialogue to social life. Key terms include *contradiction*, *change*, *totality*, *multivocality* and *dialogism*, and *practical patterns*.

Dialectic scholars assume that “relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies as they are enacted in interaction” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 6). Contradictions refer to functionally incompatible forces, each of which is necessary for creating and sustaining relationships but which also negates the others. For example, people desire some degree of certainty in their relationships (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). But as dating partners may become increasingly certain about their relationship over time, paradoxically this may create a need for the partners to enact unplanned activities, violate social norms, and change themselves lest they begin to feel “trapped” in a relationship that is “stuck in a rut.” Desires for certainty, then, play out against contradictory desires, such as certainty–novelty, certainty–spontaneity, and certainty–excitement. In this sense, dialectical contradictions have a “both-and” rather than “either-or” quality.

Being inherent to social life, contradictions are not taken as signs of relational problems. Ongoing contradictions, however, do create constant change within relationships. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) rejected linear stage models in which relationships “develop” or “progress” from separateness to connectedness or closedness to openness. Contradictions are not “worked out” or “overcome” through a lasting synthesis as a relationship processes; rather, they mark the very existence of a relationship and abate only if the potential for future contact ceases. Relationships also are not “maintained” in a stable state between their “development” and “deterioration” (Baxter, 1995). Change and stability themselves are related dialectically, and this opens the possibility for a variety of temporal patterns such as spiraling change.

The third term, *totality*, emphasizes that the social world is a series of interrelated contradictions. Internal tensions play out between members of a dyad; external tensions play out as the dyad interacts with larger social units (Baxter, 1995; Rawlins, 1992). For example, cross-sex friends must themselves manage dialectical tensions of expressiveness and protectiveness, but they also must decide how much to reveal or conceal about their relationship with others in a society with few scripts for cross-sex friendship (Werking, 1997). Neither internal nor external tensions operate in isolation; for instance, cross-sex friends themselves may find predictability in deviating from societal expectations about gender and friendship.

Closely related to *totality* are Bakhtin’s concepts of *multivocality* and *dialogism*. Partners give life to the contradictions of personal relationships through communication. Each “utterance” in a conversation expresses multiple voices (*multivocality*), representing one link in a chain of preceding and future dialogue. The meaning of an utterance is evident only in relation to immediately prior utterances, in the way that “I feel the same way” is interpretable only based on what was said just before. Utterances also may be linked to voices quite distant from the current talk, such as when a couple’s expression of love sparks memories of earlier times. In a “both-and” fashion, an utterance “echoes the past at the same time that it contributes something new in the present” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 28). Persons anticipate their relational partner’s response when speaking, and the meaning of the utterance may be evident only in light of that response. Persons also may anticipate the responses of larger social groups, or what Bakhtin called the “superaddressee.” Before saying “I love you” to another for the first time, an individual may consider the larger societal expectations invoked by this declaration. In this sense “an utterance is far from a solo performance enacted by an individual. . . [It] is closer to an ensemble composed of

the speaker, the listener, the inner dialogues of the speaker [e.g., voices from the past] and the superaddressee" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 29). Dialogism refers to an ongoing exchange of utterances, "an exchange that is unfinalizable, never ending in ultimate truths and never exhausting all possibilities. For Bakhtin, the fated uncertainty of dialogism liberates people from oppressive monological belief systems, whether those be represented in pronouncements from the state, the church, or a single individual" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 200).

The final term, praxis, focuses attention on concrete ways by which people enact and respond to the contradictions of social life. Baxter and Montgomery discuss several praxical patterns that partners display as they live out relational contradictions, some of which are regarded as more "functional" than others. Denial occurs when relational partners attempt to hide or ignore the presence of contradiction by valorizing one pole (e.g., certainty) to the exclusion of its opposites (e.g., novelty, unpredictability). Disorientation occurs when the parties view relational contradictions as inevitable but negative and display incoherent behaviors indicative of being trapped by contradictions. Praxical patterns with more functional possibilities include spiraling inversion (the parties sway back and forth between opposite poles of a dialectic over time), segmentation (the parties for a time prioritize one dialectic pole for some topics or activities but the opposite pole for others), balance (the parties compromise for a time at some level between dialectic poles), integration (the parties find means, such as rituals, of temporarily responding to both poles while still conceiving them as opposites), recalibration (the parties find means for temporarily recasting the poles as not in opposition), and reaffirmation (the parties for the time accept but celebrate the contradiction as part of the "richness" of relating). These praxical patterns reveal attempts by relational partners to respond actively to the contradictory forces of relating. Paradoxically, such attempts may create life circumstances or reinforce relational and social expectations that in turn constrain the partners' future choices.

What is the meaning of communicative competence within this theory of relational dialectics? Baxter and Montgomery (1996) distinguished their treatment of competence from earlier approaches on two grounds. First, relational dialectics *treats competence as a social judgment that implicates multiple, often contradictory viewpoints*. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), prior approaches tend to reflect the prevailing culture's viewpoint by generating lists of ideals about how people ought to communicate with one another (see Rawlins, 1985; Spitzberg, 1989). Yet couples develop their own unique standards for communicating well, and their standards may deviate from cultural ideals (Wood, 1982). Reflecting the ideas of totality and multivocality, the authors argued that judgments of competence "reflect, to varying degrees, cultural or groupwide consensus, unique relational meanings, and idiosyncratic or individual views" (p. 187). Each of these viewpoints may lead to a different judgment about competence, be more or less salient at any moment, and impact the other viewpoints in dynamic ways over time.

Second, relational dialectics *views competence as a judgment about interaction*. Baxter and Montgomery argued that most existing measures of communicative competence assess the degree to which individuals display particular qualities (e.g., self-disclosure) or enact specific behaviors (e.g., eye contact) (see Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). They critiqued such approaches for being "too static to represent the constant flow of utterances and their attendant competency judgments and too individualistically focused to capture the dynamic synergy of this process" (p. 192). They adopted the term *interactional competence* to emphasize their unit of analysis.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) proposed four dialogic principles for judging interactional competence in relationships. First, *competent interaction reifies contradiction*. Rather than identifying a type of behavior (e.g., eye contact) as competent and its opposites as incompetent, the competence of any behavior must be assessed as coupled with its opposites: "Competence, then, is not assessed with a checklist of discrete behaviors . . . but, at least partly, with an assessment of how sensitive the relational unit is to the contradictory nature of the social situation" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 198).

Along these lines, disorientation and denial are purported to be less competent than other praxical patterns in that they do not recognize and re-create the dialectical nature of social reality.

The second principle is that *competent interaction reifies respect for multivocality*. Competence requires being sensitive to multiple, simultaneously salient viewpoints for evaluating the relationship. Thus, "a couple's behavior is interactionally competent when it is judged to be sensitive to each partner's logic, to the logic of their relational culture, and to the logic of broader social cultures" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 200). The third principle is that *competent interaction reifies fluid dialogue*. Dialogue entails multiple voices participating in an ongoing, unfinalizable exchange. Behaviors that inhibit or curtail dialogue, such as interpersonal violence, are deemed incompetent. Conflict itself is not taken to be incompetent, but patterns of conflict that discourage open exchange may be perceived as incompetent (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 201; but see Buzzanell, 1994; Kim & Leung, 2000). The final principle is that *competent interaction reifies creativity*. Appreciating the dialectical nature of social life requires that relational partners be "dyadically proactive, imaginative, and figuratively moving forward" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 205). The authors argued that many of the praxical patterns by which couples enact and respond to contradictions display a creative element.

As is apparent, relational dialectics offers a unique perspective on communicative competence. Points of comparison between relational dialectics and the four families of "psychological" theories are drawn in Table 1.1. Before addressing these comparisons, we offer two caveats. First, several categories in our table must be reframed or applied differently from the perspective of relational dialectics. The "central theme," for example, describes competent interactions rather than competent communicators. "Qualities needed for competence" also should be revised as qualities of a relationship at a particular place and time rather than qualities of individual communicators. For example, it may be more important that relational partners possess similar rather than high levels of the "skills" listed in Table 1.1 (Burleson & Denton, 1992; Burleson & Samter, 1996). Second, "relational dialectics" offers a newer, and less developed, perspective on competence relative to the four families of psychological theory. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) acknowledged that "the data from which to argue strenuously for our view of interactional competence simply do not yet exist" (p. 206). The authors also have not (to our knowledge) written about some points of comparison listed in Table 1.1, and hence parts of the table represent our best attempt to infer their position.

From the viewpoint of relational dialectics, *competent interactions are sensitive to the demands and possibilities of contradiction* (see Table 1.1). Competent interactions validate the importance of each pole forming a dialectic tension. Close friends, for example, realize the simultaneous need for protectiveness as well as expressiveness during talk (Rawlins, 1992), even within a larger culture that at times glorifies friends who can "say anything" to each other (Parks, 1995). Competent interactions

also incorporate active responses to relational contradictions. Responses may include temporal spiraling, topical segmentation, or other praxical patterns, but they involve more than despair and resigned acceptance that nothing can be done to change unwanted patterns (Cronen, Pearce, & Snavely, 1979; Sabourin & Stamp, 1995). Finally, competent interactions exhibit creativity and flexibility. Interactions with rigid patterns of competitive symmetry (Escudero, Rogers, & Gutierrez, 1997; Sabourin & Stamp, 1995; Wilson, Paulson, & Putnam, 2001) or demand/withdraw (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999) are characterized by outcomes such as impasse, relational dissatisfaction, inequity, and violence.

Sources of communicative incompetence, from the perspective of relational dialectics, reside at several levels of analysis. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identified power discrepancies as one relational quality that can increase the likelihood of incompetent interactions. Persons with less power than their relational partner may avoid voicing concerns (dialogue) out of fear of their partner's reaction (Cloven & Roloff, 1993). Persons with greater power may have diminished incentive to understand their partner's views (multivocality) and negotiate differences (dialogue) because their personal outcomes are less dependent on their partner's actions. Consistent with such thinking, partner violence is positively associated with the inequitable distribution of power in intimate relationships (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Coleman & Straus, 1990).

Aside from relational qualities, criticism from larger social networks may increase the likelihood of incompetent interactions (totality). For example, gay and lesbian couples may find it challenging to enact functional praxical patterns when some of their own social network, as well as the larger society, disapproves (or at best is ambivalent) of their relationship. Responding to dialectical tensions, such as how partners reveal or conceal their relationship with others, certainly is more complicated in such cases (e.g., Ben-Ari, 1995; Prescott & Le Poire, 1999).

Transitions that require relational reconfiguration may, at least temporarily, lead to incompetent interactions. Dialectics such as autonomy–connection and expressiveness–protectiveness play out differently after the arrival of one's first child, and couples report stress as they attempt to negotiate new ways of living these tensions (Stamp & Banski, 1992). Blended families also report stressors following reorganization; for example, stepparents face challenges in building involvement with their new stepchildren without being seen as trying to “replace” the absent biological parent (Braithwaite, Baxter, & Harper, 1998; Cissna, Cox, & Bochner, 1990).

Finally, some individual qualities may increase the likelihood of incompetent interactions. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argued that a desire for personal control does not promote, and may undermine, their sense of interaction competence. The authors strongly cautioned

against conceiving of relationally-based competence in the same power and control terms adopted in individual-based conceptions of competence. . . . [T]he strategic ability of an individual to bring about a personal goal can work in opposition to the dialogic principles of ongoing exchange, joint action, and interactive creativity. (p. 202)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>In our view, Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) claim about the desire for personal control being antithetical to relational competence is too simple. Drawing on attributional and hierarchical theories, Parks (1994) located “communicative competence judgments in the cognitive and behavioral activities associated with personal control” (p. 595). According to Parks, incompetence occurs when an individual perceives that (a) no discernible pattern or logic exists regarding the factors that affect whether s/he

Attachment orientations, when considered in combination, might represent another case in point. Persons who early in life formed a dismissive/avoidant attachment with their primary caretaker may now find it difficult, as an adult, to enact functional praxical patterns with partners who possess an anxious/ambivalent orientation (Le Poire, Shephard, & Dugan, 1999).

Relational dialectics suggests several avenues for helping partners stuck in patterns of denial or disorientation to improve their interaction competence (see Table 1.1). Individuals themselves may seek out advice from friends, family, or counseling professionals on how to transform interactions with their partner. Young adults, for example, may turn to friends for advice about how to manage competing tensions between autonomy and connection in their dating relationship (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Rawlins, 1992). Yet advice from friends or family can be a mixed blessing. Especially when unsolicited, relational partners may view advice from third parties as intrusive, uninformed, and misguided (Goldsmith, 2000; Petronio, Jones, & Kovatch, 2000; Pudlinski, 1998). Too much advice from third parties also may hinder relational partners in developing their own unique, creative means of addressing relational contradictions.

Programs designed to build supportive social networks may help relational partners transform incompetent interactions. For example, interventions designed to prevent the (re)occurrence of child physical abuse often aid parents in developing social networks, through means such as establishing support groups in which parents can discuss childrearing challenges with peers in their community; providing information about government and social-service agencies during prenatal home visits; encouraging parents to join civic and religious organizations; and creating residential programs for mothers trying to regain custody of their children from the state (e.g., Olds, 1997; Whipple, 1999; see Schellenbach, 1998). These programs have the potential to transform problematic parent-child interactions by helping parents develop an ongoing network of peers who can (a) assist when brief breaks from a child are needed, (b) brainstorm alternative ways of responding to relational tensions, (c) reinforce norms that discourage severe physical discipline, and (d) provide information and understanding in coping with stressors. Although such programs typically are based on ecological and systems frameworks (e.g., Belsky, 1993) rather than a relational dialectics perspective, they are consistent with the themes of totality and praxis.

Finally, individual- or couple-based skills training and values education may be useful in helping relational partners to transform incompetent interactions. Respect for multivocality requires the abilities to identify and comprehend multiple points of view (personal, relational, cultural) including those that differ from one's own lived experience. Dialogue may be enhanced when participants use active-listening and negotiating skills (see Hart & Newell, this volume; Roloff & Putnam, this volume). Equally important, participants must be encouraged to adopt values that promote

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can achieve personally desired outcomes; or (b) a pattern or logic may exist, but s/he lacks the ability to affect these factors (pp. 606–607). Incompetence, for Parks, is equated with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair. Such feelings sound to us quite similar to the praxical pattern of “disorientation,” which Baxter and Montgomery (1996, p. 198) deemed incompetent. Personal control need not imply an individual who attempts to achieve his or her goals without regard for others. “Pursuing any one goal by means of socially inappropriate behavior may jeopardize the individual’s other goals and would therefore be a mark of incompetence” (Parks, 1994, p. 596). Although a strong “need to control others” may well be associated with incompetent interactions, we believe that feelings of “personal control” both contribute to and are a by-product of interactional competence.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, such as a commitment to empowering others rather than only oneself, being true to the demands of one's own beliefs while also respecting those with different beliefs, and remaining open to new positions about complex issues.

## Section Summary

This section has explicated the meaning of communicative competence within five families of communication theory. From the viewpoint of each theory, we have described a core theme about communicative competence and related terms necessary for understanding competence, qualities that enable competent communication, sources of incompetent communication, and strategies for enhancing competence. More generally, this section has attempted to show how communicative competence can be explicated as a theoretical term. Yet an important question remains: Why bother? Or, to return to the pragmatic themes sounded at the start of this chapter, what difference does it make if we—as a community of scholars—conceive of communicative competence as a theoretical term rather than as a construct? Will doing so help address problems of theory and method as well practical problems of living, or will it simply create greater confusion? Our final section briefly considers the advantages and challenges of treating communicative competence as a theoretical term, both for scholarship and for teaching.

## IMPLICATIONS OF TREATING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AS A THEORETICAL TERM

### Implications for Research About Communicative Competence

As scholars, we see important advantages in treating competence as a theoretical term rather than a construct. Taking this tack helps avoid, or reframe, several persistent conceptual and methodological problems. Consider four examples:

#### ***Why Can't Scholars Agree on a Single Definition of Communicative Competence?***

This chapter opened with two frequently voiced complaints: Scholars have not developed a clear, consensual definition of communicative competence, and research in the area lacks theoretical grounding. Treating competence as a theoretical term obviously addresses the latter complaint, but our key point is that such a move reframes the former worry, too. When competence is viewed as a construct (i.e., as something defined primarily by vertical linkages with observables, and hence something any researcher can define in the same way regardless of his or her assumptions and purposes), then definitional divergence is a serious concern. Viewed as a construct, definitional divergence must reflect what Miller (1990) labeled "Humpty-Dumpty impulses," by which he meant failing to define concepts explicitly, meaning different things by the same label or the same thing by different labels, and so on. Definitional divergence is especially problematic from this view because scholars cannot develop larger theories of communicative competence unless they first agree on what needs to be theorized. In sharp contrast, when communicative competence is treated as a theoretical term (i.e., as something defined primarily by horizontal linkages with other terms composing a specific theory, and hence as something a researcher can define only within a particular theoretical framework to

accomplish specific aims), then some degree of definitional divergence is expected. Competence can be conceptualized within multiple communication theories, and, because theoretical terms have “systemic” meaning (Kaplan, 1964), its meaning will vary somewhat across theoretical frameworks (see Table 1.1).

Treating competence as a theoretical term is not an excuse for sloppy conceptualization. Kaplan (1964) stressed that systemic meaning is not the same thing as ambiguity: “I must emphasize that I am not saying that [theoretical] terms cannot or do not have their meanings specified; I am saying only that, because of the openness of their meaning, the specification is not by way of definition in the strict sense” (p. 73). Thus, theoretical terms are not specified by a conceptual definition (i.e., a set of synonyms) that can be transferred out of context across different families of communication theory. Theoretical terms can be defined clearly only within larger frameworks. Kaplan provides an example: “We learn what is meant by “culture” in a certain theory as we see what the theory says about culture, what inferences it draws from these assertions, what evidence it adduces on their behalf. We are provided, not with a dictionary of terms, but with a guidebook to their subject-matter” (p. 73). Thus, scholars are responsible for explicating, clearly and in detail, their own theoretical foundations and what communication competence means within those foundations. Scholars also should analyze similarities and differences in the meanings of competence across different families of communication theory (see Table 1.1). Treating communicative competence as a theoretical term, however, saves us as a community from needing to reach consensus about a single, final, and best definition. It frees us to theorize communicative competence in multiple ways.

Some readers may worry that treating communicative competence as a theoretical term will lead to a proliferating number of meanings associated with the label and hence only greater conceptual confusion. Relatedly, some may question whether distinct meanings of communicative competence (e.g., its meaning in attributional versus relational dialectic theories, see note 14) are so divergent that different labels really ought to be used. Despite such divergence, scholars explicating “communicative competence” as a theoretical term can find stases for comparing their own view with those from other families of communication theory (see Craig, 1999, and Table 1.1). We see great scholarly and pedagogical value in such discussion. Besides, treating communicative competence as a construct has not prevented these problems. When communicative competence is explicated within a particular family of communication theory, grounds exist for determining which psychological and behavioral qualities are central to competence, how they are associated with each other, and how they enable competence. Such grounds vary across different families of theory, but they exist within each family. In contrast, explicating competence as a construct has left us with hodge-podge lists of qualities and no principled grounds for addressing such issues.

***How Should Scholars Select, Develop, and Assess Measures of Communicative Competence?*** There is no shortage of operationalizations for communicative competence; indeed, Spitzberg and Cupach (1989) reviewed nearly 80 existing measures. Some procedures ask participants to describe or evaluate their own behaviors, beliefs, or feelings, whereas others ask interactional partners or trained observers to rate the degree to which participants display concrete behaviors (e.g., eye contact) or abstract qualities (e.g., considerateness). Some measures focus on competence in particular relationships (e.g., heterosocial skills) or populations (e.g., young children). How should researchers decide whether to use an existing measure or develop their own?

Developing reliable and valid operationalizations still is important when communicative competence is treated as a theoretical term rather than a construct, because ultimately the theory as a whole must be tied to observables. The manner in which researchers select or develop measures, however, changes in important ways. First, researchers should select an existing measure of communicative competence if, and only if, it taps the specific meaning of competence within the larger theory of communication guiding the research. When investigating competence from the perspective of attributional theories, researchers should select measures that assess the degree to which participants set developmentally and contextually appropriate expectations for themselves and others, perceive themselves as having some ability to affect interaction outcomes, alter judgments about their own and others' performance in light of mitigating information, and so forth. Many existing measures do not provide information relevant to this conception of communicative competence. When investigating competence from the perspective of relational dialectics theory, researchers should select measures that focus on interaction patterns rather than individuals. Most existing measures are not cast at the relational level.

Second, researchers should validate new competence measures, and revalidate existing measures, by showing that they relate to other concepts as predicted by the larger communication theory guiding the research. When investigating competence from the perspective of attributional theories, one might validate a new measure by showing that it distinguishes persons who give up easily from those who persist in the face of initial failure to accomplish goals (Dweck, 1998) or that it correlates inversely with self reports of chronic depression and hopelessness (Peterson & Seligman, 1984). Showing that a new measure correlates with an existing competence measure (e.g., Duran, 1983; Rubin, 1985; Stohl, 1983; Wiemann, 1977) offers evidence of convergent validity if, and only if, the existing measure taps key elements of competence as defined within the relevant theoretical perspective. Whether measures of communicative competence developed within different theoretical frameworks should be expected to correlate highly depends on whether competence has similar meanings within those frameworks. Thus, the same measure may be valid for assessing competence within some theoretical frameworks but not within others.

***How Can "Culture" Be Integrated Into Conceptions of Communicative Competence?*** This question subsumes several more specific issues such as (a) to what degree are judgments about the competence of specific behaviors (e.g., avoidance conflict tactics) culturally general versus specific, (b) to what degree do the qualities or processes that enable competence vary across cultures, and (c) to what degree do our communication theories themselves reflect "Western" beliefs and values (see Lannamann, 1991; Kim, 2001)? Explicating communicative competence as a theoretical term frees us from expecting to find one "correct" answer to these questions and offers useful avenues for theorizing such issues.

Regarding cultural specificity versus generality, consider EVT. From this view, understanding communicative competence requires both forms of analysis (Burgoon, 1995). Researchers must carefully analyze implicit beliefs and values shared by particular groups, because several theoretical terms (e.g., clarity and strength of communication expectancies, specific behaviors perceived to violate expectancies, qualities that contribute to assessments of reward valence) likely vary depending on national origin, ethnicity, religious background, and so forth. Researchers also must analyze general processes (e.g., the arousal-eliciting function of expectancy

violations, the potential for reward valence to moderate interpretations and evaluations of unexpected behavior) presumed to remain constant across culture. Researchers working with EVT can test and refine these predictions about communicative competence and culture, whereas those working with attribution, GPA, hierarchical, or relational dialectic theories can develop their own blends of culturally specific and general analysis.

Treating communicative competence as a theoretical term also challenges scholars to consider how their larger frameworks are embedded in cultural values. When scholars spell out their assumptions about communicative competence, explicitly and in detail (see Table 1.1), they are better positioned to analyze the cultural and ideological underpinnings of their views. Parks (1994), whose definition of communicative competence is based on hierarchical and attribution theories, explicitly considered how his view might be explicated meaningfully in non-Western cultures (p. 612). Baxter and Montgomery (1996), whose definition of interactional competence is based on relational dialectics theory, explicitly considered whether their dialogic perspective transcends, and provides a meaningful frame for analyzing, different cultures (p. 205). Regardless of whether one agrees with their positions, we think it not a coincidence that these two works, which both attempt to explicate communicative competence as a theoretical term, also explicitly consider the cultural assumptions underlying their views.

***How Might "Ethics" Enter into Conceptions of Communicative Competence?*** Several points in this chapter implicate ethical issues or "judgments . . . [about] degrees of rightness and wrongness, virtue and vice, and obligation in human behavior" (Johannesen, 1996, p. 1). By discussing how female physicians often are faced with either behaving so as to reinforce gender stereotypes or violating stereotypes at the risk of being judged incompetent, whereas their male counterparts can either follow or violate language expectancies and still be seen as competent, we hope to encourage scrutiny of gendered expectations. Our impulse here is motivated by ethical concerns about fairness and impartiality (Jaggar, 1989). When discussing how child physical abuse arises, in part, from incompetent parental discipline attempts, we do not feel it strong enough to say that acts of violence toward children are "inappropriate" disciplinary responses (in the sense of being rude or impolite). Intimate violence raises concerns about justice in what Western societies often regard as the "private" sphere of personal relationships (Wood, 1998).

The question of how ethics might enter into conceptions of competence raises a number of more specific issues, such as (a) on what grounds should behavior be judged as ethical, and how do these grounds relate to criteria for evaluating communicative competence; (b) what role does communication play in adjudicating ethical arguments, and can such processes themselves be evaluated in terms of competence; and (c) does integrating ethics into conceptions of communicative competence blur the distinction between "is" and "ought" in problematic ways? Again, explicating communicative competence as a theoretical term frees us from expecting to find one "correct" answer to these questions, and offers useful avenues for theorizing such issues.

Treating communicative competence as a theoretical term can inform discussions of ethics in several ways. Theories of competence, even if not offering ethical analyses themselves, can highlight circumstances that call for ethical scrutiny. EVT, as a traditional social-scientific theory, does not explicitly address whether gendered expectations regarding physician–patient communication are ethically problematic. One

might turn to feminist theories of ethics to build such an argument (Jaggar, 1989). Yet EVT does clarify how gender stereotypes get reinforced through everyday interaction. EVT also suggests strategies that activists might employ to challenge gender stereotypes (e.g., raising awareness of how members our society often, without much thought, make inferences about communicator reward valence based on biological sex).

Descriptive and normative questions about communicative competence, in other cases, might be addressed within a single theoretical framework. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) frame their understanding of communicative competence around Bakhtin's writings. Although they do not address ethics explicitly in their framework, the concepts of multivocality and dialogue suggest that participants do have ethical responsibilities, as becomes clear in a comment by Baxter during a conversation between the two authors in the book's final chapter:

Recognition of difference is not to say that anything goes, that is, relativism. With difference comes responsibility, whether we are talking about a researcher in a dialogue with research participants or relational partners in conversation with each other. All participants in a dialogue have responsibility to be true to the conventions of their own perspective while keeping the conversation going with proponents of other perspectives. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 237)

Others (e.g., Murray, 2000) have drawn on Bakhtin's writings in building a dialogical view of communication ethics. Exactly how ethical questions might be addressed within Baxter and Montgomery's framework remains to be worked out. Given that competence is treated as a judgment about interaction rather than individuals within relational dialectics, to what degree is the same true of ethics? Our larger point here is that treating communicative competence as a theoretical term could encourage scholars to "consider the relationship between communication competence and standards of ethical communication" (Jablin & Sias, 2001, p. 832) and create opportunities for linking social-scientific and ethical analyses.

## **Implications for Teaching Communicative Competence**

As teachers, we see two implications to viewing communication competence as a theoretical term rather than a construct. Taking this approach requires that we teach students to apply theoretical frameworks in detail, as well as to compare different families of theory.

When viewed as a theoretical term, one cannot teach "communicative competence" as an isolated topic because its meaning arises as part of larger theoretical frameworks. Consider GPA theories. From this view, teaching communication competence means helping students develop an anticipatory mind-set (see Table 1.1). Students can be asked to analyze the instrumental, interpersonal, and identity goals (Clark & Delia, 1979; Wilson & Putnam, 1990) or primary and secondary goals (Dillard et al., 1989) that they might choose to pursue within concrete situations from their own lives. Students can analyze how pursuing specific goals (e.g., giving advice), within the context of social roles (e.g., parent-adult child) and cultural values, makes additional goals more or less "relevant" to pursue (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998; Wilson & Kunkel, 2000). They also can identify obstacles, in the participants and the larger situation, that must be overcome or redefined for participants to achieve their goals (Clark & Delia, 1979; Ifert &

Roloff, 1998; Marshall & Levy, 1998). Students can assess how they make inferences about the likely goals of other participants (Berger, 2000), and how their own goals change as situations unfold (Waldron, 1997). Students can begin to appreciate that situations

generally are problematic because there are, or should be, multiple goals that come into play. . . . [C]ommunicators are faced with dilemmas; it often is impossible to accomplish everything; communicators frequently must make tough choices. Effective communicators, then, are people who address the dilemmas in ways that minimize the negative consequences of the choices they make. (Tracy, 1989, pp. 419–420)

Teaching competence from the GPA framework also means helping students develop their plans and planning abilities. Students can analyze whether they lack satisfactory plans for specific goals (e.g., saying “no” to unwanted requests from friends) and rehearse a broader range of techniques for such occasions. They can learn to focus their attention forward (e.g., anticipating possible obstacles) as opposed to only backward (e.g., making frequent negative assessments of themselves) during conversation. Videotaping role plays and having students provide stimulated recall might prove useful in this latter regard (Cegala & Waldron, 1992).

Aside from applying specific theories, treating competence as a theoretical term also necessitates teaching students to compare families of communication theory. Case analyses may be especially useful in this regard (Braithwaite & Wood, 2000; Sypher, 1997). For example, students might be placed into groups, with each group analyzing the same case from the perspective of one of the families of communication theory described in Table 1.1. From the perspective of their chosen theory, each group can address questions such as the following:

1. Have participants in this case communicated competently to date? What criteria should be used to make this judgment? Is it a judgment about individual or group performance (or both)? About effectiveness, appropriateness, ethics, or a combination of these? From whose perspective should this judgment be made?
2. What factors create challenges to communicating competently in this case? What are likely sources of (in)competent communication in the case? Why?
3. What interventions might increase the chances that participants will be able to enact competent interactions in the future? Exactly how would those interventions be implemented in this case? Why would they increase the likelihood of competent interactions? What unintended consequences might they have? Do they focus on knowledge, motivation, skills, or a combination of these needed to communicate competently?
4. How can we assess whether participants in this case are engaging in more competent interactions over time? Which psychological, physiological, and behavioral indicators should be assessed to make this judgment? Why?

Groups can address these questions from the perspective of their larger theory of communicative competence. Discussion can center on how each family of theory offers a unique perspective on what constitutes communicative competence in the case, whether different theories suggest (in)compatible interventions for helping participants improve their competence, and so forth.

As these examples make clear, teaching communicative competence as a theoretical term is not something to be attempted during a single course meeting using a

single instructional technique. Rather, students are likely to appreciate the implications of conceptualizing communicative competence as a theoretical term only after participating in a variety of instructional activities over multiple meetings.

Although teaching communicative competence as a theoretical term is daunting, the outcomes seem more fruitful than teaching competence as a construct. Teaching students that competence means “communicating so as to be perceived as effective and appropriate” is far too general to be useful. If students already understood why their own behaviors were perceived by others as inappropriate or ineffective, how such behaviors contribute to dissatisfactory interaction patterns, and how changing their behaviors might lead to perceptions and feelings of competence, then they would not need our advice. Teaching lists of abstract qualities such as empathy or flexibility also is far too general. Students need to know exactly what it means to demonstrate empathy or flexibility in concrete situations. Equally important, they need to understand when and why these qualities, as opposed to others, are particularly important in communicating competently. Finally, teaching students to enact concrete behaviors (e.g., establish eye contact, match your partner’s speech rate), in and of itself, is likely to fall short. Students need to understand why these behaviors contribute to perceptions of competence, why the same behaviors might be perceived as incompetent in different situations, and so forth. Each of these alternatives seems inadequate precisely because it lacks grounding in a larger theory of communication.

## CONCLUSION

Explicating communicative competence as a theoretical term, rather than as a construct, requires major rethinking about how we approach the competence literature. Doing so means that we, as a scholarly community, must live with systemic meaning. Communicative competence will not have one set meaning; rather, its precise meaning and measurement will vary somewhat across families of communication theory, or even as a single theory evolves over time.

Systemic meaning is always open, for the set of propositions making up a theory is never complete. The value of a theory lies not only in the explanation it was constructed to provide but also in its unforeseen consequences, and these in turn enrich meanings in unforeseen ways. No single specification of meaning suffices for a theoretical term, precisely because no single context of application exhausts its significance for the scientist using it. . . . As evidence accumulates in support of a theory, we simultaneously come to a better understanding both of the world and of our own ideas about the world. (Kaplan, 1964, p. 65)

The approach advocated in this chapter will not lead to a single, final, and consensually agreed on understanding of competence. Treating communicative competence as a theoretical term, however, reframes long-standing stumbling blocks to defining competence, frees us to theorize competence in multiple ways, and offers rich avenues for helping students develop competence.

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CHAPTER

# 2

## MODELS OF ADULT COMMUNICATION SKILL ACQUISITION: PRACTICE AND THE COURSE OF PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

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There may be no observation about communication skills that is more fundamental, and more far-reaching in its implications, than that they are developed and refined over time through implementation. Communication skills do not appear instantaneously, fully developed, and ready to be applied in persuading, comforting, or understanding others. The novice public speaker, interviewer, therapist, or negotiator is unlikely to be as polished or as successful as one who has a wealth of experience in such activities.

The general idea that communication skills develop gradually through use is widely recognized and accepted, so much so that it can be seen to constitute the basic warrant for much of what transpires in college courses on communication skills, professional training seminars, and relationship counseling sessions. Doubtless, most communication teachers and trainers would conclude with Michael Argyle and his associates (Trower, Bryant, & Argyle, 1978, p. 71), that “practice is essential” in the acquisition of social skills.

Although the practice–skill acquisition relationship is readily seen to be embedded in the very fabric of what, and how, we teach, our understanding of the nature of this relationship remains somewhat vague. As teachers, trainers, and practitioners, we acknowledge—even if only implicitly—that practice leads to improved performance, but behind this general principle lurks a number of essential questions: What is the nature of the cognitive mechanisms that give rise to changes in performance quality as a result of practice (i.e., *why* does practice cause improvement)? If performance improves as a function of practice, then what is the nature of the function relating changes in performance quality to amount of practice? What individual-difference variables or person factors impact the course of skill acquisition and in what ways? What types of practice are more or less effective in bringing about performance improvements?

Despite the significance of these and related issues for the design of instruction and training programs, these sorts of questions have not typically been a point of

emphasis for communication researchers. In part this may be because skill acquisition is a slow process that does not easily lend itself to the constraints of laboratory studies, or even to the temporal limitations of a semester-long course. Researchers in other skill domains have observed that acquiring even a reasonable degree of proficiency in relatively complex activities such as computer programming and air-traffic control requires a minimum of 100 hours of training and practice (e.g., Anderson, 1982; Schneider, 1985). Even more remarkable, there is a general consensus that truly exceptional performance in a wide variety of activities requires a minimum of 10 years of intensive preparation (see Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996; Simon & Chase, 1973).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the course of adult communication skill acquisition, with emphasis on message production (i.e., output) and processing (input) skills. Particular attention is given to addressing the questions outlined above concerning the impact of practice on skill development. In pursuit of these points, two distinct, but potentially complementary, lines of inquiry come to the fore, each reflecting a different sense of the term *model* (see Hawes, 1975).<sup>1</sup> On one hand, models may serve as explicative devices, elucidating the mechanisms that underlie and give rise to the phenomena of interest. On the other, models can serve a primarily descriptive function in seeking to express or capture the dynamics of the process(es) under scrutiny. Although concern with the course of communication skill acquisition by adults (particularly on a timescale such as that shown to characterize the development of proficiency in other behavioral domains) has been rather sparse, by drawing on work from a variety of research traditions, including some that are only indirectly related to communication and social interaction, it is possible to make some headway on both the explicative and descriptive fronts.

## BEHAVIORAL AND COGNITIVE MARKERS OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Intrinsic to the concept of skill *acquisition* is the notion that performance quality improves over time, that is, people “get better” as they persist in the activity under examination. The deeper question, of course, is what does it mean to “get better”—how, exactly, does behavior change as a skill develops, or alternatively, how is performance quality (and by extension, *change* in performance quality) to be assessed?

There is a tradition in the study of social skill and competence that can be traced at least as far back as the seminal work of Wiemann (1977) and Brown and Levinson (1978) centering on the notion that performance quality in the social sphere involves the *effectiveness* and *appropriateness* of one’s actions (see also Spitzberg, this volume; Wilson, this volume), that is, people exhibit skillful behavior to the extent that they are effective in accomplishing their interaction goals while adhering to the norms and rules operating in that social context.

Obviously, operationalizing performance quality by recourse to effectiveness and appropriateness has considerable intuitive appeal. At the same time, given the concern with describing and explaining the course of adult communication skill acquisition, such an approach is severely limiting because most of the relevant research and theory has been developed in the context of traditions of inquiry that emphasize other indices of performance quality. To gain some purchase on the issues central to this

<sup>1</sup>In point of fact, Hawes (1975) would not apply the term *model* to the sort of explicative frameworks reviewed here because they do not involve analogues. Rather, in Hawes’s terminology, these conceptual frameworks would be more properly identified as *theories*.

review, then, it is necessary to look beyond changes in effectiveness and appropriateness to other sorts of changes—both behavioral and cognitive—that accompany the development of communication skills.

## Behavioral Indices of Skill Development

**Speed.** Perhaps most readily apparent of the behavioral changes that occur as a person becomes more skilled at a given activity is an increase in speed of task execution—quite simply, experts are faster than novices. The relationship between practice and speed of task execution is quite robust and has been shown to hold for a wide variety of perceptual, cognitive, and motor behaviors (for reviews, see Lane, 1987; Mazur & Hastie, 1978; Newell & Rosenbloom, 1981). In fact, so central is rapidity of task performance that some definitions of *skill* include speed as an essential characteristic (e.g., Glass, Holyoak, & Santa, 1979; Welford, 1968).

Of particular importance in the context of a focus on acquisition of communication skills is the fact that speedup in task performance appears to extend to the realm of message-production behavior. A delightful illustration of just such an effect is found in Kuiper's (1996) analysis of the verbal fluency of announcers of horse races who may serve many years in an apprentice capacity while developing the ability to deliver rapid-fire descriptions of fast-changing events. It is important to note, however, that although fluency, or speech rate, tends to increase with experience, a caveat is in order concerning this relationship. Under certain conditions, people with the greatest experience may actually have lower rates of speech because they make effective use of pauses to assist their listeners in comprehending the message. An example of this effect is found in a study by Clemmer and Carrocci (1984) contrasting the speech fluency of professional broadcasters, student broadcasters, and people with no broadcasting experience while they were reading news stories and editorials. The results indicated that when reading news stories, the professional broadcasters had higher speech rates and fewer and shorter silent pauses than the other two groups. When delivering an editorial, however, it was the student broadcasters (i.e., those with moderate levels of experience) who exhibited the highest rates of delivery, again presumably because the more experienced broadcasters were using pauses to their advantage.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it appears that while people with more experience at a particular type of message-encoding task have the *ability* to speak with greater rapidity, they may choose not to do so in the interest of maximizing listener comprehension.

**Accuracy.** A second defining characteristic of the behavior of highly skilled individuals is greater accuracy (or its converse, lower error rates). Put simply, experts don't make as many mistakes; their responses are more likely to be correct as defined by some criterion of accuracy or appropriateness (see Newell & Rosenbloom, 1981; Proctor & Dutta, 1995). The growth of accuracy with practice is observed to occur for both input processing tasks, such as reading X rays (see Lesgold et al., 1988), and output tasks such as typing (see Grudin, 1983). Moreover, the impact of practice on error rate extends to the realm of message production where experts are shown to exhibit far fewer speech errors and disfluencies (e.g., Clemmer & Carrocci, 1984). As with speed, however, some caveats are in order concerning the practice–accuracy

<sup>2</sup>A similar effect can be seen to emerge over the span of years from childhood to middle age in that the highest oral reading rates are exhibited by those in the early teen years (Sabin, Clemmer, O'Connell, & Kowal, 1979).

relationship. First, although it is the case that greater expertise is associated with both greater speed and accuracy, for any given level of skill, there is commonly observed a speed-accuracy trade-off (see Proctor & Dutta, 1995). That is, increases in performance speed are typically made at the cost of more frequent errors, as when attempting to type faster results in more erroneous keystrokes. Again, a similar effect occurs in the case of verbal message production where faster rates of speaking are associated with more frequent speech errors (see Dell & Reich, 1980; MacKay, 1982). A second caveat concerns the fact that under some circumstances frequent use of particular behavioral routines may cause those behaviors to manifest themselves in situations in which they are not appropriate (see Norman, 1981; Reason, 1979), as when habitual responses disrupt or override one's intended course of action. Finally, it is important to note that there are situations in which considerable time spent on some task does not necessarily result in more accurate performance. An interesting example of such a phenomenon concerns the ability to detect deception. It is commonly observed that people with years of experience in occupations such as law enforcement who place great emphasis on ability to detect deception are, in fact, no better at such tasks than their lay counterparts (e.g., Burgoon, Buller, Ebisu, & Rockwell, 1994; DePaulo & Pfeifer, 1986). At the same time, however, it is clear that training people to look for the correct behavioral cues does result in significantly better detection of deception (e.g., de Turck & Miller, 1990; Fiedler & Walka, 1993). Thus, practice employing nonoptimal techniques or practice that is not accompanied by corrective feedback may not necessarily lead to more accurate performance.

**Flexibility.** A third behavioral change that characterizes the development of skill is an increase in flexibility and adaptation to situational exigencies. The ability to make behavioral adjustments is commonly identified as a central component of communication competence (e.g., Parks, 1994; Phillips, 1985; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989; Wiemann, 1977), and again, evidence suggests that both input processing performance (e.g., Lesgold et al., 1988) and behavioral production (e.g., Clemmer & Carrocci, 1984; Kuiper, 1996; Shaffer, 1980) come to be characterized by greater flexibility as experience increases. At the same time, Hatano and Inagaki (1984) suggested that practice alone is not sufficient to ensure behavioral flexibility. These authors distinguish "routine" and "adaptive" expertise, where the former entails the increased speed and accuracy arising from practice, but with little flexibility, while the latter involves development of a more abstract conceptual understanding of the skill domain and for this reason is associated with more creative, adaptive performance. From this perspective, then, practice is likely to lead to adaptive expertise only under those conditions that foster development of a conceptual grasp of the performance domain.

**Multiple-Task Performance.** The study of people's ability to carry out multiple, simultaneous tasks has a long history in the behavioral sciences (see Barber, 1989; Damos, 1991; Meyer & Kieras, 1997), and as intuition suggests, it is not unusual to find that the speed and accuracy with which some task can be carried out is diminished when a second task is introduced. It is also the case, however, that such interference effects are reduced, or even eliminated, with practice. For example, after several weeks of practice subjects have been shown to develop the ability to read and comprehend written material while simultaneously transcribing unrelated, aurally presented words (e.g., Hirst, Spelke, Reaves, Caharack, & Neisser, 1980; Spelke, Hirst, & Neisser, 1976). Similarly, skilled typists are able to type written material while carrying out a variety of other tasks (see Gentner, 1988; Shaffer, 1975).

## Cognitive Indices of Skill Development

**Cognitive Effort.** Just as skill acquisition is marked by a variety of overt, behavioral indices, there are also certain cognitive changes that accompany skill development. Foremost among these is *cognitive effort* (which can be viewed as the mental foundation of the multiple-task phenomena discussed above).<sup>3</sup> Central to the concept of cognitive effort is the notion of some sort of capacity limitation in processing ability, whether this be identified with a single resource or quantity (e.g., Kahneman, 1973; Norman & Bobrow, 1975) or with multiple resources (e.g., Navon & Gopher, 1979; Wickens, 1991). Activities are effortful, then, to the extent that they make demands on this limited capacity for carrying out cognitive tasks. The key claim of resource theories is that when the cognitive demands of ongoing activities exceed the available resources, performance will suffer (thus giving rise to multiple-task limitations). At the same time, the effect of practice is to reduce the effort, or capacity-demands, associated with a given task, thereby freeing resources for other activities (see Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977). One result is that frequently accessed constructs may be invoked in social-perception and judgment tasks even when the cognitive demands of other activities are relatively high (see Bargh, 1989).

**Phenomenal Experience of Behavior.** Among the more intriguing cognitive changes accompanying the development of a skill is a shift in the actor's own conception or apprehension of what he or she is doing. Psychologists have long observed (e.g., James, 1890/1950) that although people are initially cognizant of task-directed activities, with extensive practice those behaviors tend to be lost from conscious awareness. Thus, experts may have difficulty reporting just how they do what they do. This loss of the phenomenal experience of one's own actions is commonly ascribed (see Anderson, 1982, 1983) to the waning use of declarative-knowledge structures in behavioral production in favor of procedural encodings that are not available to conscious inspection and verbal report (an issue discussed below).

A related line of thought on the qualitative shift in phenomenal experience that accompanies skill acquisition is found in Vallacher and Wegner's (1985, 1987) "action identification theory." According to Vallacher and Wegner, any activity can be represented at a number of levels of abstraction, ranging from high-level conceptions such as "eating a healthier diet" to low-level act identities such as "raising the fork to my mouth." The particular level of abstraction that will be employed in monitoring and regulating ongoing activity is, at least in part, a function of one's level of expertise. Early in the course of skill acquisition it is necessary to employ relatively low-level conceptions of what one is doing to successfully execute the activity. With increasing practice, however, such low-level control is no longer needed, and people move toward more abstract identifications or understandings of their own actions.

## Other Cognitive and Behavioral Indices of Skill Development

Beyond the various cognitive and behavioral changes discussed to this point, the literature on skill acquisition and expert–novice differences does suggest some additional features that might be expected to change as a function of practice (see Ericsson &

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<sup>3</sup>The emphasis here is on the notion of *cognitive effort* rather than the related construct *automaticity* because of the multiple meanings and resultant ambiguities involving the use of the latter term (see Bargh, 1992).

Lehman, 1996; Glaser & Bassok, 1989; Glaser & Chi, 1988; Proctor & Dutta, 1995; VanLehn, 1996). Although we have little direct evidence that these changes extend to the domain of social and communicative skill, their emergence in other skill domains makes it reasonable to expect that acquisition of message production and processing skills would be characterized by similar effects. Among these additional indices is the tendency for experts to perceive tasks or problems in deeper, more sophisticated ways (see, for example, Chase & Simon, 1973; Chi, Feltovich, & Glaser, 1981).<sup>4</sup> A second example suggested by research in other behavioral domains concerns the development of metacognitive processes that allow the expert to more accurately monitor, assess, and regulate his or her own thoughts and actions (see Larkin, 1983; McGuiness, 1990). Whether these sorts of performance shifts do, indeed, accompany the development of communication skills, under what conditions, and with what effects, are issues that should be the focus of future research efforts.

## MODELS OF SKILL ACQUISITION

### Adult Communication Skill Acquisition

Despite the great emphasis placed on skills and skill training in the field of communication and allied disciplines, there have been relatively few attempts to develop theoretical accounts of the processes that underlie adult acquisition of communication skills.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, there is a tradition of research on *communication instruction* (see Darling, 1992), focusing in large part on the relative effectiveness of various pedagogical techniques, behaviors, and materials (e.g., Lederman, 1992; Vangelisti, Daly, & Friedrich, 1999; see also Daly & Vangelisti, this volume). Similarly, there is a body of work on *social-skill training*, concerned with development and implementation of adult skill training programs (e.g., Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Glaser, 1983; Kelly, 1989; Trower, Bryant, & Argyle, 1978; see also, Segrin, this volume). There is also a large literature on the nature of skilled communication *behavior* itself (i.e., efforts to identify those behaviors that are more or less skillful, effective, appropriate, and so on; as discussed in many of the chapters in this volume). Finally, and perhaps most relevant to this chapter, there are even a number of attempts to develop models of the processes underlying skilled communication *performance* (i.e., how do people produce, or fail to produce, skilled actions; e.g., Greene, 1984; Levelt, 1989; see also Berger, this volume). Each of these literatures can be seen to offer certain insights about the processes involved in becoming more socially skilled, but at the same time, scholars working in these areas have not typically had as their primary concern the development of models of skill *acquisition* (i.e., describing the course of *changes* in performance quality over time or explicating the nature of the mechanisms underlying and giving rise to such changes).

Where models that *do* touch, even if only indirectly, on mechanisms of communication skill acquisition have been developed, they can be seen to rely on

<sup>4</sup>The tendency for experts to perceive tasks in more principled or sophisticated ways has a notable parallel in O'Keefe's (1988) conjecture concerning a developmental progression of increasingly sophisticated message design logics.

<sup>5</sup>In contrast to the relatively limited number of efforts to develop models of adult communication skill acquisition, there is an enormous literature on the development of language and other communication skills in infancy and childhood (see Bates, 1979; Kuczala & Barrett, 1986; MacWhinney, 1998). Moreover, there have been a number of noteworthy attempts to articulate general models of adult acquisition of cognitive and motor skills (for reviews, see Adams, 1987; Proctor & Dutta, 1995; VanLehn, 1996).

some combination of three sorts of general explanatory mechanisms: (a) establishment of new knowledge structures, (b) refining or tuning of those structures, and (c) strengthening of such memory structures through use.<sup>6</sup>

Of the various mechanisms introduced to account for changes in performance quality, the most straightforward involves ascribing improvement to the acquisition of new knowledge structures, as when people develop new understandings of social processes, knowledge of rule prescriptions, means–end relationships, and so on. Expressed in the language of the underlying cognitive architecture, such structural changes may involve establishing new cognitive *units* of some sort (e.g., nodes, productions) or the development of new structural *links* between units, as when an associative link is established between two symbolic nodes.

As examples of models that address improvement in performance quality primarily in terms of acquisition of new knowledge structures or cognitive content, one could point to O'Keefe's (1988) original formulation of "message design logics," which holds that people may progress through increasingly sophisticated modes of reasoning about social interaction and message encoding. A second example, one which reflects a very different conceptual foundation, is found in Parks's (1994; see also Hargie, 1997) application of Powers's (1973; see also Carver & Scheier, 1982) cybernetic–perceptual–control model to the realm of interpersonal interaction. According to Parks, interpersonal competence can be apprehended in terms of the development and operation of a hierarchical system of control mechanisms. These control mechanisms, as conceived by Powers (1973), consist of a system of simple "comparators" that serve to match an input, or perceptual, signal with some reference signal and that generate an efferent, or output, signal in the event of a mismatch between the two. The reference signals themselves arise as a result of the person's past experiences in controlling "intrinsic errors," or deviations from optimal physiological states. Skill development, then, is essentially a process of acquiring new, and in some sense, more appropriate, reference standards and of establishing lower level operators that can efficiently bring about desired changes in the perceptual environment.

The second general type of explanatory mechanism invoked to account for the growth of skills involves some sort of adjustment or tuning of existing knowledge structures. In production-system models such as that developed by Anderson (1982), such structural refinements include "generalization," where previously acquired response representations are extended to new situations, and "discrimination," whereby actions come to be restricted to those situations in which they are likely to be effective. Alternatively, in parallel distributed processing (PDP) approaches (e.g., McClelland & Rumelhart, 1985), refinement involves modifying connection weights to capture patterns of association in input configurations. An example of PDP approaches to communication behavior is found in O'Keefe and Lambert's (1995) model of the cognitive system that gives rise to the ideational content of verbal messages. On their view, message-production, or at least the specification of the thought content of messages, is accomplished by selecting from among a set of elemental clauses

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<sup>6</sup>This distinction between acquisition of new cognitive structures, refinement of those structures, and strengthening is useful as a general expository device but shouldn't be pushed too far. Applied in the case of any particular model of the cognitive mechanisms underlying skill development, the boundaries between these categories of mechanisms may be blurred. For example, in Anderson's (1982) production system model, "generalization," presented here as an example of refinement or tuning, can actually be viewed as a case of establishing new structural representations, and "strengthening," presented here as a separate class of mechanisms, is treated as one of the tuning mechanisms.

those that, when uttered, are likely to lead to desired effects. O'Keefe and Lambert, then, viewed acquisition of message production skill as involving the development of structural associations between distributed representations of (a) goals, (b) utterances, and (c) the expected effects of those utterances and adjustment in the weights of those associations based on experience.

The final mechanism commonly invoked to address issues of skill acquisition is "strengthening" of memory structures as a result of frequent use such that performance becomes more accurate and rapid. Examples of such strengthening mechanisms are found in MacKay's (1982, 1983, 1987) and Greene and Geddes's (1993) models of message production processes. MacKay's model, in contrast to that of O'Keefe and Lambert (1995), is not limited to analysis of the processes underlying the specification of the thought content of messages, but instead explicitly addresses the question of how those thoughts could actually come to be expressed overtly (i.e., as strings of words). MacKay proposes a hierarchical system of nodes and associative links comprised of three major levels, each of which is further organized into sublevels. At the *conceptual level*, single nodes correspond to entire thought units (e.g., "fast pedaling builds lung power"), conceptual compounds (e.g., "fast pedaling"), and individual lexical concepts (e.g., "fast," "pedaling"). At the second major hierarchical level, the *phonological level*, nodes correspond to individual syllables, phonological compounds, and phonemes. Finally, at the *muscle-movement level*, nodes code motor-system commands. Central to MacKay's conception of skill development is the notion that links between nodes are strengthened with use. More specifically, the function relating strength to frequency of use is curvilinear, with increments in strength becoming increasingly smaller as amount of prior use grows (a principle MacKay invokes to account for the power law of learning discussed later). With increasing strength of associative links comes faster priming of related nodes, with a concomitant increase in speech fluency.

A second example of an approach involving a strengthening mechanism is found in Greene and Geddes's (1993) model of skilled performance. This model, based on Greene's (1984, 1989) action assembly theory, is intended to apply to both the verbal and nonverbal components of message behavior. Furthermore, unlike other models which assume that complete thoughts are typically represented as memory elements, or nodes, action assembly theory views thoughts as emergent constructions, created "online" through the integration of simpler cognitive content. From the perspective of action assembly theory, a person's behavior at any moment comprises a very large number of elemental behavioral features, some abstract and conceptual, others related to verbal aspects of behavior (e.g., lexical items, syntax, phoneme specification, etc.), and still others, at very low levels of abstraction, pertinent to motor control. Any particular behavioral feature, then, represents just a fragment of the entire configuration of features that constitute an individual's behavior at some instant in time. These elemental behavioral features reside in long-term memory as components of "procedural records," structures that preserve relationships between features of action, outcomes, and situations. According to action assembly theory, behavioral production involves two processes, an activation process that serves to retrieve relevant behavioral features and an assembly process by which activated features are organized and integrated to produce the complex of features that constitute a person's ongoing action. The assembly of behavioral features is held to proceed serially and to make demands on a limited pool of processing resources. Within this framework, skill acquisition is seen to involve at least three distinct subprocesses: the acquisition or establishment of new procedural records, the formation of

“unitized assemblies” of behavioral features that circumvent the need for the time and capacity-demanding assembly process, and the strengthening of procedural records such that they are activated more rapidly.

It is noteworthy that communication skills training programs typically make use of techniques and activities that allow them to capitalize on each of the three sorts of mechanisms (i.e., acquisition, refinement, and strengthening) identified here. Skills training programs, of which there are many (see Ladd & Mize, 1983; Segrin, this volume; Spence & Shepherd, 1983), routinely involve *instruction or presentation of behavioral ideals* (perhaps with additional materials designed to provide an overarching conceptual rationale for those behaviors or illustrations of how those behavioral objectives might actually be manifested in ongoing interaction), *opportunity for practice* of one sort or another, and *feedback* about the extent to which those performance trials approached the behavioral standard. Thus, via instruction, implementation, and feedback, learners are able to acquire new knowledge structures, to refine those structures, and to strengthen them with the aim of insuring production of the desired responses outside the training context.

## Cognitive and Motor Skill Acquisition

Although there have been relatively few attempts to develop models of adult communication skill acquisition, there are a number of more general models of cognitive and motor skill development (see footnote 5). Of these, two merit special mention here because they have proven to be particularly important in guiding research on the course of performance improvement in message-production and processing tasks.

Research on cognitive and motor skills has lead to widespread convergence on the notion that the development of such skills proceeds through three stages, a conception that can be traced most directly to the work of Paul Fitts (1964; Fitts & Posner, 1967). According to Fitts, in the initial, or “cognitive,” stage of skill acquisition, the person gains a rudimentary factual understanding of the requisite behavior through instruction, observation, and so forth and is able to use this information to produce a rough approximation of the skill. Where the skill involves separate subcomponents, these tend to be tackled in isolation, and overt verbalization of task-relevant information is common. In the “associative” stage, there is progressively less reliance on the initial factual representation of task requirements, and in their place, motor programs for task execution begin to develop. Initial errors in understanding the task and appropriate methods for proceeding are detected and eliminated. Individual subcomponents of the task that were originally treated in isolation begin to be integrated into larger wholes. Finally, in the “autonomous” stage, which can extend over a period of many years, performance is gradually refined as the skill becomes increasingly integrated, rapid, and automatic.

A similar three-stage model, developed by John Anderson (e.g., 1982, 1983; Neves & Anderson, 1981), has proven to be the most influential approach to skill acquisition to date. Cast in the language of Anderson’s ACT\* theory, the model makes a fundamental distinction between two types of knowledge relevant to skilled performance, declarative knowledge, or knowledge *that*, on one hand, and procedural knowledge, or knowledge *how*, on the other. Thus, people are held to possess both factual information and information about how to carry out various tasks and activities. Criteria for distinguishing declarative and procedural knowledge have been advanced at various times (see, for example, Anderson, 1993; Ryle, 1949; Saint-Cyr & Taylor, 1992; Singley & Anderson, 1989), and these include the fact that people

tend to be able to give a verbal report of declarative information, whereas the ability to report procedural information is extremely limited; declarative knowledge can be acquired suddenly, as when we learn a new fact, whereas procedural knowledge is acquired over time through practice; and procedural knowledge appears to be more resistant to decay. One particularly striking source of evidence in support of the procedural-declarative distinction is the fact that in some cases people are able to acquire a new skill without also acquiring new declarative information relevant to that skill (e.g., Cohen & Squire, 1980; Nissen, 1992).

Central to ACT\* is the assumption that procedural knowledge is held in the form of production rules, amenable to characterization as IF-THEN statements, that link actions with a set of conditions under which those actions should be applied. For example, in the realm of interpersonal greetings, one hypothetical production rule might look something like the following:

IF one wishes to address another  
and the other is of higher status  
THEN use his/her title plus last name

According to Anderson, productions are activated when the conditions specified in their IF components correspond to conditions currently represented in working memory.

Working within this conceptual framework, Anderson specified three stages of skill acquisition that are highly reminiscent of those identified by Fitts. In the “declarative” stage, task-relevant information is held in declarative form (i.e., a set of facts about how to perform the skill). Such declarative encodings cannot be used directly to produce actions, which can only come about via the operation of the procedural knowledge system, and so it is necessary to make use of general production rules capable of applying the declarative information to the task at hand. Implementing declarative information by use of general productions has the advantage of affording flexibility and adaptability in responding to novel task situations, but it comes at the cost of being relatively slow and cognitively demanding. In the second stage of skill acquisition, termed *knowledge compilation*, the original declarative encodings are transformed into procedural form. That is, new, task-specific production rules are formed so that it is no longer necessary to make use of general interpretive productions or to retrieve relevant factual information from memory to execute the skill. Also at this stage, a sequence of successive production rules may be combined to form a single production that accomplishes the same end in just one step. Finally, the “procedural” stage of skill acquisition is marked by continuing gradual improvement in task execution as the productions involved in the skill are refined and strengthened through repeated use.

Anderson’s model of skill acquisition is just one of several that has been offered as an account of the processes underlying changes in behavior that accompany practice (see, for example, Fischer, 1980; Gluck & Thompson, 1987; Logan, 1988; Norman & Shallice, 1985; Schmidt, 1975), but it is one that has proven to be particularly fruitful in generating a number of empirical investigations of skill and learning (e.g., Anderson & Fincham, 1994; Pirolli & Anderson, 1985; Singley & Anderson, 1989), and it has served as a conceptual foundation for other theorists concerned with phenomena not considered by Anderson (e.g., Ackerman, 1988; Smith, 1989a, 1989b; Woltz, 1988). Moreover, in its formulation of knowledge compilation and strengthening processes, ACT\* can be seen to provide an explanatory account for the characteristic shape of

empirically derived skill acquisition curves (see Neves & Anderson, 1981), the topic of the next section.

## MODELING THE COURSE OF SKILL ACQUISITION

The fact that communication skills develop over time raises an obvious question about the course of skill acquisition. That is, if performance improves with time and practice, then what is the nature of the function describing the course of that improvement? With some measure of performance quality represented on the ordinate, or y axis, and time or amount of practice given on the abscissa, one can imagine a host of alternative trajectories that might conceivably capture the course of skill development. In fact, research from a variety of behavioral domains indicates that from among the vast number of conceivable skill-acquisition curves, only a few general functions emerge as plausible candidates for representing the development of skilled behavior.

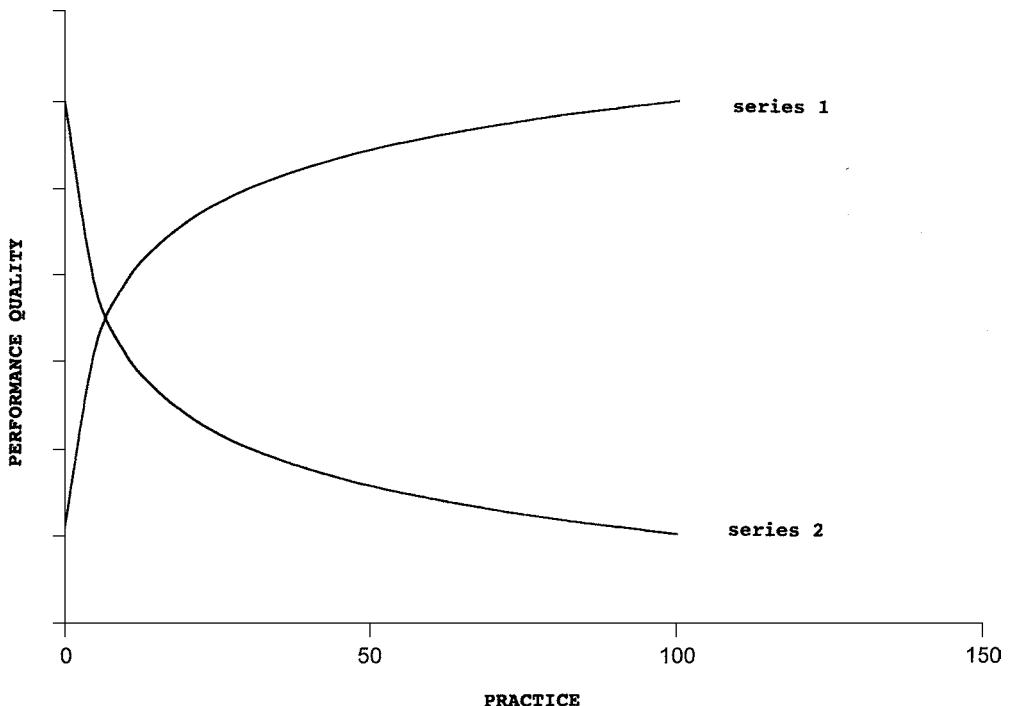
As discussed later, to date there is only a small body of research examining acquisition functions for *communication* skills, but there are a number of studies of cognitive and motor skill acquisition, many of these conducted in military and industrial-training contexts (see Lane, 1987; Mazur & Hastie, 1978; Newell & Rosenbloom, 1981; Nanda & Adler, 1977). To a remarkable degree, this research converges on a general principle of skill acquisition that appears to apply across virtually all behavioral domains: *The course of improvement with time and practice follows a decelerating trajectory in which the increments in performance quality diminish as practice continues* (a pattern exemplified in series 1 of Fig. 2.1).<sup>7</sup> In essence, practice results in continual improvement, but there is also a “diminishing returns” effect in that initial practice trials are characterized by large gains, but with each successive practice trial, the size of the increment in performance quality gets smaller and smaller.

### Overview of Empirically Derived Skill Acquisition Functions

Skill acquisition curves trace changes in performance quality as a function of time or practice. Their derivation, which is reasonably straightforward, involves making a series of assessments of performance quality and fitting this time-series data with a mathematical function expressing the course of improvement in the skill under examination.

In principle, virtually any measure of performance quality can be used to establish a skill-acquisition function. Performance assessments might involve a variety of objective (e.g., time, error rate) or subjective (e.g., quality ratings) measures, but, in point of fact, studies of the course of skill acquisition have typically focused on objective measures of speed and accuracy (see Lane, 1987; Newell & Rosenbloom, 1981). In contrast to the learning curve illustrated in series 1 of Fig. 2.1, where values of the performance measure *increase* with practice, performance assessed as time to task completion or error rate will naturally produce values which become progressively *smaller* as practice continues, as in series 2 of Fig. 2.1.

<sup>7</sup>Although the vast majority of investigations have concluded that the course of skill acquisition is captured by power, hyperbolic, or exponential functions, scattered studies have indicated support for other sorts of functions (see Lane, 1987; Mazur & Hastie, 1978). It is particularly noteworthy that skill-acquisition curves based on *rating* data appear to conform to the family of logistic functions (see Spears, 1985), a fact that may arise as a result of the particular characteristics of performance ratings (see Lane, 1987; Schneider, 1984).



**FIG. 2.1. Typical skill acquisition curves representing decelerating performance improvements over the course of practice.**

With valid and reliable time-series data in hand, it remains to fit the data with some function that captures the course of performance improvement. The large body of research on acquisition of cognitive and motor skills has centered on two distinct families of curves, the exponential and power functions, both of which are consistent with the general pattern of decelerating performance increments mentioned above.

***The Exponential Function.*** The general exponential function describing a learning curve like that in series 2 of Fig. 2.1 (i.e., where values of  $P$  decrease with practice)<sup>8</sup> is given by the equation:

$$P = Be^{-\alpha N}, \quad (1)$$

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<sup>8</sup>The general equations for exponential and power functions describing learning curves, where values of  $P$  decrease with practice, are used as a starting point for this discussion because those equations are slightly simpler for expository purposes than the corresponding equations for functions that increase with practice. In practice, however, it is easy to derive equations for measures of performance that increase with practice simply by treating the optimal level of performance as an asymptote (e.g., a "10" in figure skating or 100% on a performance evaluation) and then applying equations 3 and 4, but with the provision that the second term is now subtracted from the asymptotic value rather than added to it. Thus, the exponential equation for learning curves that increase toward some asymptotic value is

$$P = A - Be^{-\alpha N},$$

and the corresponding power equation, with a prior-learning parameter, is

$$P = A - B(N + E)^{-\alpha}.$$

where  $P$  is a measure of performance quality,  $B$  represents performance level on the first practice trial,  $e$  is the base of the natural logarithm (or approximately 2.718),  $\alpha$  is the learning-rate parameter (indicating the steepness of the curve), and  $N$  is the trial number.

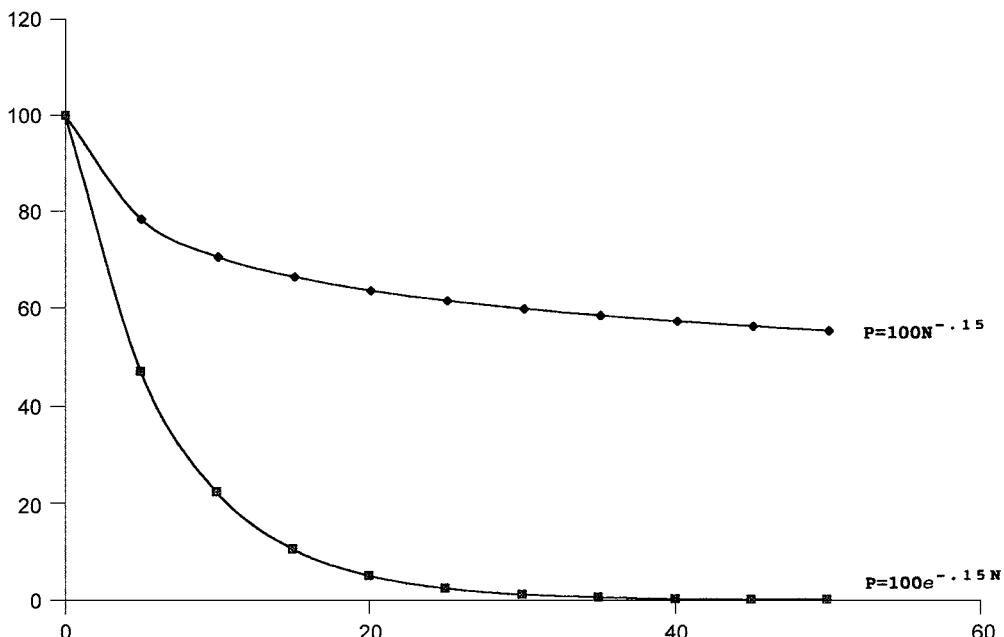
The significance of the exponential function for understanding the relationship between practice and performance can be expressed verbally in a straightforward way: If performance improves by some factor (say, 2, or twice as good) in  $n$  trials, then from that point it will take another  $n$  trials to improve by that same factor again (i.e., to improve by a factor of 2 yet again). So, for example, if the time required to execute some task drops by a factor of 2, from 4 seconds to 2 seconds in 100 trials, it will take another 100 trials for it to drop by a factor of 2 again, that is, from 2 seconds to 1 second.

**The Power Function.** With measures of performance that decrease with practice (see footnote 8), the general power function is given by the following equation:

$$P = BN^{-\alpha}, \quad (2)$$

where  $P$ ,  $N$ , and  $\alpha$  are defined as stated earlier, and  $B$  represents the  $y$  intercept (i.e., performance on a hypothetical zeroth trial). Again, as in the case of the exponential function, larger values of  $\alpha$  indicate a steeper learning curve or faster rate of improvement.

By way of comparison, with equal  $\alpha$  values, the rate of improvement with practice is much slower under a power function than under an exponential function, a relationship illustrated by the hypothetical skill acquisition curves given in Fig. 2.2. In contrast to the exponential function, under a power function, if performance



**FIG. 2.2.** Contrastive illustration of the course of performance improvement under exponential and power functions with equal values of  $B$  and  $\alpha$ .

improves by some factor in  $n$  trials, it will take  $n(n - 1)$  additional trials for performance to improve by that same factor again.

**Prior Learning and Asymptote Effects.** The equations for the exponential and power functions given to this point reflect a pair of simplifying assumptions. On one hand, it is assumed that there is no prior experience and that skill acquisition begins with the first learning trial. Furthermore, it is assumed that the eventual asymptote of performance is perfection (e.g., a task performed in zero time, or with perfect accuracy). In practice, of course, neither of these assumptions may hold; people may have previous training or experience that transfers to the new skill-learning environment; the realities of acting in the world may preclude the possibility of “perfect” performance. In light of these considerations, arriving at a skill-acquisition curve that provides a good fit to the performance data may require incorporating additional parameters into the basic equations given earlier—an asymptote parameter representing performance level after an infinite amount of practice and an experience parameter that represents amount of prior learning (expressed in the same units as the  $N$ , or number of trials, parameter). For the exponential function there is no specifiable effect for prior experience, but the effect of a performance asymptote,  $A$ , can be represented in the following extension of Equation 1:

$$P = A + Be^{-\alpha N}. \quad (3)$$

For the power function, both prior experience,  $E$ , and asymptote effects,  $A$ , can be represented, as in this extension of Equation 2:

$$P = A + B(N + E)^{-\alpha}. \quad (4)$$

**Linear Transformations.** Both the exponential and power functions can be expressed in linear terms via log transformations, a fact that makes it possible to derive empirically based skill acquisition curves using standard least squares regression techniques. The linear form of the exponential function given in Equation 1 is as follows:

$$\log P = \log B - \alpha N, \quad (5)$$

and the exponential function with an asymptote term (Equation 3) is given by

$$\log(P - A) = \log B - \alpha N. \quad (6)$$

The linear form of the simple power function given in Equation 2 is

$$\log P = \log B - \alpha \log N, \quad (7)$$

and the power function with asymptote and prior-learning parameters (Equation 4) is given by

$$\log(P - A) = \log B - \alpha \log(N + E). \quad (8)$$

## The Course of Perceptual, Motor, and Cognitive Skill Acquisition

At the outset of a discussion of empirically derived skill-acquisition curves a pair of caveats are in order. The first of these concerns the possibility that the course of skill acquisition, at least for some types of tasks, may reflect plateaus, or periods of no

improvement. The existence of plateaus is a matter of some controversy (see Lane, 1987), but to the extent that such periods do arise in the course of practice, they present a challenge for both the senses of "model" mentioned above. That is, on one hand they suggest the need for more elaborate explicative frameworks capable of accounting for such "flat spots," and on the other they implicate more complex learning functions than are captured by the families of power and exponential curves reviewed earlier.

The second, related, caveat concerns the derivation and interpretation of skill-acquisition curves based on group versus individual data. By aggregating time-series performance data over people, it is possible to arrive at a single estimate of average learning performance (i.e., a single skill acquisition curve), just as when a single measure of central tendency, such as the mean, is used to represent an entire group's exam score. At the same time, however, such composite measures may obscure individual variations in the course of skill development and, even more important, may also obscure significant deviations from power and exponential trajectories (see Lane, 1987). Again, the families of power and exponential functions discussed earlier do not capture plateaus in the course of practice, but even if such plateaus do arise, either for certain individuals or for everyone, a skill-acquisition curve based on aggregate data may still be closely modeled by power or exponential functions, as long as the location of the plateaus varies with people (i.e., if some people reach a plateau earlier in the course of practice than others).

Because both the exponential and power functions can take a decelerating trajectory like that known to approximate the course of skill development, it should not be surprising to learn that each has received some measure of empirical support in investigations of perceptual, motor, and cognitive skill acquisition. However, despite the fact that the exponential curve has sometimes been shown to provide a very good fit to the performance data (e.g., Digman, 1959; Noble, Salazar, Skelley, & Wilkerson, 1979), contrastive reviews suggest the relative superiority of the power function.

Although they do not consider the power function per se, Mazur and Hastie (1978) do contrast the fit provided by the exponential function with that of the hyperbolic function. In its simplest form the hyperbolic function is given by

$$P = B/N \quad (9)$$

or equivalently

$$P = BN^{-1}. \quad (10)$$

Contrasting Equation 10 with Equation 2 reveals that the hyperbolic function can be viewed as a special case of the power function in which  $\alpha$  is equal to 1.<sup>9</sup>

Mazur and Hastie (1978) reported the analysis of data from seven free-recall studies involving various stimulus-presentation conditions in which they contrasted the fit to the performance data provided by the exponential and hyperbolic functions. Of 23 comparisons, the hyperbolic function fared better in 21 cases, accounting for an

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<sup>9</sup>With asymptote and prior learning parameters, the hyperbolic function is given by the following equation:

$$P = A + B/(N + E).$$

Cast in the more general form of a power function, the hyperbolic function is given by

$$P = A + B(N + E)^{-1}.$$

average of approximately 98.4% of the variance versus 94.2% for the exponential function.

More relevant to the focus of this chapter, the same authors reported contrastive tests involving data from studies of acquisition of a variety of motor and cognitive skills including typing, addition, mirror tracing, and printing inverted letters. Of 56 comparisons, the hyperbolic model accounted for a greater portion of the variance in 47 cases, although the overall difference in mean variance explained was negligible (hyperbolic function  $M = 95.7$ ; exponential function  $M = 95.6$ ).

In what has become the most widely cited and influential treatment of this issue, Newell and Rosenbloom (1981) contrasted the relative adequacy of exponential, hyperbolic, and power functions for fitting the data from 11 studies of manual and cognitive skill acquisition, some of them the same as those examined by Mazur and Hastie (1978). Once again, all three models performed reasonably well, but of 15 comparisons, the power law accounted for the largest proportion of the variance in the performance data in all 15 cases (in three instances, the hyperbolic function performed equally well). Approximate mean  $R^2$  values for the power, hyperbolic, and exponential functions were .863, .810, and .731, respectively. On the basis of their analysis, Newell and Rosenbloom (1981) concluded that the course of skill development does not follow an exponential trajectory. Instead, the course of performance improvements with practice is given by a power function (with the hyperbolic as a special case), and this "power law of practice" holds "over all types of mental behavior" (p. 34).

A third published examination of the relative adequacy of the exponential, hyperbolic, and power functions, this by Lane (1987), suggests a similar conclusion. Using data drawn from eight studies, none of which were included in the earlier reviews by Mazur and Hastie (1978) or Newell and Rosenbloom (1981), Lane (1987) conducted 15 contrastive tests. Of these, in not a single case did the exponential function yield the best fit to the performance data. The power function produced the largest  $R^2$  value in three cases, and the hyperbolic function accounted for the greatest portion of the variance in another seven cases. Interestingly, a fourth function examined by Lane (this constructed by taking the log of  $N$ , or trial number, and leaving  $P$ , the measure of performance quality, untransformed), performed as well or better than any of the other models in seven instances. Approximate mean  $R^2$  values for the exponential, power, hyperbolic, and log- $N$  functions in Lane's study were .837, .930, .930, and .935, respectively. Given these results, Lane (1987) concluded the following:

The power law and its underlying assumptions continue as the most interpretable candidate for description of performance changes with practice. The hyperbolic represents, for at least some types of data, a powerful and mathematically economical alternative to the basic power function. For the few cases we examined, the exponential is less appropriate than its broad base of support from the literature suggests. (p. 45)

In many cases, the behaviors under examination in studies of the course of skill acquisition have involved relatively simple perceptual and motor tasks. Of somewhat greater interest to those concerned with communication skills are those studies indicating that the course of improvement in fundamental, but symbolically based, skills such as typing (e.g., Gentner, 1983) and reading (under various experimenter-constructed conditions) (e.g., Kolers, 1976) is described by a power law. Perhaps most significant, however, is the fact that the power function has been shown to capture the course of performance improvements for considerably more complex cognitive

and behavioral skills as well. Thus, relatively abstract skills such as learning a new programming language (e.g., Anderson, Conrad, & Corbett, 1989) and application of complex hierarchical rule sets (e.g., Woltz, 1988) also appear to conform to a power function (but see Carlson & Lundy, 1992).

## Modeling the Course of Communication Skill Development

In contrast to the rich literature on acquisition of perceptual, motor, and cognitive skills, there have been relatively few attempts to examine the course of *communication* skill acquisition. When such investigations have been undertaken, however, they do tend to support the applicability of the power function in the realm of communication behaviors. As an example, MacKay (1982; see also MacKay, 1981) presented subjects with preformulated sentences that they simply were to repeat a dozen times. With time to produce each repetition as the measure of performance quality, the course of improvement was found to reflect a power function, although no measure of the extent to which the data conformed to the power law was given, nor did MacKay indicate whether his data might have been fit equally well, or better, by other functions. As part of this study, MacKay also contrasted time to produce aloud the 12 repetitions of each stimulus sentence with the time required to mentally traverse similar sentences. Interestingly, covert traversal of the sentences was significantly faster than overt production, but the time required to execute 12 covert repetitions of the stimulus sentences also reflected a power-function speedup. MacKay (1982) interpreted these results in the terms of his model of strengthening of associative links in a hierarchical node system outlined above.

Like the results reported by MacKay (1982), a series of studies undertaken by Greene and his associates (Caplan & Greene, 1999; Greene, Rucker, Zauss, & Harris, 1998; Greene, Sassi, Malek-Madani, & Edwards, 1997; Sassi & Greene, 1998) suggests that the course of message production skill acquisition does conform to a power function. In an effort to lay the groundwork for systematic investigation of adult communication-skill acquisition, these researchers sought to identify a communication skill that was novel to the subject (to ensure that the process of skill development could be observed from its earliest stages), permitted large numbers of performance trials, and avoided rote repetition of the same linguistic content from trial to trial. Toward this end, they adopted as their target skill a simple, six-step organizing scheme for describing geometric arrays (see Greene et al., 1997). Training in use of message-organizing schemes has a long history in communication education in which students are taught to employ organizational sequences in public speaking, interviewing, group discussion, and so on.

In their first investigation of the course of acquiring this message-organizing skill, Greene and his colleagues (Greene et al., 1997, Study 1) had five subjects employ the organizing sequence in describing a series of 150 geometric arrays. Quality of performance was assessed as the time required to complete each description and as the number of errors (i.e., omissions, transpositions) in applying the steps of the organizational scheme. Comparison of the fit to the message-duration data provided by the exponential and power models (Equations 1 and 2) revealed that the power function accounted for a greater portion of the variance in the case of all five subjects (mean  $R^2$  values of .714 vs. .562 for acquisition curves based on the raw data, and means of .874 vs. .706 for curves based on data smoothed by taking running averages over sets of five data points). Aggregating over the five subjects, the power function accounted for 91.1% of the variance in the message-duration data.

The analysis of the error data in this study similarly indicated the superiority of the power model over the exponential function, but, beyond this, also served to illustrate an important point concerning the appropriateness of certain types of performance measures for deriving skill-acquisition curves. As with the message-duration data, the power model proved superior to the exponential function in the case of every individual subject, both for the raw data (mean  $R^2$  values of .221 vs. .096) and for the data smoothed by taking a running average (mean  $R^2$  values of .336 vs. .160). Aggregating over the five subjects, the power function accounted for 38.8% of the variance in the error data.

The fact that the  $R^2$  values for the error data in this study are markedly lower than those for the message duration data is not atypical (see Anderson, 1992). In part, this phenomenon may be seen to arise from the fact that performance errors tend to occur intermittently, thus producing a "noisier" time series. Beyond this, error-rate data are characterized by a floor-effect in the sense that, unlike duration measures, once a person reaches the point of error-free performance, it is no longer possible to continue to improve.

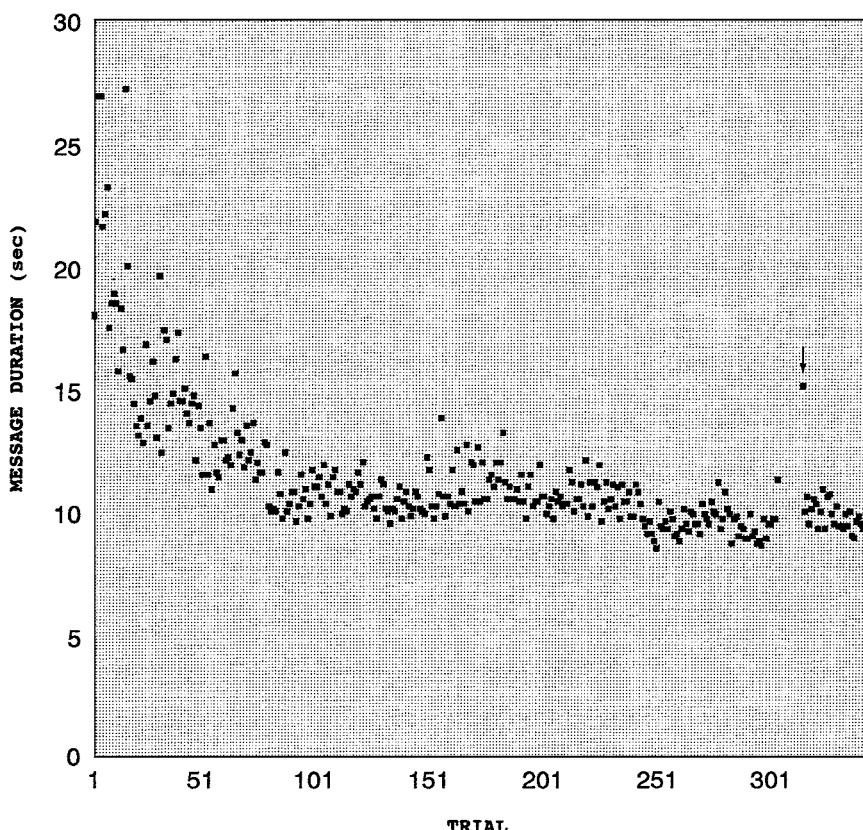
Like this first study, two additional studies reported by Greene et al. (1997) support the applicability of the power law to the acquisition of message production skills. In their second study, employing the same six-step organizing sequence and 150 message trials but with slightly different instructions, the power model was again found to provide a better fit to the message duration data than the exponential model in the case of all five subjects, accounting for an average of 53.3% of the variance in the raw data and 74.8% of the variance in data smoothed by taking a running average.

The final study reported in Greene et al. (1997) produced some particularly noteworthy results. In this case, a single subject employed the six-step organizing sequence in producing a series of 300 messages over the course of a 5-day period. Two weeks later, with no prior warning, the subject was asked to produce an additional 30 descriptions using the organizational scheme she had learned before. The data from this study are given in Fig. 2.3. Once again, the power function provided a better fit to the message duration data ( $R^2 = .759$ ) than did the exponential model ( $R^2 = .544$ ). It is particularly remarkable that on the fifth day, after 250 previous message trials, the subject was still improving. Finally, as might be expected, after a 2-week interval she was quite slow in producing the first of the final 30 descriptions, but she quickly returned to her prior level of performance.

Although the results reported by MacKay (1982) and by Greene and his collaborators (e.g., Greene et al., 1997) indicate that the acquisition of certain message production, or output, skills follows a power function, there is also evidence that execution of various input-processing tasks such as are involved in person perception and attribution may likewise be characterized by the power law of practice. Drawing on Anderson's ACT\* theory discussed earlier, Eliot Smith and his associates (e.g., Smith, 1989b; Smith, Branscombe, & Borman, 1988; Smith & Lerner, 1986) examined changes as a function of practice in the speed with which subjects were able to execute a variety of social judgment tasks. As should be expected, their results indicate that performance improves only under certain conditions,<sup>10</sup> but where significant speedup in task execution does occur, the course of improvement appears to be captured by a power function. In a representative study from this program of

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<sup>10</sup>Most notably, there must be some element of repetition or consistency in responding for practice effects to emerge (see Smith et al., 1988; Smith & Lerner, 1986), a common observation in studies of the course of skill acquisition (see Carlson & Lundy, 1992; Duncan, 1986; Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977).



**FIG. 2.3.** Course of acquisition of a simple message production skill. From Greene, Sassi, Malek-Madani, and Edwards (1997), Study 3.

research, Smith (1989b) had subjects make a series of 200 judgments about whether specific behaviors were indicative of a target trait. Thus, on a particular trial subjects might be asked whether the action of *seducing* (behavior) another person would be characteristic of the trait *friendly*. Smith's (1989b) results indicated that, with data aggregated over 32 subjects, response times were fit by a power curve, although the  $R^2$  value for the power function was somewhat low for aggregated data (.42), and the fit of other functions was not examined.

At one level, the sort of judgment task under examination in this and related studies can be seen to be important because such behavior-to-trait judgments are central to everyday processes of person perception and inference making (Smith, 1989a; Smith et al., 1988). Beyond this, Smith (1989a) traced some noteworthy implications of speedup in social-judgment and other input-processing tasks. Specifically, he suggests that the increased processing efficiency resulting from practice should lead to greater availability, and application, of relevant trait categories, systematic biases in favor of particular interpretations and stereotypes (see also Sedikides & Skowronski, 1991), and heightened salience of frequently accessed attitudes, with a concomitant increase in attitude-behavior consistency (see also Fazio, 1986).

To summarize this section, there have been relatively few empirical investigations of the course of communication skill acquisition that extend over more than a handful of performance trials. Where such studies have been undertaken, however,

they do tend to indicate that the acquisition of communication skills conforms to the same power law of practice that has been shown to characterize the development of cognitive and motor skills, and this appears to be true for both message production and social judgment tasks. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the research conducted to date is somewhat limited in that it has focused on relatively simple, noninteractive tasks. There is a need, then, to extend the analysis of skill acquisition functions to more complex communication processes, involving both verbal and nonverbal dimensions of behavior, in more fully interactive social contexts. Furthermore, it should be noted that in the studies of message production skill acquisition reviewed in this section, subjects were provided immediate corrective feedback when they made errors in applying the organizing sequence they had learned. Such feedback may be a component of many skills training programs but is much less likely to occur in everyday social interactions where inappropriate actions may not be noted or sanctioned.<sup>11</sup> At this point, the course of message production skill acquisition in the absence of performance feedback remains unexplored.

## PERSON FACTORS AND THE COURSE OF SKILL ACQUISITION

Although it appears that the course of skill acquisition is typically described by the general family of power functions, it should be clear that the specific shape of a skill-acquisition curve may be influenced by a host of individual-difference, task, and training variables. People might reasonably be expected to differ in their initial levels of performance quality, to acquire skills at different rates, to achieve varying levels of asymptotic performance, and so on. Similarly, both intuition and experience tell us that the requirements of specific tasks, and the structure and content of various training programs, will influence the course of skill acquisition.

The fact that skills—communication and otherwise—appear to develop according to a power law suggests the possibility of systematic and rigorous examination of the impact of person, task, and training variables on the course of skill development. Returning to Equation 2, with measures of performance quality,  $P$ , and number of performance trials,  $N$ , available for each subject, it is relatively easy to arrive at estimates of the learning-rate parameter,  $\alpha$ , and the y-intercept of the learning curve,  $B$ , for each person. These data can then be treated as any other dependent variable in analyses of the impact of individual-difference and situational factors. Similarly, by applying Equation 4, one can arrive at estimates of degree of prior learning,  $E$ , and asymptotic performance level,  $A$ . Finally, although the  $R^2$  value for empirically derived skill acquisition curves was treated above as a means of adjudicating between alternative families of functions (i.e., power and exponential), it should also be apparent that  $R^2$  values for individual learning curves are themselves of considerable conceptual importance because they can be taken to reflect the level of “noise” in the time-series data (i.e., variations in performance quality from trial to trial). Derivation of parameter values for individual learning curves, then, affords the potential for identifying, in a relatively precise way, the manner in which person, task, and training variables impact the course of changes in performance quality.

Although it is certainly possible to distinguish a number of different types of person variables, two broad categories are particularly relevant for understanding skill acquisition processes. On one hand, there are what we might generally label as “traits,” that is, relatively enduring dispositions and capacities including such things as

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<sup>11</sup>I am indebted to Walt Zakaifi for this observation.

personality factors, intelligence, and cognitive style. On the other, there are "states," or transient intrapersonal conditions such as level of arousal, stress, and anxiety. In the following sections, the impact of these two classes of person variables is considered in turn.

## Trait Variables and the Course of Skill Acquisition

It has been observed that the number of traitlike terms in the English language runs into the thousands (e.g., Allport, 1937), and perusal of the journals of social science reveals that scores, or, more likely, hundreds, of these traits have been the object of efforts at operationalization and empirical investigation. Indeed, in all the study of human behavior there may be no more common research design than that involving assessment of some traitlike variable followed by observation of the impact of that variable, either in isolation or in conjunction with situational factors, on some target response. In the vein of the humorous (and the incisive), the proliferation of trait constructs, inadequate research designs, and the absence of integrative theoretical frameworks has led Block (1977, p. 39) to refer to the body of work in the area as the trait "litter-ature."

The sheer number of trait constructs suggests that the list of individual-difference variables that might, in some way, under some conditions, impact the course of skill acquisition could be a long one indeed. Of course, the best source of clues for identifying those trait variables that are likely to play a particularly important role in skill acquisition is the skill acquisition process itself, that is, our understanding of the mechanisms underlying skill development can be seen to provide a principled basis for identifying relevant individual-difference variables.

It is just this sort of approach that is exemplified in Ackerman's (1988, 1990; Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989) model of the role of individual differences in skill acquisition. With the assumption that the course of skill acquisition reflects the sort of three-stage process described by Fitts (1964; Fitts & Posner, 1967) and Anderson (1982, 1983; Neves & Anderson, 1981) as his starting point, Ackerman identified three general classes of individual-difference variables that should be expected to play a role in acquiring a skill. Of particular significance is the fact that each of these groups of variables is held to exert its primary influence during a different stage of the skill acquisition process.

In the initial (i.e., declarative) stage of skill acquisition, when skill-relevant information is held in declarative form, performance is seen to be determined by general intellectual abilities, or intelligence. In other words, when the person is executing a task by relying on verbal or written instructions and other declaratively based information, the ability to reason and manipulate that information is of paramount importance in determining his or her level of performance. Thus, tests of intelligence, reasoning ability, and so on should be expected to be associated with performance quality early in the course of skill acquisition. Furthermore, because intellectual ability appears to be related to individual differences in working-memory capacity (see Kyllonen & Christal, 1990), measures of the extent to which people are able to keep material activated for use in ongoing activities should be an important predictor of performance early on. Cast in a slightly different way, when task-relevant information is held in declarative form, the ability to keep those facts and instructions active in working memory will be a key limiting factor in determining the level of one's performance (see Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; Kyllonen & Woltz, 1989; Woltz, 1988).

As skill acquisition progresses beyond the declarative stage, general intellectual ability and working-memory capacity should exert diminishing influence on performance. According to Ackerman, in the second phase of skill acquisition (i.e., "knowledge compilation"), where task-specific knowledge structures are developed, rate of performance improvements should be determined by the speed with which people are able to form new procedural encodings. He further suggested that such individual differences can be tapped by measures of speed of information processing like the digit-symbol substitution test (see Wechsler, 1981). Thus, once skill acquisition moves beyond its earliest, declarative stage, tests of the speed with which people are able to form new productions, as tapped by various measures of speed of information processing, should become increasingly important in determining rate of performance improvement.

As practice continues, the individual enters the final, or "procedural" stage of skill acquisition. At this point, relevant productions have been compiled, and as a result, speed of information processing becomes less important in determining performance quality. According to Ackerman, in the final stage of skill acquisition, when knowledge structures are strengthened through use, the primary limiting factor on performance arises from the ability to execute motor responses with speed and accuracy. Individual differences in psychomotor ability, then, should become increasingly important late in the course of skill acquisition when the cognitive demands of the task have been reduced to a minimum.

Ackerman's model of the role of individual differences in skill acquisition has found a considerable measure of support in studies of cognitive and motor tasks such as identification of items from a memory set and air traffic control simulations (e.g., Ackerman, 1988, 1990; Eyring, Johnson, & Francis, 1993; Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; Woltz, 1988; but see Matthews, Jones, & Chamberlain, 1992; Mumford, Baughman, Uhlman, Costanza, & Threlfall, 1993). There is less evidence, however, bearing on the issue of whether these same sorts of patterns might extend to cases of communication skill acquisition. To date, only a pair of studies conducted by Sassi and Greene (1998) have attempted to ascertain whether the three classes of individual-difference variables identified by Ackerman do, indeed, impact the course of message production skill acquisition in a manner consistent with his model.

As their target skill, Sassi and Greene (1998) employed the same organizational sequence for describing geometric arrays used in the Greene et al. (1997) studies discussed earlier. Following Ackerman, they sought to examine the impact of working-memory capacity, speed of information processing, and psychomotor ability (i.e., the speed with which people could read aloud a short sample description) on the course of performance improvements. More specifically, Sassi and Greene hypothesized that working-memory capacity would have its greatest impact at the beginning of the practice trials, that speed of information processing would be positively related to overall learning rate, or  $\alpha$ , and that psychomotor ability would become an important predictor of performance only very late in the series of performance trials. The results of Sassi and Greene's first study indicated only limited support for these hypotheses. Contrary to their expectations, working-memory capacity was not related to initial performance quality, and speed of information processing was negatively, rather than positively, related to the learning-rate parameter,  $\alpha$ . Only psychomotor ability proved to be related to asymptotic performance in the way that the experimenters had expected. In the face of these results, Sassi and Greene reasoned that their task may not have been difficult enough to produce the sorts of effects they had hypothesized; that is, the relatively simple six-step organizing sequence may not

have been complex enough to place a heavy demand on working-memory capacity (so that no effects for this individual-difference variable were observed), and those subjects who were highest in speed of information processing may have already mastered the sequence before the first performance trial, so that they actually had lower, rather than higher,  $\alpha$  values. In their second study, Sassi and Greene sought to examine this possibility by having their subjects learn two distinct six-step organizing sequences, either of which might be designated for use on any given trial. With this added degree of difficulty, their results were in line with the original hypotheses: Working-memory capacity was a significant predictor of initial performance quality, speed of information processing was positively associated with learning rate, and, once again, psychomotor ability was related to asymptotic performance.

Thus, although the body of relevant research is small, there is some evidence suggesting that the course of message-production skill is influenced by individual-difference variables in a manner consistent with Ackerman's model. At the same time, it is important to sound a note of caution in attempting to generalize beyond the relatively constrained experimental paradigm employed by Sassi and Greene, in which the skill under examination is explicitly delineated and time to produce each message is taken as the measure of performance quality, to the broader domain of message-production skills. Ackerman's model has the advantage of providing a theoretically grounded approach to the study of the role of individual differences in skill acquisition, but at this point it is probably best taken as suggestive when applied to the domain of social behavior.

In addition to the sorts of individual-difference variables implicated in Ackerman's model, a noteworthy extension of that model developed by Eyring et al. (1993) incorporates self-efficacy as a factor held to influence learning rate. These authors suggested that self-efficacy is associated with greater effort and task-directed attention and, as a result, should lead to more rapid acquisition of new skills. Test of this prediction in an air traffic control simulation indicated that perceptions of self-efficacy were, indeed, related to an exponential learning-rate parameter reflecting the time required to reach asymptotic levels of performance.

In an approach that shares much in common with that of Ackerman, Mumford and his associates (e.g., Mumford, Baughman, Uhlman, et al., 1993; see also Mumford, Baughman, Threlfall, Uhlman, & Costanza, 1993), sought to relate a variety of personality traits, including achievement motivation, temperament, rigidity, and locus of control, among many others, to the course of cognitive-skill acquisition. They suggested that in the initial stage of skill development, personality factors related to adaptation and flexibility, desire for mastery, and self-observation and regulation will be particularly important. With the onset of the second stage of skill development, Mumford argued that personality variables associated with accurate information encoding and attentional focus on the task at hand will exert greatest influence on performance. Finally, in the third stage of skill development in which the task becomes increasingly routinized, self-discipline and preference for the predictable and routine might be expected to be key determinants of performance quality. In a study of skill acquisition involving a relatively complex industrial simulation, Mumford (Mumford, Baughman, Uhlman, et al., 1993), was able to demonstrate that, in a manner generally consistent with expectations, the configuration of personality variables influencing performance did shift as subjects became increasingly familiar with the task. To date, however, this model has not been extended to the domain of interpersonal behavior, and its applicability and implications for understanding the influence of personality factors on the development communication skill must await future research.

## State Variables and the Course of Skill Acquisition

In contrast to the sorts of enduring dispositions and capacities considered in the previous section, the focus here is on intrapersonal conditions that change over relatively short time spans. Such "state" variables, then, would include a host of factors relevant to the quality of one's social performance, including arousal level, stress, and fatigue.

Of all state variables, none has been more extensively investigated by communication researchers than that of communication anxiety or apprehension (see Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Daly & McCroskey, 1984; Leary, 1983; Patterson & Ritts, 1997). High levels of communication anxiety are often associated with performance deficits, and skills training programs are seen as one means of alleviating anxiety and its attendant behavioral manifestations (see Allen, Hunter, & Donohue, 1989; Glaser, 1981; Hopf & Ayres, 1992). At the same time, the very nature of the cognitive mechanisms that give rise to communication anxiety may serve to impede the skill acquisition process. It has been observed by a number of researchers (e.g., Greene & Sparks, 1983; Leary, 1983; Patterson & Ritts, 1997; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1991) that heightened levels of communication anxiety tend to be elicited by rumination about evaluation, personal ability, and self-presentation. These distracting, off-task thoughts, then, might be expected to negatively impact the course of skill acquisition.

The effect of anxiety on message-production skill acquisition has been examined in a study by Greene et al. (1998) involving the same training in use of an organizational sequence for describing geometric arrays that was discussed previously. As in the case of other studies employing this experimental paradigm, a skill-acquisition curve was derived for each subject using Equation 2. Estimates of  $B$ , the intercept of the skill-acquisition curve,  $\alpha$ , the learning-rate parameter, and  $R^2$ , a measure of the noise, or variability in performance quality, were then correlated with the subjects' level of self-reported anxiety. Consistent with the idea that a state of communication anxiety is accompanied by distracting ruminations and concerns with evaluation, highly anxious subjects were shown to have higher  $B$  values, indicating slower, more hesitant performance at the outset of learning, lower values of  $\alpha$ , indicating slower rates of improvement, and lower  $R^2$  values, indicating greater variability in performance quality from trial to trial.

In addition to anxiety level, there are a number of other state variables that are known to affect performance quality and that might reasonably be expected to influence the course of skill acquisition. Unfortunately, despite the obvious need for research in this area, there have been virtually no studies examining the impact of these state variables on social skill acquisition functions. A particularly obvious candidate for investigation along these lines is arousal level. Although the very nature and status of the arousal construct is the subject of some controversy (see Anderson, 1990; Näätänen, 1973; Neiss, 1988, 1990; Sparks & Greene, 1992), there is at least some evidence indicating that various physiological measures that could be considered to be indicants of arousal are related to performance and that these effects extend to the domain of message processing (e.g., Cacioppo, 1979; Sanbonmatsu & Kardes, 1988). Of particular relevance is the idea that the function relating performance to arousal level takes the form of an inverted U such that moderate levels of arousal are associated with optimal responses (see Easterbrook, 1959; Humphreys & Revelle, 1984; Koob, 1991; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908; see also Näätänen, 1973; Neiss, 1988). Humphreys and Revelle (1984) suggested that the shape of this function is the result of two distinct information-processing components, one supporting sustained information transfer,

which increases with arousal, and the other, related to short-term memory, which diminishes as arousal level increases. To the extent, then, that acquisition of particular communication skills involves either or both of these components, we might expect that arousal will impact the course of performance improvement. However, because the degree to which information transfer and short-term memory are involved in task performance will likely change as practice continues, such effects may occur only during specific stages of skill development.

Just as it is possible to construct a plausible case for the impact of arousal on skill acquisition, the same might be done for other state variables such as those related to circadian rhythms, stress, fatigue, and the influence of various drugs (see Hartley, Morrison, & Arnold, 1989; Hockey, 1979; Pennebaker, 1989; Proctor & Dutta, 1995). Systematic examination of the impact of these and other state variables on communication skill acquisition clearly would have considerable theoretical and practical significance and should be made a point of focus for future investigations.

## Aging and the Course of Skill Acquisition

To this point our review of the role of person factors in communication skill acquisition has focused on traits, or enduring capacities and dispositions, and states, or transient intrapersonal conditions. A consideration of person factors would not be complete, however, without mention of the impact of aging on the course of skill acquisition. In light of the graying of the populace and growing efforts to integrate the elderly into social and work settings, it is not surprising that issues of social and communication skill among older adults have garnered increasing attention (see Giles, Coupland, & Wiemann, 1990; Hummert, Wiemann, & Nussbaum, 1994; Nussbaum & Coupland, 1995). To be sure, most of this research has focused on contrasting the performance levels and characteristics of younger and older adults, but there are a small number of studies that have examined *acquisition* of various message-production and processing skills by the elderly (e.g., Hoyer, Lopez, & Goldstein, 1982; Lopez, 1980). Unfortunately, of this latter group, few studies have attempted to address the course of performance improvements by recourse to analysis of skill-acquisition curves (but see the discussion of Caplan & Greene, 1999, later).

Moving beyond the realm of social and communication skills, one encounters an enormous literature on performance of various motor and information-processing tasks by the elderly (see Birren & Schaie, 1990; Craik & Salthouse, 1992; Hess, 1990). From this research, three pertinent generalizations emerge. First, performance by older adults on a variety of tasks tends to be slower and less proficient than that of their younger counterparts, an effect that appears particularly strong in the case of tasks that place a premium on time,<sup>12</sup> (and which extends to at least certain aspects of message production and processing as well, see Kemper & Hummert, 1997; Light, 1988; Stine & Wingfield, 1990). Second, the performance deficit exhibited by the elderly tends to be especially pronounced with novel and more difficult tasks, a phenomenon known as the "complexity effect" (see Cerella, Poon, & Williams,

<sup>12</sup>Performance on information-processing tasks such as those employed in the study of adult skill acquisition are characterized by speed-accuracy trade-offs, and evidence suggests that, relative to their younger counterparts, older adults tend to adopt a more conservative response strategy that emphasizes accuracy over speed (e.g., Charness & Campbell, 1988; Strayer & Kramer, 1994). Nevertheless, with differences in accuracy controlled, older adults tend to perform more slowly than young adults.

1980; Cornelius, 1984). Finally, as with younger adults, performance by the elderly improves with practice.

On the issue of whether the course of skill acquisition (particularly learning rate) differs for younger and older adults, the evidence to date is mixed. Some studies have indicated similar, or even greater, skill acquisition rates for elderly adults (e.g., Fisk & Rogers, 1991; Noble, Baker, & Jones, 1964; Parasuraman & Giambra, 1991; see also Charness, 1989). For example, Salthouse and Somberg (1982) examined the effects of practice on performance of very simple tasks such as signal detection, memory scanning, and visual discrimination. Their results indicated that although older adults were consistently slower in carrying out these tasks, there were also age-by-practice interactions indicating that the older subjects evidenced greater absolute improvement over the course of practice (i.e., steeper learning curves) than did the younger adults. More recently, however, a memory-scanning study by Strayer and Kramer (1994) indicated that not only did younger adults achieve more rapid asymptotic reaction times than the older subjects, they also exhibited higher rates of skill acquisition. A study of more complex mental operations conducted by Charness and Campbell (1988) indicated that practice in multiplication and squaring one- and two-digit numbers reflected the familiar power function speedup. Moreover, analysis of the performance of young ( $M=24$  years), middle-aged ( $M=41$  years), and older adults ( $M=67$  years), indicated that although for some classes of problems there were no differences in the values of the learning-rate parameter,  $\alpha$ , for other types of problems, the middle-aged group tended to exhibit greater skill-acquisition rates than either their young or old counterparts.

Turning to acquisition of communication skills, Caplan and Greene (1999) employed the description of geometric figures paradigm used in other studies reviewed here to investigate the effects of age and task complexity on the course of message production skill acquisition. Their design involved having young ( $M=24.6$  years) and old ( $M=80.9$  years) adults learn either a three- or six-step organizing sequence for describing geometric arrays. The results of this study indicated that the older group exhibited slower overall responses than their younger counterparts and that, consistent with the complexity effect, this difference was more pronounced for those subjects learning the more complex, six-step sequence. Even more relevant to our present concerns, the older group was found to have lower skill acquisition rates, particularly when learning the more complex skill.

## CONDITIONS AND TYPES OF PRACTICE

As noted at the outset, a fundamental characteristic of communication skills is that they develop over time through use. For this reason, this review has emphasized the role of implementation, or practice, in skill acquisition. The focus has been on modeling performance quality as a function of amount of practice, a function that, as we have seen, typically conforms to the family of power curves. Practice, then, has assumed a central conceptual and empirical role in our treatment of skill acquisition. Thus far, however, little space has been devoted to discussion of varieties and conditions of practice and their effects on skilled performance. In essence, practice has been treated as if it is all interchangeable—as if any practice trial is equivalent to any other in its impact on performance. Intuition and experience, on the other hand, tell us otherwise; we understand that all practice is not created equal, that some practice is more, or less, effective in bringing about performance enhancements. Indeed,

*it should be apparent that under certain conditions, practice may lead to no performance enhancements at all.* Doubtless the most obvious case in this regard is that in which the performance trials involve repeated application of the same suboptimal or inappropriate techniques, particularly in the absence of knowledge of results or other performance feedback (see below).

The preceding treatment of the course of adult communication skill acquisition, then, needs to be accompanied by a caveat reflecting the fact that the parameters that define skill acquisition functions may well be influenced by a number of factors involving conditions and types of practice. The magnitude of the learning-rate parameter,  $\alpha$ , for example, is almost certainly greater under certain practice conditions and regimens than others. Unfortunately, to date, there simply are no studies reporting systematic examination of the effects of variations in conditions of practice on communication skill acquisition curve parameters. Nevertheless, the body of research on communication and social skill training and that on cognitive and motor skill acquisition does suggest what certain of the key practice variables might be.

As a prelude to this discussion, it is essential to note that much of the research relevant to the issues at hand has been conducted in the context of paradigms that involve a training, or *acquisition phase*, followed at some interval by assessment of *retention* or *transfer* of the new skill. The distinction between the performance gains observed during the training phase and those observed in tests of retention and transfer is crucially important because *practice conditions that facilitate the short-term, acquisition of new skills may actually result in a decrement in long-term retention and transfer.* Conversely, those practice conditions that tend to be associated with lower rates of acquisition often produce superior retention and transfer (see Schmidt & Bjork, 1992). This phenomenon is reflected in the familiar trade-off between "cramming" and spaced study for exams. Intensive study may, indeed, result in more rapid acquisition of the material, but at the cost of limited long-term retention. As a general principle it appears that training conditions that encourage alternative information-processing activities, such as are induced by the introduction of variations in stimulus configurations or response requirements over practice trials, have the effect of retarding the course of skill acquisition but with the benefit of improved retention and transfer to novel situations (see Lane, 1987, Proctor & Dutta, 1995; Schmidt & Bjork, 1992).

## Deliberate Practice

Evidence from a variety of skill domains suggests that perhaps the most important factor in the development of proficient performance is not so much time spent in the activity as time spent on deliberate, focused efforts at improving one's performance (see Ericsson et al., 1993). According to Ericsson and his colleagues, simple repetition or use of a skill, even over an extended time period, is not sufficient to bring about maximal performance. Rather, what is required to achieve the highest levels of skill is highly structured activity in which people focus attention on the details of their behavior with an eye toward modifying and reorganizing their actions. Such deliberate practice, which Ericsson distinguished from "work" and "play," is highly demanding, not intrinsically rewarding, and probably cannot be sustained for more than a short period each day. Although Ericsson and his colleagues did not address communication behaviors per se, the parallels with social-interaction skills are readily apparent. Through daily use people may acquire a behavioral repertoire that,

while adequate, remains in some sense suboptimal. Improved performance, then, may require deliberate practice in altering and refining one's actions.

## Presentation and Grasp of Behavioral Ideals

A second key component of more effective practice regimens is inclusion of conditions that help to ensure the individual has a clear understanding of what he or she is to do or accomplish. Furthermore, when behavioral specifications are relatively abstract, it may be necessary to present examples of how those abstract behavioral objectives might be manifested in concrete response to. Of course, it is quite possible that performance may improve as a person continues carry out behaviors in a given task domain even in the absence of articulated behavioral ideals. That is a person may become faster, less error prone, and so on, without explicit presentation of optimal performance techniques and standards. Nevertheless, the slope of the skill acquisition curve, as well as the quality of asymptotic performance, is likely to be greater when practice is carried out with a clear understanding of what is to be done. It is not surprising, then, that social skill training programs routinely call for the presentation of behavioral models and instruction designed to ensure that the person has a grasp of behavioral ideals (e.g., Glaser, 1983; Kelly, 1989; Ladd & Mize, 1983; Trower, Bryant, & Argyle, 1978).

## Provision of Timely Performance Feedback

A long tradition of research on cognitive and motor behavior suggests that a particularly important factor in the development of skill is that performance trials are accompanied by feedback, both information about the behavior itself, or *knowledge of performance*, and information about the outcomes and effects of that behavior, or *knowledge of results* (for reviews, see Adams, 1987; Bilodeau, 1969; Salmoni, Schmidt, & Walter, 1984). In other words, skill acquisition is facilitated when people are provided with information about what they did and whether that action was correct, effective, and so on. In the absence of such feedback, there is little basis for adjusting one's actions on subsequent trials. Evidence from research in these skill domains indicates that performance feedback is particularly important in the early stages of skill acquisition when the individual has little basis for critiquing his or her own performance. Furthermore, feedback tends to be more effective when it is delivered in a timely fashion, rather than after an extended delay. It is particularly noteworthy, however, that although more frequent feedback leads to better performance during the *acquisition* of motor skills, better long-term *retention* has been shown to be associated with less frequent or intermittent feedback (e.g., Schmidt, Young, Swinnen, & Shapiro, 1989; Winstein & Schmidt, 1990).

The principle that skill acquisition is facilitated when performance trials are followed by feedback is, of course, fundamental to instructional practices in virtually all communication skills courses and training programs, and although performance feedback in such settings can certainly vary in its quality, specificity, degree to which it is comprehensible and adapted to the needs of the recipient, and so on, it does appear that feedback in a variety of forms can have a beneficial effect on performance (see Book, 1985; Bourhis & Allen, 1998; Rubin, 1999), but, as might be expected in light of tremendous variations in content, style, and timing of feedback, such salutary effects do not always emerge (see Book, 1985; Hillocks, 1986).

## Task Simplification

It should come as no surprise to discover that task difficulty is an important determinant of learning rate. Indeed, in the extreme case, a task may be so difficult as to virtually preclude performance improvement, even over the course of hundreds of practice trials (see Lane, 1987, pp. 49–51). For this reason, it is often desirable to simplify a complex task in some way to facilitate the process of skill acquisition. Such task simplification techniques include *segmentation*, in which sequential subcomponents of a task are practiced individually, *fractionation*, in which components that would normally be carried out simultaneously are isolated for practice, and *simplification*, in which the task is restricted to a subset of the entire range of activities that would be involved in expert performance (see Wightman & Lintern, 1985). Evidence suggests that the various part-task techniques are more effective than practicing an entire skill when the task is complex and can be broken down into independent subskills that can then be integrated relatively easily (see Lane, 1987; Proctor & Dutta, 1995; Wightman & Lintern, 1985).

## Mental Practice

Our typical conception of practice is that it involves actual execution of the behavioral skills one is seeking to master. Those who want to become better hitters, spend time in the batting cage; those whose goal is to improve their ability as public speakers, negotiators, or interviewers, need to spend time actually engaged in the activities that contribute to expert performance in those domains. As the evidence reviewed thus far indicates, the value of overt performance in achieving greater proficiency can be enormous. At the same time, there is some reason to believe that simply engaging in mental rehearsal of the target behaviors may also result in improved performance. Analysis of the impact of mental practice on performance of motor skills indicates that, relative to conditions of no practice, mental practice does contribute to performance gains and that this effect is particularly pronounced for skills that incorporate cognitive components (Feltz & Landers, 1983). There is similar evidence that mental rehearsal of word strings leads to increasingly rapid overt production (MacKay, 1981, 1982). More directly relevant to development of social interaction skills, work on imagined interactions (e.g., Honeycutt, 1995; Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1992), suggests the potential for mental rehearsal in facilitating social interchanges. The key point is not that mental practice is equivalent to overt activity in its potential for bringing about enhanced performance or that mental practice can be employed as an alternative to actual task execution, but rather that the relative ease of establishing conditions for mental practice may allow many more repetitions of a skill than could be reasonably accomplished solely by recourse to overt action.

## Spaced Practice

A final practice factor, that of “spaced” versus “massed” practice, merits mention here given its long history as the subject of investigation in the field of psychology (see Adams, 1987; Lee & Genovese, 1988), even though it may be less relevant to acquisition of social and communication skills where performance trials typically tend to be separated by significant time intervals. As might be expected, the effects of spaced practice depend heavily on the length of the interval between performance

trials, and long intervals are a detriment to skill acquisition. Nevertheless, it appears that opportunity to reflect on and consolidate information gleaned from a practice trial or trials before proceeding with additional trials has a beneficial effect.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This review of models of adult communication skill acquisition is guided by the observation that such skills develop over time through use. This principle is widely accepted and constitutes a fundamental warrant for much pedagogical practice, but it suggests a set of essential questions that have attracted only scant attention from those who study and teach communication skills. Among these questions are four that have been the focus of this chapter: (a) What is the nature of the cognitive mechanisms that give rise to changes in performance quality as a result of practice? (b) If performance improves as a function of practice, then what is the nature of the function relating changes in performance quality to amount of practice? (c) What individual-difference variables impact the course of skill acquisition and in what ways? and (d) What types of practice are more or less effective in bringing about performance improvements?

The first of these questions involves understanding *why* implementation, or practice, leads to enhanced performance. This issue has not been a major focus of theoretical efforts in communication, but, here and there, one can find models that shed some light on the problem. In the main, these models can be seen to appeal to three sorts of cognitive changes. Most obviously, performance improvements may arise from the acquisition of new knowledge structures, as when people learn more effective strategies for accomplishing their social goals. A second group of mechanisms invoked to account for improved performance are those by which existing knowledge structures are refined or adjusted in light of additional experience. Finally, a number of models invoke conceptions of “strengthening” of memory structures such that retrieval and utilization of those structures becomes more rapid and less effortful.

Beyond those theoretical frameworks focused primarily on social interaction and communication skills, a number of more general models of cognitive and motor skill acquisition have been developed. The most influential of these models, those developed by Fitts (e.g., Fitts & Posner, 1967) and Anderson (e.g., 1983), posit that skill development progresses through three stages: (a) an initial stage in which information about how to perform the skill is held in declarative form (i.e., a set of facts about how to carry out the task); (b) an intermediate stage in which the individual develops task-specific procedural structures that obviate the need for the original declarative encodings; and (c) a final stage that may extend over many years in which the relevant knowledge structures continue to be refined and strengthened through use. The result of this shift from declarative to procedural knowledge structures, and the subsequent strengthening of those structures, is seen to result in behavior that is increasingly more rapid, accurate, and effortless.

The notion of a qualitative shift in the nature of the memory representations involved in skilled performance suggests some important considerations for the design of skills training programs. For example, because the factors that contribute to effective establishment of a factual understanding of the skill may not be the same as those that lead to refining and strengthening of appropriate procedural structures, the training techniques that work best at one point in the course of skill development may not be particularly effective at another. Similarly, because people’s conception of what they are required to do is likely to change as the skill develops, the nature of the feedback that is most effective and useful is likely to change as well. Finally,

it may well be that possession of an adequate conceptual grasp of the skill is not enough to provide a basis for acceptable performance. That is, a person may have a good declarative command of what is required but still lack an understanding of how that knowledge could be implemented in actual behavior (see Greene, 2000). As a result, training in the factual foundations of the skill may need to be accompanied by materials and exercises designed to ensure that the learner is able to translate his or her factual understanding into actual performance.

The tendency for performance to improve over time gives rise to the second key question examined here: If performance quality is a function of time or practice, then what is the nature of that function? A wealth of data drawn from a variety of skill domains indicates that the course of improvement follows a decelerating trajectory such as is captured by the families of exponential and power curves. Both of these groups of curves have been shown to provide very good fits for observed changes in performance quality, but of the two, the preponderance of evidence supports the superiority of the power function as a characterization of the course of skill acquisition.

With respect to teaching communication skills, the chief implication of the fact that the course of skill acquisition tends to reflect a power function is to suggest the need for large numbers of performance trials. Under a power function, performance improves rapidly over the first few trials, but it is also the case that performance quality continues to improve over extended periods of implementation. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the "10-year rule" for developing expert levels of performance mentioned at the outset of this chapter (see Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996; Simon & Chase, 1973) may apply just as much to social interaction skills as to other behavioral domains. Now, to be sure, the realities of most occupational, pedagogical, and therapeutic skills training programs preclude the possibility of thousands, or even hundreds, of practice trials; however, to the extent that larger numbers of performances can be built into the training curriculum, perhaps as part of out-of-class exercises, available evidence indicates that the individual will stand to benefit.

The third major area of concern in this review is prompted by the observation that just as people differ in the level or quality of their social performance, so too, might we expect individual variations in the course of skill acquisition. Thus, the skill-acquisition-rate parameter,  $\alpha$ , as just one example, may vary over people (that is, some people may improve more rapidly than others). Following common practice, the realm of potentially relevant person factors can be divided into traits, or enduring dispositions and capacities, and states, or more transient intrapersonal conditions. With respect to the first of these, a variety of traits have been identified as being among those that may exert influence on skill development (see Ackerman, 1988, 1990; Mumford, Baughman, Uhlman, et al., 1993), but what is particularly noteworthy is that the impact of certain trait variables appears to shift over the course of practice. That is, some person variables appear to be important early in the course of skill acquisition, whereas others exert their greatest influence on performance much later on. For example, Ackerman's model suggests that factors such as intellectual ability and working-memory capacity are particularly important in the initial stages of skill acquisition, when skill-relevant information is represented in declarative form. As practice continues, these factors become less important, and speed of information processing assumes a more prominent role in determining performance quality. Finally, in the latter stages of skill-acquisition, performance is limited primarily by motor ability.

One implication of this line of reasoning is not simply that we should expect individual variations in rate of skill development, but that those people who appear most adept early in the course of practice may begin to lag behind their peers as practice continues. Beyond this, to the extent that person variables such as intellectual ability and working-memory capacity impact skill development, and there is at least some evidence that they do (see Sassi & Greene, 1998), those charged with implementing skills training programs need to be sensitive to the sorts of intellectual demands imposed by training exercises and materials and to the fact that training tasks that are appropriate for much of the population may severely tax the abilities of those in greatest need of such training. In much the same way, because individual-difference variables such as temperament, achievement motivation, competitiveness, and self-discipline appear not only to exert influence on performance, but also to shift in the magnitude of their influence over the course of time, teachers and trainers may need to be aware of the potential impact of such factors and to tailor skill acquisition curricula accordingly (see Mumford, Baughman, Uhlman, et al., 1993). As a final point, in many cases, even when dealing with individuals of relatively high intellectual ability and motivation, it may be necessary to reduce the rate of task-relevant inputs or to decompose complex social skills into simpler components so as not to overload the learner.

Turning to state variables, an obvious candidate for influencing the course of skill acquisition is anxiety level—this in light of the distracting and off-task ruminations commonly held to be associated with heightened levels of anxiety; indeed, there is evidence that anxiety is related to lower communication skill acquisition rates and more erratic performance (Greene et al., 1998). The fact that anxiety may interfere with the acquisition of communication skills suggests a practical problem for approaches to dealing with social anxiety that emphasize skills training; that is, heightened anxiety may impede acquisition of the very skills intended to relieve that anxiety. It may well be that skills training alone is not an optimal ameliorative approach and, furthermore, that it may be necessary to invoke means of alleviating anxiety before focusing on skills training (see Allen et al., 1989; Hopf & Ayers, 1992).

Beyond the impact of anxiety level, other state variables might plausibly be expected to influence the course of communication skill acquisition, but, to date, evidence on the impact of these variables on the parameters that define skill acquisition curves has yet to be reported. There is a need for investigating the possible effects of stress, arousal, fatigue, and other states, but while we await the accrual of findings regarding these influences, teachers, trainers, and therapists should be aware of their potential impact.

A discussion of person factors and skill acquisition would not be complete without mention of the role of aging. It is well established that, relative to younger adults, the elderly tend to perform more slowly and less proficiently, and that these effects are particularly pronounced on tasks that place a premium on speed of responding and on tasks that are novel or complex. Distinct from these findings concerning aging and performance quality is the issue of the impact of aging on the course of skill acquisition. On this point, the evidence is mixed, but, on balance, it does appear that the elderly may acquire communication skills less readily than their younger counterparts. This effect may arise from lower rates of information processing or reduced working-memory capacity in older adults (see Kyllonen & Christal, 1990; Myerson, Hale, Wagstaff, Poon, & Smith, 1990; Salthouse, 1985). These cognitive differences, along with a tendency for older people to exhibit a conservative response bias and a preference for “real-world” tasks (see Denney, 1982; Strayer & Kramer, 1994), have

numerous implications for the design of skills-training programs that might better serve the elderly. Among these are (a) development of techniques that emphasize application and extension of skills the individual already possesses so as to reduce the need for development of a completely new repertoire, (b) moderation in amount and speed of presentation of training materials so as not to overload processing abilities, (c) opportunity for more performance trials than might be deemed necessary for a younger group, (d) provision of support and encouragement of experimentation and risk taking, (e) measures to ensure an operational grasp of what is required and of how more abstract specifications of the skill can actually be implemented in interaction, and (f) emphasis on the practical implications of the skill (see Fozard, 1980; Glendinning, 1995; Lopez, 1980; Perlmuter, 1988).

A final issue of concern here stems from the observation that under certain conditions large numbers of performance trials may not lead to any improvement at all in performance quality. It is reasonable to inquire, then, about the nature of the conditions that are more likely to be associated with enhanced performance. Unfortunately, there is virtually no research to date examining the impact of conditions and types of practice on the parameters that define learning curves for communication and social interaction skills. At the same time, however, it is possible to speculate about what some of the key features of more productive practice might include.

To begin, it is reasonable to expect that skill acquisition will proceed more quickly when the learner has a clear grasp of what is to be done—that is, when either through use of description or examples, he or she comes to grasp the relevant behavioral ideals. Furthermore, when those ideals are expressed in relatively abstract terms, it may be necessary to introduce concrete illustrations of ways in which they can be translated into actual interaction behaviors.

Performance trials themselves will be most effective in promoting skill development when they are characterized by deliberate, focused efforts at monitoring and reorganizing the behaviors of interest. Because such deliberate practice is effortful and may not be intrinsically rewarding, it may be necessary to limit practice to relatively brief periods and to incorporate motivational incentives as part of the training regimen (see Ericsson et al., 1993; Schneider, 1985). Along these same lines, it may be beneficial to space performance trials so as to permit opportunity for reflection and consolidation of information gleaned in previous sessions. It is important, too, that performance be followed by feedback that is both specific and adapted to learners' current grasp of the task and their own behavior.

Because long-term retention and transfer of skills is facilitated by variation in task conditions and response requirements (not to mention the detrimental motivational impact associated with boredom), it is desirable that training incorporate an element of novelty in the performance trials (see Schmidt & Bjork, 1992). At the same time, in light of the fact that the benefits of practice accrue from repeated responses to particular configurations of relevant conditions (see Carlson & Lundy, 1992), it may be important to assist the learner in discerning similarities in a series of performance trials. In other words, if every situation is perceived as novel and unique, improvement with practice may be impeded relative to learning environments that encourage people to apprehend new situations in terms of their similarities and relationships with earlier performance trials. Beyond this, development of complex skills may be facilitated by various task-simplification techniques that not only reduce the cognitive demands placed on the learner but that also may serve to reduce frustration and other negative affective responses that arise when a person feels that he or she is confronted with an overwhelming task. Finally, it is possible that the course of performance gains

may be accelerated when actual practice trials are augmented with structured mental practice in which the individual rehearses executing the target behaviors in realistic interaction contexts.

## CONCLUSION

References to “learning curves” appear so frequently in lay discourse that it may be no exaggeration to suggest we encounter the term almost daily. Perhaps it is because the notion is so common that we tend to overlook the fundamental significance of the relationship it expresses—it is as if the point that performance improves as a function of time and trials has passed into the realm of the taken-for-granted and, as a result, simply isn’t an object of scrutiny. This seems to be particularly true in the case of communication and social interaction skills in which training curricula routinely, if not universally, invoke the principle that practice leads to improved performance and yet very few studies have sought to examine skill acquisition functions. It would appear, however, that there is considerable insight to be gleaned from analysis of communication skill acquisition functions, and particularly the  $\alpha$ ,  $B$ ,  $A$ , and  $E$  parameters that define the power curve (see Equation 2), along with the  $R^2$  measure of goodness of fit, as they relate to a variety of task, person, and training variables. If, in the conduct of our teaching, training, and therapy, we are to continue relying on the principle that practice leads to improved performance, then we need to seek a better understanding of that fundamental regularity.

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## CHAPTER

# 3

## METHODS OF INTERPERSONAL SKILL ASSESSMENT

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### THE KEN OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Few characteristics are more important to the everyday quality of life as the skill with which interpersonal communication is negotiated. Yet few concepts are as difficult to define and assess as interpersonal skill. This chapter examines issues associated with the assessment of social interaction and communication skills. It proceeds by first considering the importance of such skills. It continues by making several key distinctions in terminology and concepts relevant to a review of assessments. Next, a synoptic overview of historical eras is provided, which is intended to situate current debates about assessment concerns. These current debates are presaged in a discussion of several ideological tensions often overlooked in the examination of skills assessment. This discussion gives way to a characterization of several trends in assessment that have emerged since the last major reviews were written before the 1990s (e.g., Bellack, 1979, 1983; Curran, 1979a, 1979b; Curran, Farrell, & Grunberger, 1984; Curran & Mariotto, 1980; Kolko & Milan, 1985b; McFall, 1982; Spitzberg, 1988, 1989; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989) in light of those in the interim (e.g., Hargie, 1997; Inderbitzen, 1994; Matson, Sevin, & Box, 1995; Rubin, 1994; Spitzberg, 1994b; Trower, 1995). Then the chapter explicates a conceptual heuristic, the adapted Behavioral Assessment Grid (BAG, Cone, 1978; Spitzberg, 1988; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989) for analyzing assessment methods. With this conceptual vocabulary established, a number of omnibus measures and methods are briefly reviewed (leaving the more specific contextual and skill-specific assessments to the appropriate later chapters of this text). The chapter concludes with a consideration of key decision points any scholar or practitioner should consider in developing an assessment and some of the implications of these decisions.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

There is abundant evidence that competence in interpersonal skills is vital to psychological, emotional and physical health (Spitzberg & Cupach, in press). Previous review (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989) has concluded that interpersonal competence is empirically associated with the etiology and prognosis of mental disorders (e.g., Monti et al., 1984; Monti & Fingeret, 1987), anxiety (e.g., Conger, Wallander, Mariotto, & Ward, 1980; Fydrich, Chambless, Perry, Buergener, & Beazley, 1998), stress (Herzberg et al., 1998), cardiovascular disease (Ewart, Taylor, Kraemer, & Agras, 1991), loneliness (Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987b), academic success (Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997), juvenile delinquency (Renwick & Emler, 1991), drug abuse (Twentyman et al., 1982), dysphoria and depression (Segrin, 1998). Negative, compared with positive, communication has been associated with much stronger influence on marriage (Gottman, 1994), relational satisfaction (Spitzberg, Canary, & Cupach, 1994) and psychological well-being (Spitzberg & Cupach, in press). Interpersonal and communication skills, broadly defined, are consistently ranked as among the top two or three competencies that organizations require of their employees (e.g., O'Neil, Allred, & Baker, 1997).

Several other findings suggest, at minimum, an indirect or mediational role of interpersonal skills (Spitzberg & Cupach, in press). For example, House, Landis, and Umberson (1988) summarized epidemiological studies to find a consistent effect of social integration on mortality rates. Many of these studies found these effects even after controlling for drug use, smoking, obesity, and health care practices. Another indication of the indirect impact of interpersonal skills is the "marriage benefit." Data show that married people, compared with single or divorced people, have lower suicide rates, imprisonment rates, psychiatric diagnoses, and mortality rates (Argyle, 1991).

Interpersonal interaction is the *sine qua non* of marriage, family, and social integration. It can be accepted as axiomatic that the more interpersonally skilled a person is, the more likely it is that person will successfully negotiate satisfying marriage, family, and extended networks of social relationships. It is further accepted as axiomatic that higher levels of interpersonal skills either directly or indirectly facilitate significantly higher levels of psychological, emotional, and physical well-being (Segrin & Flora, 2000).

Were everyone interpersonally competent, the alarming findings regarding interpersonal skills and well-being would hardly be a major concern. Important social competencies evade large proportions of the population, however (see reviews by Spitzberg, 1987; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Estimates indicate that at least 7% to 10% of the population is socially inadequate (Curran, Miller, Zwick, Monti, & Stout, 1980; Hecht & Wittchen, 1988), although some would estimate the rate at closer to 25% (Bryant, Trower, Yardley, Urbina, & Letemendia, 1976; Vangelisti & Daly, 1989). Such inadequacies may explain why as much as one fifth to one quarter of the population suffer from loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1982), anxiety, or shyness (Richmond & McCroskey, 1985; Zimbardo, 1977). In summary, substantial proportions of the population experience difficulties with their social interaction and interpersonal relationships, and these difficulties are associated with myriad psychological, emotional, and physical problems (Segrin, 1998; Segin & Flora, 2000). It is no small thing, therefore, to inquire as to the state of social interaction and communication skills assessment.

## TERMS AND DISTINCTIONS

### Skills

Despite extensive efforts “there is little consensus in the field regarding the definition of social skills” (Bedell & Lennox, 1997). Skills are defined here as intentionally repeatable, goal-directed behaviors and behavior sequences (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Skills are the actual behaviors manifested in the attempt to accomplish some goal. These behaviors are repeatable, more or less, on demand. “Communication” and “social interaction” will be taken here as interchangeable, even though there are communication situations that can be arguably considered nonsocial or noninteractive. In reference to social interaction, therefore, such skills presuppose interdependent goals, goals that can only be accomplished through symbolic interaction with others. Furthermore, such skills must be intentionally repeatable. Almost anyone may be able to introduce himself or herself to an attractive stranger at some point. But to be able to do so at will implies that the person has a skill of initial interaction.

The definition of interpersonal skills as behavioral captures a particular view of skills. Many authorities concur that skills should be conceptualized and assessed at the behavioral level (e.g., Bellack & Hersen, 1978; Curran, 1979a, 1979b; Hargie, 1997). Others, in contrast, have made articulate cases for including social cognitive and perceptual abilities (e.g., Burleson, 1987) or intrapersonal production abilities (e.g., Greene, 1984, 1994, 1997). The approach taken here is that it is conceptually helpful to separate the motivational and knowledge factors from skill factors, and to further separate those factors that account for the production of behavior from competence, which is the evaluation of the quality of performed behavior (McFall, 1982; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). To a large extent, this is the distinction Trower (1984) recommended between social skill (i.e., motivation and knowledge) and social *skills* (i.e., the manifest behaviors that are a product of motivation and knowledge). Clearly, skills cannot be produced without the skill, but the two terms imply distinct content domains of assessment. This chapter primarily concerns assessments that focus on the objective or subjective representation of behavioral referents, although passing mention is made of the motivation and knowledge domains, given their close relevance to interpersonal skills as they are defined here.

Skills, therefore, are generally thought to be manifestations of some underlying ability, which is a capacity for action. This capacity is typically conceptualized as a function of numerous motivation (e.g., confidence, goals, reinforcement potential, etc.) and knowledge (e.g., content and procedural knowledge, familiarity, etc.) components.

This discussion of skills and ability has foregone any mention of success in goal accomplishment. This is an extraordinarily complex issue that belies what otherwise seems like a straightforward concept. Consider a relatively standard objective assessment, the eye test. In a typical eye test, subjects are asked to read a series of sequentially smaller rows of alphabetic letters to determine visual skill. Underlying this skill is not only visual acuity (i.e., the eye’s ability to receive visual input at various ranges, in various colors, with varying degrees of discrimination of line and form) and cognitive interpretation (i.e., the ability to distinguish concepts such as two dimensions vs. three, solid vs. nonsolid, etc.), but also symbol recognition (i.e., the ability to know and recognize alphabetic and numeric symbols). Indeed, technically speaking, the vision test also involves the skill of communicating the end

product of these underlying abilities (i.e., actually saying the “words” “E, W, O, 2, F” and so on, in correspondence with one’s interpretations). At first blush, this seems an objective assessment of skill. However, consider some of the presumptions built into the assessment. Were it a preliterate culture, nonverbal iconic symbols would take on much greater social relevance than linguistic symbols. For people with certain mental disabilities, such a linguistic basis for assessing reading may be relatively meaningless. Furthermore, why is the ability to read symbols important? Perhaps because “literate” societies have deeply embedded values favoring the ability to read, which in turn depends on alphabetic recognition (e.g., traffic signs, advertising, instructions, bureaucratic forms, etc.). So recognizing linguistic and numeric symbols is taken as an assessment stimulus of choice because society values the importance of those particular symbols as indicators of social competence. The eye exam ultimately assesses several underlying abilities, and collectively the behavioral product of these abilities is taken as a proxy of a person’s visual skill. The point is that even an assessment as objective as the eye exam is subtly imbued with a host of subjective decisions. The eye exam seems uncontroversial because it is employed in a societal context that reveals its relevance in the normative fabric of everyday interaction. Remove it from that context, and suddenly its relevance to a concept of competence is problematic.

The eye test is relevant only in a societal context, and the context itself is a highly multifaceted concept. The term *context* represents at least five clusters of meaning, each of which is important to the assessment of skills. Context can be understood in terms of culture, time, relationship, situation, and function. *Culture* entails the sets of behaviors, beliefs, values, and linguistic patterns that are relatively enduring over time and generation within a group (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Skills valued in one culture are clearly not necessarily the skills valued in another (e.g., Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Nicotera, 1997). *Time* refers to the sequential nature of skills (e.g., questions tend to precede answers), the use of time in context (e.g., amount of time spent speaking), and the frame of time across which skills are assessed (e.g., state vs. trait). Interpersonal skills tend to be sequentially organized (Psathas, 1990). Use of time within an episode of interaction is predictive of perceived competence (Dillard & Spitzberg, 1984). In addition, skills manifest in a given episode of interaction often bear only minimal relationship to skills assessed over time (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983; Spitzberg, 1987, 1990; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987b). Context can also be viewed as the type of *relationship* between interactants. Typical relationships include kinship (e.g., parent-child, sibling, etc.), intimate (e.g., dating, married, etc.), social (e.g., acquaintance, friend, etc.), instrumental (e.g., superior-subordinate, colleague, etc.), or more generic (e.g., stranger) connections. Skills valued in one type of relationship are not necessarily valued in another (Hecht, Sereno, & Spitzberg, 1984; Knapp, Ellis, & Williams, 1980). Context also takes the form of the physical or social *situation* in which interaction occurs. Situations vary in a variety of characteristics, including the more sensorial ways (e.g., temperature, spatial arrangements, etc.) and the more social ways (e.g., formal-informal, active-inactive, etc.). Skills valued in some situations, such as a formal interview, may not be valued in other situations, such as an informal chat over coffee (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981; Pavitt, 1989). Finally, contexts vary according to the *function* being served by the interaction (Burleson, 1987). Communication *does* rather than just *is*. As such, skills valued for one function (e.g., assertion) may not be valued in the pursuit of another function (e.g., affection).

Observing that skills are, or are not, valued in given contexts suggests that skills alone are rarely the sole issue when assessing communication. Instead, skills are

typically only important in society to the extent they are considered competent or incompetent. The competence of skills, it turns out, is often a much more complicated concept than the skill itself.

## Competence

Competence can be viewed as an evaluative judgment of the quality of a skill (McFall, 1982; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). The majority of contemporary competence literature has focused on appropriateness and effectiveness as core criteria. The importance of these criteria is clarified by a brief consideration of the alternative criteria that are sometimes forwarded (Spitzberg, 1993, 1994a, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989, in press).

### Criteria of Competence

**Dialogical Criteria.** Dialogue is defined by such characteristics as “coordination (or cooperation), coherence, reciprocity and mutuality (e.g., with regard to moral commitments)” (Linell, 1998, p. 14). Dialogue emphasizes skills such as empathy, confirmation, relaxed readiness, perspective reflection, meta-communication, congruence, humor, present orientation, genuineness, and egalitarianism (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulson, 2000; Pearce & Pearce, 2000). Such approaches are related to critical perspectives attempting to construct an ethical system of social discourse (e.g., Habermas, 1970; see Burleson & Kline, 1979; Penman, 1992).

**Clarity.** Clarity is one of the most intuitive or lay notions of competence (McCroskey, 1984; Powers & Spitzberg, 1986) and reflects a natural language perspective in which language, used properly, is thought to have the capacity for reflecting an observational world (Clark & Paivio, 1989). It is typified by such statements as “Why can’t you just say what you mean” or “Just be clear.” Clarity can be viewed in relatively objective terms (e.g., readability indexes) or in somewhat more subjective senses (e.g., code elaborateness).

**Understanding.** An implicit conjunction with clarity, understanding is also a common criterion of competence. Typified by statements of “You just don’t understand what I’m saying,” and “We need to understand each other better,” this criterion is often confounded with clarity. Clarity is a characteristic of expressive behavior. Words can be more or less clear based on such things as definitional complexity, rarity, or contextual specificity. Understanding, in contrast, is a mentalistic notion. Independent of mode of expression, to what extent do interlocutors comprehend each others’ intended meanings? Specifying the nature of understanding is itself a controversial subject (e.g., Ickes, 1997; Kenny, 1994).

**Efficiency.** Efficiency refers to the notion that accomplishing a goal can involve less or more effortful and resource-intensive activities. A person is more competent to the extent that less resource-intensive, complex, or effortful means are employed to achieve a given goal (Kellermann & Park, 2001). Efficiency is typified by statements such as “Well why didn’t you just say so in the first place?” and “Why are you beating around the bush?”

**Satisfaction.** A person who accomplished preferred outcomes through interaction is likely to experience a sense of positive affect, or satisfaction (Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984). Satisfaction is typified by statements such as, “I really enjoyed talking with you” and “How do you feel about your interview?” Even when interaction is normatively unpleasant, such as conflicts, a person can be more satisfied with some responses relative to other responses.

**Effectiveness.** Effectiveness is the extent to which preferred outcomes are achieved. Effectiveness is obviously related to efficiency and satisfaction, both of which employ effectiveness as one of their definitional components. Effectiveness is perhaps the most elemental representation of the functional aspect of communication. Communication is enacted to accomplish something, and the extent to which this something is achieved provides a measure of the competence of that communication (Parks, 1985).

**Appropriateness.** A further criterion often attributed to communication is appropriateness, which is the extent to which behavior meets the standards of legitimacy or acceptability in a context (Larson, Backlund, Redmond, & Barbour, 1978). Appropriateness has occasionally been defined as the extent to which behavior conforms to existing contextual rules, but this is an unnecessarily delimiting construction. Sometimes the most competent behavior is to alter existing rules or establish new rules. Thus, appropriateness is better viewed in terms of behavior that accords with the extant (rather than existing) rules of an interpersonal context (Spitzberg, 2000).

Appropriateness and effectiveness represent the most general, encompassing, and conceptually useful criteria for competence (Spitzberg, 1983, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Clarity and understanding are only important to the extent that interactional goals are achieved. Efficiency adds a value judgment that the quickest or least “expensive” path is always preferable to one that may take more effort but end up being more rewarding. This value judgment seems unnecessary to the primary concern of most interactants to be appropriate and effective. Satisfaction runs afoul of such distortions as those who feel good about their coercive behavior, or a performance that was viewed as inept by everyone else in the encounter except the performer. Relying on either appropriateness or effectiveness alone leads to similar objections. However, combining appropriateness and effectiveness provides a framework that most competence theorists accept as generally viable. Competence, according to the dual criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness, is the extent to which an interactant achieves preferred outcomes in a manner that upholds the emergent standards of legitimacy of those judging the interaction.

## SUMMARY

Communication and social interaction skills are viewed here as a set of behaviors and behavior sequences. “Asking a question” or “making eye contact” are examples of interpersonal skills. Whether these skills were enacted in a way that was successful, satisfying, appropriate, clear, and so forth is a matter of quality or competence. The ultimate purpose of assessing communication and social interaction skills rarely turns on the mere ability to enact skills. Instead, the purpose of most assessment efforts is to obtain a normative reference point on an implicit or explicit continuum of social competence.

This chapter is about the assessment of both skills and competence, because the two are so often inextricably intertwined. The normative nature of the connection between skills and competence is in evidence throughout history. Therefore, a brief historical sketch of conceptions of communication and social interaction skills assists in situating current assessment practices.

## A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Different cultures and eras produce relatively distinct epistemes of competence, across and within which both the content and criteria of competent interaction vary. For example, the “upper crust” of society may have one set of standards and the “lower crust” may have another. Recognizing the limitations and Western biases implied by written histories, several chronologically ordered epistemes can be identified (see Phillips, 1985; Spitzberg & Duran, 1993; Wine, 1981). The ancient rhetorical tradition, given classical Greece and Rome’s reliance on public oratory in matters of state and judiciary, focused on the mastery of oral argument in the pursuit of successful persuasion. The sophists presupposed that communication skills were teachable and that those with better skills would benefit proportionately from communication skill. Soon, Aristotle’s rhetoric, defined as the study of the available means of persuasion, would dominate discussion until the 18th century.

Before and during the Renaissance, as the Black Death receded and the remaining resources were available to smaller numbers of people, divisions of wealth permitted a broader and more variegated status hierarchy. But as wealth tends to motivate actions to preserve that wealth, rhetorics evolved that erected social barriers to parallel the resource barriers. The politics of holding court involved elaborate social codes of conduct (Jeanneret, 1991; Menache, 1990). By the end of the 17th century, influential books by Castiglione, Guazzo, and Della Casa articulated these social codes as maps to social mobility, even if such mobility were practically reserved for those already in the higher reaches of the status hierarchy (Goldsmith, 1988).

Partly concomitant with the politics of courtship was the episteme of manners and etiquette in which books were written to serve as *arbiter elegantiarum* for an age. Such concerns were presaged by the elocutionist movement of 19th and early 20th centuries rhetorics in which very specific stylized skills and movements were taught as the proper expressions of certain emotions and intentions (Austin, 1966; Sheridan, 1762). Ewbank’s (1987) examination of American etiquette books of the early 20th century concludes that behavior books for children, written largely by clergy, focused on moral principles of action, whereas adult books reflected imported notions of European aristocracy. It is not entirely coincidental that in the first half of this century conceptualizations of social intelligence, relying on racially and gender-biased notions of cognitive intelligence (e.g., Doll, 1935, 1953), were at their zenith.

The importance of this selective and abstracted historical review of the rhetoric(s) of competence is to illustrate that competence is culturally, chronologically, and contextually evolutionary. The concept of “skill” is inherently relative in importance and reflective of prevailing ideologies.

## Some Ideological Dialectics and Tensions in Assessment

If competence and interpersonal skills are intrinsically intertwined with ideology, it is important to identify the tensions created when one value is given preference and another marginalized. There are many such contradictions and dialectics

(for reviews, see Lannamann, 1991; Parks, 1995; Spitzberg, 1994b). Some of the tensions most relevant to assessment are examined next.

**Elaboration Versus Conciseness.** A vision of expressiveness, of self-disclosure, of style and flourish would emphasize competence as elaboration. Furthermore, societies that value clear status differences in their hierarchies might value elaborate codes of interaction, in which, as Bernstein (1986) noted, the upper-crust groups master a more complex and differentiated set of symbolic resources and rules of use than more pedestrian native interactants. An efficiency ethic prefers a more mechanical or industrial criterion, in which unnecessary words and actions are removed like chaff from the wheat.

**Understanding Versus Feeling Understood.** The ethic of understanding claims that communication functions best when mutual understanding is achieved. The understanding ethic is reflective of a conduit metaphor of communication, within which an entity or state in one interlocutor's mind is transferred into the other interlocutor's mind. The precision with which this transfer occurs, and the extent to which the entity is reproduced in the other's mind without distortion, are measures of the communication skill of the interactants. In contrast to being understood, much of the rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s celebrated the importance of feeling good. Indeed, there is a fair amount of research to suggest that feeling understood is strongly associated with relational satisfaction (Cahn, 1990). There is relatively little research suggesting that actual understanding and accuracy is related to relational satisfaction (Spitzberg, 1993).

**Honesty–Assertiveness Versus Equivocation–Politeness.** An ethic began to emerge in the 1960s, particularly in American therapeutic literatures, that emphasized assertiveness, honest expression, and disclosure of feelings. Genuineness of self-expression, openness, and directness were highly valued as pathways to self-discovery and authentic intimacy (see Bochner, 1982; Parks, 1982; Spitzberg, 1993). In contrast, others point out the universal pragmatic of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and the essential nature of equivocal communication in preserving the delicate machinations of everyday face support (e.g., Chovil, 1994). Deception can be competent and can be based on altruistic motives, but it is normatively viewed as incompetent (O'Hair & Cody, 1994).

**Effectiveness Versus Appropriateness.** Despite the virtually univocal acceptance of these dual criteria among contemporary competence theorists, there are frequent tensions involved in achieving both criteria simultaneously (Spitzberg, 1993, 1994a, 1994c). Conflict encounters, for example, represent contexts in which the effectiveness of parties is generally viewed as mutually exclusive, and therefore, lines of appropriate action are highly restrictive (Spitzberg et al., 1994). To be appropriate is to occasionally forego one's optimum efficacy, and to be entirely effective at times is to jeopardize one's appropriateness in the eyes of others.

## Summary

The history of competence reveals that there are ebbs and flows in the evolution of societal conceptions of "skilled" communication. For example, competence defined in terms of empathy, cooperation, dialogue, understanding, and appropriateness is

more in line with traditional feminine stereotypes (Spitzberg, 1994b). In contrast, competence defined in terms of assertiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness is more in line with traditional masculine stereotypes. Such definitional criteria are therefore not without their direct implications for the type of society they envision and the type of society in which such criteria currently reside. Any discussion of competence assessment that is unaware of such implications is shortsighted and ultimately at risk of being misdirected in politically pernicious or arbitrary ways.

## METHODS

### Current Trends

The 1970s and 1980s represented a very active time in the scholarship on social skills. The concept was relatively recent in its articulation (Argyle, 1969). When it began to be articulated by respected scientists as an alternative model for mental health, and thus intervention (Phillips, 1978; Trower, Bryant, & Argyle, 1978), it quickly captivated the scholarly imagination. By the mid-1980s, there were manifold reviews and discussions of challenging or intractable issues involved in the assessment of social skills (see, for example, Bellack, 1979, 1983; Curran, 1979a, 1979b; Curran & Mariotto, 1980; Curran et al., 1984; McFall, 1982; Spitzberg, 1987, 1994a, 1994c; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). It seems surprising, however, that more than a decade later there are only a handful of new measures to add to the list. There is a sense in which social skills and communication competence have receded from the forefront of scholarly interests. To the extent to which this is more than mere appearance, at least three explanations are evident, all having to do with social and communication skills research moving to particular pastures rather than disappearing altogether from the scholarly landscape.

First, there seems to be a trend toward specialized uses of the social skills and competence concepts. These concepts once were envisioned as integrative metaphors for the entire field of interpersonal communication. More recently, they seem more relegated to three fields of endeavor: therapeutic (including marital), intercultural, and instructional contexts.

Second, interest in social and communication skills assessment may have simply moved into more specialized arenas. There are still vibrant veins of research in clinical and counseling literatures on social skills both as causes of social and psychological problems and as a potential source for effective intervention. These literatures appear to have become very specific applied tributaries of what was once a more general mainstream of social skills research. Social and interpersonal skills are being examined in relation to such specific arenas as loneliness, depression, dysphoria (Segrin, 1998), gender (Bruch, Berko, & Haase, 1998), delinquency (Gaffney, 1984), health care delivery (Ravert, Williams, & Fosbinder, 1997), heterosocial interaction (Kolko & Milan, 1985a; Perri, Richards, & Goodrich, 1978; Wallander, Conger, & Conger, 1985) and marital interaction (e.g., Gottman, 1994). The trend is toward specialized contextual applications of the assessment of social interaction skills, rather than toward general theories or assessment approaches.

Third, social skills assessment has moved into more interdisciplinary tributaries. For example, competence is a dominant theme throughout the educational context. It is difficult to pick up an undergraduate textbook in communication that does not espouse a competence framework. At a more scholarly level, however, there is

considerable research being conducted on various competencies, including communication competencies, in terms of educational achievement and curricula. It is in the educational literature that general measurement and comparative validation studies are still being conducted (e.g., Demaray et al., 1995; Flanagan, Alfonso, Primavera, Povall, & Higgins, 1996; Smit & van der Molen, 1996) and general conceptual frameworks for assessment (e.g., Sheridan, Hungelmann, & Maughan, 1999) still seem to be active areas of scholarly endeavor. There also seems to be considerable interest communication skills in corporations and their assessment centers (e.g., O'Neil, Allred, & Dennis, 1997).

Despite the apparent waning of excitement over social and communication skills at the scholarly level, researchers are still conducting significant and substantive work. But as indicated above, the literature and relevant assessments are scattered far and wide across the scholarly terrain. To facilitate a review of assessments and the key issues involved, an organizational heuristic, the Behavioral Assessment Grid, is explicated next.

## Overview of the Adapted Behavioral Assessment Grid

Traditional reviews of social skills assessment tend to classify methods and measures into types such as direct behavioral observation, behavior-rating scales, interviewing techniques, sociometric methods, objective self-reports, role-play methods, and so forth (e.g., Merrell, 1994). Such approaches gloss over the important conceptual dimensions underlying and differentiating these diverse methodologies. It is important, therefore, to attend to those underlying dimensions that organize and differentiate assessments. Issues such as what is being assessed, who is doing the assessing, the level of abstraction of the referents being assessed, and the level of generalization implicit in the assessment represent fundamental distinctions among the various types of assessment. The Behavioral Assessment Grid a heuristic model that assists in identifying these dimensions.

The Behavioral Assessment Grid (BAG) was originally conceived by Cone (1978) to organize discussion about behavioral assessment issues. It is adapted here and elsewhere (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989) to provide a useful vocabulary for analyzing various options and issues related to skills assessment (see Fig. 3.1). Because many assessments ultimately represent hybrids of various forms, the categories of the BAG are not intended to be mutually exclusive.

The BAG is a matrix defined by three axes: assessment referent, method, and universes of generalization. Assessment referent is the behavioral content or domain of reference (e.g., cognition vs. behavior). Method refers to the techniques of generating assessment referents (e.g., role-play vs. self-report). Universes of generalization refer to the domains across which assessments are intended to apply (e.g., time vs. context).

**Assessment Referent.** Assessment of social interaction skills must refer to some aspect of behavior. But behavior can be referred to in at least three distinguishable domains: motivation, knowledge, and skill. Any assessment of social or interaction skills could refer to motivational characteristics, including issues of arousal, anxiety, nervousness, apprehension, interest, goals, desires, needs, effort, or values. Such references can be made to internal states (e.g., "I really want to make a good impression when I meet strangers") or to behavioral activities presumed to result from such internal states (e.g., "I really try to make a good impression when I meet strangers"). Assessment of skills can also examine knowledge, or cognitive,

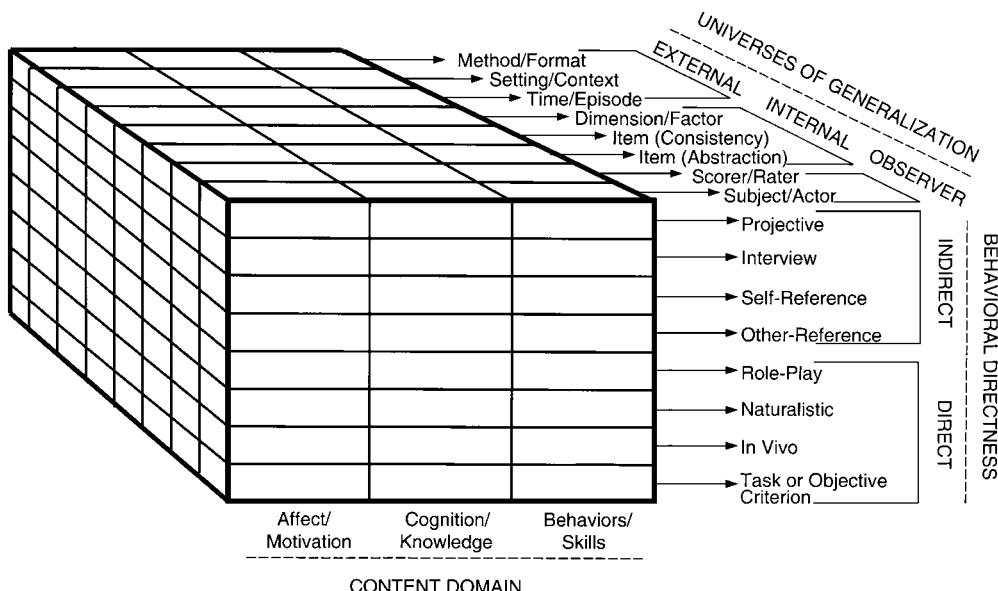


FIG. 3.1. The Behavioral Assessment Grid (adapted from Cone, 1978).

aspects of interaction. Several measures have attempted to examine the mental aspects of planning, evaluating, analyzing, and reflecting and ruminating on interaction (e.g., Duran & Spitzberg, 1995; Martin & Anderson, 1998; Martin & Rubin, 1995). Skills assessment is most commonly and obviously associated with manifest behavioral referents. Verbal and nonverbal interaction behaviors, such as eye contact, smiling, gesturing, talk time, asking questions, and assertions represent exemplars of the skill-based building blocks of competent interaction (Dillard & Spitzberg, 1984).

**Methods.** Methods refer to the ways in which referents are either stimulated or presented for assessment. A role-play method presents a description of a situation to elicit overt response behavior from the subject. These overt responses are subsequently rated, coded, or otherwise evaluated in regard to their competence. In contrast, questionnaires present subjects with items to rate in reference to their own, or someone else's (e.g., their marital partner's) skills, competence, or both. These methods can be viewed in terms of their degree of removal from the referent being assessed. Indirect methods tend to involve no actual referent skill being manifested in the assessment context. Direct methods, in contrast, elicit performance of overt skills, which are then further assessed in the process.

*Indirect methods* include projective, interview, self-reference questionnaires, and other-reference questionnaires. Projective methods, such as inkblot techniques or sentence-completion tasks, present ambiguous stimuli to a subject, to which the subject reacts or provides an interpretation, and these reactions are then interpreted according to some scheme designed to assess the subject's social competence (e.g., Helper, 1970).

*Interview methods* refer to verbally presented questions about the subject's social interaction (e.g., Brugha et al., 1987; Gurland et al., 1972; Hecht & Wittchen, 1988; Monti, 1983). Interview methods are typically employed when there is background or personal information that would be difficult to obtain through behavioral observation

or without the subject's individual familiarity with the referents. Self-reference questionnaires refer to the presentation of items (e.g., "I am a good communicator") the subject applies to himself or herself. Items can vary across any of the universes of generalization to be discussed below. Other-reference questionnaires refer to items (e.g., "My partner is a good communicator") the subject applies to another person. It is presumed that the respondent has sufficient knowledge of the other person to make the judgments called for by the assessment. Other-reference questionnaires can be scaled in all the same ways as self-reference questionnaires.

*Direct methods* elicit some sample of behavior that serves as the referent for further assessment and evaluation. Self-monitoring is a technique employed in many therapies in which a person is instructed to code each time she or he engages in some target behavior(s).

In *role-play methods*, a subject is presented with one or more simulated versions of an interaction situation. The situations are generally developed and selected on the basis of their relevance to the particular areas of skill of concern to the assessors. The subject's performance is subsequently rated by self, by the confederate, or observers, and the recorded behavior from the scenarios can subsequently be coded and rated (e.g., Bellack, Hersen, & Lamparski, 1979; Bellack, Hersen, & Turner, 1978; Kern, 1982; Kern, Miller, & Eggers, 1983; McNamara & Blumer, 1982; St. Lawrence, Hughes, Goff, & Palmer, 1983).

*Naturalistic assessments* are situations introduced to subjects as if they were real but involve some degree of manipulation on the part of the assessors (e.g., Bellack, Hersen, & Turner, 1979). These methods tend to be employed when the subjects are in a relatively contained environment, such as patients in psychiatric hospitals or subjects in a waiting room. In vivo assessments involve assessments of people's behavior in truly natural, unmanipulated contexts (e.g., Snyder & Shanks, 1982). For example, recordings of telephone conversations, courtroom interactions, doctor-patient interviews, classrooms, and even unobtrusively observed interactions in parks or restaurants, all represent examples of in vivo contexts (Psathas, 1990). Finally, task-based or objective criterion assessments represent situations in which a subject's achievement of some particular outcome provides a measure of that person's skill, such as compliance-gaining success, accuracy of giving directions or intended meanings (Burleson & Denton, 1992, 1997; Powers & Spitzberg, 1986; Rubin, 1982).

**Universes of Generalization.** Symbols are not the things to which they refer; that is, the map is not the territory. Every assessment is an abstraction of its referent. As an abstraction, every assessment represents a degree of generalization from that which it is derived. A subject's glance is generalized to a measure of the subject's eye contact, the eye contact is generalized to the subject's confidence or attentiveness, which in turn are generalized to the subject's autonomy or empathy, and ultimately, the person's interpersonal competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, in press).

There are at least three domains of generalization: external, internal, and observer. External domains are concerned with the extent to which generalizations are sought across distinct methods, contexts, or times. These are external to the assessment itself in the sense that entirely distinct assessments or referents are being compared. Internal generalizations involve comparisons within the content of a given assessment method. For example, Riggio's (1986) measure originally conceptualized seven factors (e.g., emotional expressivity, social sensitivity, etc.). Internal generalization asks the extent to which these are intercorrelated dimensions, and equally requisite to the entire conceptualization of interpersonal competence.

Finally, *observer generalization* concerns issues of the comparability of raters, coders, observers, and subjects.

External universes of generalization are important in establishing various types of validity of an assessment. For example, studies have examined the validity of role-play methods by comparing the social competence of known groups across role-play, self-reference questionnaires, and interview or *in vivo* methods (e.g., Kern, 1982; Kern et al., 1983; McNamara & Blumer, 1982; Monti et al., 1983; Smit & van der Molen, 1996; St. Lawrence et al., 1983). Context or setting generalization involves the extent to which an assessment applies across similar or distinct types of situation. Does a measure of negotiation competence generalize to other conflict situations, much less to heterosocial situations? Generalization across contexts necessarily assumes generalization across time. Nevertheless, these are conceptually distinguishable universes. An assessment concerned with nursing competence can refer to nursing contexts of the last 2 weeks or the last 2 years.

Internal universes of generalization concern many of the standard psychometric concerns of reliability and content validity. Dimension–factor generalization refers to whether the content facets of a given assessment generalize to each other. Generalization across items can take two forms: internal reliability and item abstraction. Item abstraction has been the subject of considerable debate and is often referred to as the molar–molecular issue (Caballo & Buela, 1988; Dillard & Spitzberg, 1984; Royce, 1982; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Molecular items are low-abstraction references to behavior. Molecular items tend to refer to relatively discrete, observable, and objectively definable behaviors. Behaviors such as pauses, filled pauses, gestures, eye gaze, body lean, asking of questions, smiles, talk time, fidgets, interruptions, and so forth are considered relatively molecular. Some scholars have conceptualized “midi,” “mezzo,” or “intermediate” level constructs, such as “assertion,” or “humor” (e.g., Farrell, Rabinowitz, Wallander, & Curran, 1985; Monti et al., 1984; Spitzberg & Cupach, in press). Molar items, in contrast, are relatively subjective and evaluative and tend to involve high-level inferences. Items such as “S was a good communicator” reflect a more molar type. The issue of generalization across levels of abstraction concerns the extent to which it is legitimate to sum across such items.

The domain of observer generalization is the extent to which assessments are comparable across raters, coders, observers, and subjects. Any time a coding or rating system is applied by multiple assessors, it is common to ascertain the reliability or correspondence of these assessors. According to traditional psychometrics, a measure cannot be valid if it is unreliable. A coding system that codes for assertive statements cannot be considered a valid assessment of a person’s assertiveness if no two coders see the same behaviors as fitting into the same coding categories. In contrast, it is open to debate as to whether different observers should evaluate competence and skills similarly. Finally, generalization across subject–actor concerns whether a measure applies to many types of subject (e.g., children, adolescents, adults).

**Summary.** The BAG is not entirely comprehensive nor are its dimensions entirely mutually exclusive, but it does provide a useful working vocabulary for the analysis of most assessments of interaction skill. The matrix formed by the intersection of these axes suggests ways of categorizing assessments, as well as revealing relatively empty cells in which assessment efforts have been slighted. The axes of the BAG lay the conceptual groundwork for review of some of the more prominent assessments of social interaction skills, as well as the subsequent discussion of alternative types of assessment and assessment problems remaining to be resolved.

There are hundreds of communication and social interaction assessments. A comprehensive review is impractical, and a selective review is offered instead. Assessments were excluded if they were (a) developed specifically for a particular research project (e.g., Smit & van der Molen, 1996; Sanford, 1998), (b) unpublished (e.g., Kelly & Chase, 1978), (c) designed for very narrow conceptions of skill (e.g., Ravert et al., 1997; Sharpe, Connell, & Gallant, 1995), context (e.g., Gruppen et al., 1997; Ralph & Thorne, 1993), or population (e.g., see Table 4.5 of Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989), (d) largely ignored in application over the last decade, (e) ambiguous in extent of overlap with interaction skills (e.g., Cegala, Savage, Brunner, & Conrad, 1982), or (f) developed with dimensions extraneous to interaction (e.g., McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988; Rubin, 1982, 1985). What follows is a highly selective tour highlighting some of the trees of the assessment forest. Out of the assessments that were not excluded on the basis of the criteria above, assessments were included if they (a) represented a relatively omnibus measure of communication skill or competence and (b) were published in more than one study.

Furthermore, even though the emphasis of this review is on interpersonal skills, it is important to point out the availability of assessments in the motivation and knowledge domains. As indicated, motivation and knowledge are the underlying abilities or capacities that give rise to interpersonal behavior, and therefore, their relevance to interpersonal skills is clear. There are already excellent reviews available for the motivation domain. Whereas there are few reviews of the knowledge domain of assessment relevant to interpersonal skills, there are numerous assessments that are arguably germane. Therefore, a brief note regarding available measures of motivation and knowledge is provided next.

## Motivation Assessments

The anxiety component of communication motivation is one of the most established in terms of assessment (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989; Patterson & Ritts, 1997). There are hundreds of measures of anxiety, nervousness, apprehension, unwillingness to communicate, and shyness. Some of these measures are largely behavioral measures of manifest behavioral anxiety such as fidgeting, filled pauses, and avoidance of eye contact (Mulac & Wiemann, 1997). Others are based on the assumption that anxiety is reliably indicated by physiological arousal (Beatty & Dobos, 1997). Most, however, assume that people are fully cognizant of their nervousness and are able to reliably and validly report their own level of communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1997).

There are far fewer assessments of more positive communicator motivation. Positive communication motivation can be conceptualized in a variety of ways (Zorn, 1993), including self-efficacy (Moe & Zeiss, 1982), sensation-seeking (e.g., Zuckerman, 1994), pursuing and distancing (Bernstein, Santelli, Alter-Reid, & Androsiglio, 1985), extroversion and talkativeness (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1995; Wheless, Frymier, & Thompson, 1992), motives (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988), attentiveness (Norton & Pettigrew, 1979), communication involvement (Cegala, 1981), and simply as motivation to communicate competently (Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984).

## Knowledge Assessments

There have been several measures developed to assess the cognitive or knowledge-based component of communication and social interaction skills. Martin and

Rubin (1995) developed a 12-item measure to tap three components of cognitive flexibility—awareness of options, willingness to adapt, and self-efficacy in adapting—using a Likert-type response scale. It has been studied in relation to interaction involvement, self-monitoring, interpersonal communication competence, rigidity, unwillingness to communicate (Martin & Rubin, 1995; Rubin & Martin, 1994), aggressive communication (Martin, Anderson, & Thweatt, 1998), assertiveness and responsiveness, friendship cognitive flexibility, and efficacy perceptions (Martin & Anderson, 1998).

Duran and Spitzberg (1995) developed the Likert-type Cognitive Communicative Competence Scale. The items were developed to assess five factors: planning cognitions, modeling cognitions, presence cognitions, reflection cognitions, and consequence cognitions. The current version is adapted from a shorter version (Duran, Kelly, Schwager, Carone, & Stevens, 1993) and has been related to interaction involvement, communicative knowledge, and self-monitoring (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995).

Other measures are commonly considered relevant to the knowledge aspect of skilled communication, including self-monitoring (e.g., Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Lennox & Wolfe, 1984), cognitive complexity (e.g., Burleson, 1987; Rubin & Henzl, 1984), attributional complexity (Fletcher, Danilovics, Fernandez, Peterson, & Reeder, 1986), message elaboration (Reynolds, 1997), interpersonal problem solving (e.g., Shure, 1982), empathy and role-taking ability (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989), sensitivity to feedback (Edwards & Pledger, 1990), volitional control (Kuhl & Fuhrmann, 1998), social intelligence (e.g., Marlowe, 1985), and knowledge of the rules and possibilities of interaction (Spitzberg, 1990). Many of these measures are relatively narrow components of the knowledge component of competence.

## Self- and Other-Reference Skills Assessments

**Communication Flexibility Scale (CFS).** Adaptability and flexibility have commonly been identified as hallmarks of competent communication skills, and yet there have been few measures developed to assess these characteristics. The CFS was developed by Martin and Rubin (1994) and consists of 14 scenarios, each of which presents a context in which experiencing new people, situations, or altering one's communication behavior is described (e.g., "You went to a party where over 50 people attended. You have a good time, but spent most of the evening talking to one close friend rather than meeting new people"). It was related significantly to cognitive flexibility, argumentativeness, tolerance for disagreement, verbal aggressiveness, and Machiavellianism (Martin, Anderson, & Threatt, 1998). It is also related to the noble rhetorical self but not to rhetorical sensitivity or reflection, and exhibits a small relationship with social desirability (Martin & Rubin, 1994). To some extent, social desirability motive is expected to be related to interpersonal skills. The flexibility measure taps an aspect of interpersonal skills that has received too little attention but has revealed some results contrary to what would be expected and thus needs further validation.

**Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ).** The CFS was developed in a program of research examining the nature of person-centered communication (Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995). The items tend to be worded as other-reference descriptions that generalize across episode and setting. It consists of eight subscales, representing important functions fulfilled through communication: conflict management (e.g., "Makes me believe our relationship is strong enough to withstand any conflicts or disagreements we might have"), comforting (e.g., "Can really help

me work through my emotions when I'm feeling upset or depressed about something"), ego support (e.g., "Makes me feel like I'm a good person"), regulative (e.g., "Helps me see why my action broke a social rule or norm"), referential (e.g., "The capacity to express ideas in a clear, concise way"), conversational (e.g., "Can make conversations seem effortless"), narrative (e.g., "Can always get a bunch of people laughing just because he/she is so good at telling a joke or a story"), and persuasive (e.g., "Can talk me into doing things that he/she wants me to do").

Burleson, Kunkel, Samter, and Werking (1996) found that women and men differed in their rating of the importance of six of these eight skills, but the average effect size of the difference was small. In their second study, and in research reported by Burleson, Samter, and Lucchetti (1992), friends displayed significant similarity in their communication skills, supporting a skills-mediating model of interpersonal relationship attraction. The measure is one of the few that links specific skills to functions demonstrated through other research to be relevant to interpersonal competence. The research thus far suggests that the measure has sound psychometrics and expected construct validity. As yet, however, there is little basis for presuming these skills are a comprehensive list of skills or that these skills are necessarily cast at the most useful level of abstraction (Spitzberg & Cupach, in press).

**Communicative Adaptability Scale (CAS).** Although somewhat a misnomer because adaptability is not directly assessed, the CAS was one of the early measures designed to encompass multiple components of competent interaction (Duran, 1983, 1992). It assesses six factors in a Likert-type scaling: social composure (e.g., "In most social situations I feel tense and constrained"), social confirmation (e.g., "I am verbally and nonverbally supportive of other people"), social experience (e.g., "I enjoy socializing with various groups of people"), appropriate disclosure (e.g., "I disclose at the same level that others disclose to me"), articulation (e.g., "I sometimes use words incorrectly"), and wit (e.g., "People think I am witty").

Various dimensions of the CAS have been related significantly to cognitive complexity (Duran & Kelly, 1985), attractiveness (Duran & Kelly, 1988a), communication and roommate satisfaction (Duran & Zakahi, 1987, 1988), shyness (Duran & Kelly, 1989; Prisbell, 1991), communication style (Duran & Zakahi, 1984), interaction involvement (Duran & Kelly, 1988b), relationship maintenance (Prisbell, 1995), and social activity involvement (Duran & Kelly, 1994), as well as several other constructs (Duran, 1992). The dimensions of disclosure, composure, and wit were predictive of coded molecular behaviors of conversational turns, self-referencing pronouns, and other-referencing pronouns (Duran & Zakahi, 1990). The CAS has displayed consistent factor structure, acceptable psychometrics, and has generally related to other measures as expected. To date, however, these relationships have generally been with other trait measures, and therefore the predictive validity of the CAS is still in question. Furthermore, as with the Communication Functions Questionnaire, there is little rationale for the particular dimensions of the CAS. Finally, the items of the CAS tend to be cast at a fairly high level of abstraction, therefore its diagnostic value for making inferences about specific skills is limited.

**Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness (CAE).** Despite the common assumption that competent skills are appropriate and effective, few measures have attempted to assess these dimensions of behavior. The CAE was designed to measure perceptions of a particular conversational episode in terms of its appropriateness and effectiveness (Spitzberg, 1990). Appropriateness is referenced by 20 items assessing

the awkwardness or smoothness of behavior, embarrassment, and impressions of conversational propriety (e.g., "S/he said several things that seemed out of place in the conversation"). The effectiveness component is comprised of 20 items referencing control, goal accomplishment, and satisfaction (e.g., "I got what I wanted out of the conversation"). The initial version was semantic-differential in form (Spitzberg & Phelps, 1982) but was elaborated into a Likert-type response scale (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985).

Perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness successfully discriminate integrative, distributive, and avoidant conflict management tactics in the perception of both self and one's interlocutor (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989, 1990). Deep interruptions, which take speaking turns away from the person holding the floor, tend to be viewed as less appropriate and appear to have no effect on perceived effectiveness (Hawkins, 1988, 1991). The measures were highly sensitive to experimental changes in speech power (e.g., lack of tag questions, hesitations, hedges; Rose & Canary, 1988). These measures exhibited small relationships with loneliness over the last 2 weeks but were relatively unrelated to long-term loneliness (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985). The measure is virtually the only measure available to tap the dimensions most often attributed to interpersonal competence and appears to have relatively consistent factor structure. Much of the measure's item content is relatively high in abstraction, however, thereby distancing it from the actual interpersonal skills entailed in creating the impression of appropriateness and effectiveness.

**Conversational Skills Rating Scale (CSRS).** The CSRS was developed to accommodate several assumptions about the nature of communication competence. First, if competence is a judgment of quality, then a rating scale should reflect this judgment of quality, rather than quantity. Second, if competence varies from molecular to molar, then such judgments should be separated to avoid confounding levels of inference. Third, the domain of behaviors assessed should be relatively comprehensive but also relevant to most social interactions. Fourth, the measure should be sufficiently flexible to be used in reference to self or other and in context-general as well as context-specific forms. The resulting measure (Spitzberg, 1994c, 1995) consists of five molar judgment semantic differential items (e.g., skilled-unskilled, competent-incompetent, etc.) and 25 relatively molecular items reflecting four skill clusters: altercentrism (e.g., "Speaking about partner—involvelement of partner as a topic of conversation"), composure (e.g., "Shaking or nervous twitches—are't noticeable or distracting"), expressiveness (e.g., "Facial expressiveness—neither blank nor exaggerated"), and interaction management (e.g., "Speaking fluency—pauses, silences, uh, etc."). These items are scaled on a 5-point continuum from *Inadequate, Fair, Adequate, Good, to Excellent*.

The factor structure has been generally supported (Spitzberg, Brookeshire, & Brunner, 1990; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987a), although the subscales are strongly intercorrelated, thereby leading some to eschew the subscales in favor of an overall score. The measure has been significantly related to motivation, knowledge, and skills (Spitzberg & Brunner, 1991; Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984), perceptual accuracy (Powers & Spitzberg, 1986), use of humor (Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992), anxiety (Segrin, 1999), loneliness (Segrin, 1999; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987b), intercultural competence (Milhouse, 1993, 1996), shyness (Prisbell, 1991), discourse strategies (Ellis, Duran, & Kelly, 1994), client outcomes in transition from welfare to work (Waldrion & Lavitt, 2000), and psychosocial problems (Segrin, 1993, 1996, 1999). Ratings of self and conversational partner on the CSRS were significantly related to specific coded behaviors

(e.g., talk duration, speaking turns, gaze) in an in vivo “waiting period” context but generally not in either a get-acquainted or role-play situation (Segrin, 1998). The CSRS is also apparently sensitive to the differing demands of these situations (Segrin, 1998).

In general, the effect sizes of the CSRS have been relatively small with trait or dispositional types of measures and moderate with more state or episodic types of behavior and measures. Its factor structure has been somewhat inconsistent across studies and may function better when the items are summed across all the items. Finally, the CSRS was designed as an episodic measure and therefore may not serve the purposes of researchers seeking to make inferences regarding a person’s trait competence.

***Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS).*** Taking a more inductive approach, Rubin and Martin (1994) developed this measure to tap the dimensions most commonly identified by the major interpersonal textbooks of the communication field. Both a long (30-item) and short (10-item) version are available, scaled on a 5-point frequency self-reference format. Both forms reflect the following skills: self-disclosure (e.g., “I allow friends to see who I really am”), empathy (e.g., “I can put myself in others’ shoes”), social relaxation (e.g., “I am comfortable in social situations”), assertiveness (e.g., “When I’ve been wronged, I confront the person who wronged me”), altercentrism (e.g., “My conversations are pretty one-sided,” reverse coded), interaction management (e.g., “My conversations are characterized by smooth shifts from one topic to the next”), expressiveness (e.g., “My friends can tell when I’m happy or sad”), supportiveness (e.g., “My communication is usually descriptive, not evaluative”), immediacy (e.g., “My friends truly believe that I care about them”), and environmental control (e.g., “I accomplish my communication goals”). The measure was strongly related to cognitive flexibility (Rubin & Martin, 1994) and moderately related to dyadic roommate satisfaction (Martin & Anderson, 1995). The ICCS has the intuitive appeal of strong face validity and representativeness. There is little basis however, to conclude that textbooks in a discipline reflect the skills identified by the more scholarly literature as actually related to competence. Furthermore, there are significant variations in item abstraction. Finally, the measure has simply not been studied extensively enough to determine its construct validity.

***Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ).*** Developed by Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, and Reis (1988), this is a dispositional measure intended to assess competence in five domains: initiation (e.g., “Introducing yourself to someone you might like to get to know”), self-disclosure (e.g., “Revealing something private about yourself when talking to a close friend about personal matters”), negative assertion (e.g., “Asking someone you’ve been dating to change an irritating mannerism”), advice and guidance (e.g., “Not exploding at a close companion—even when it is justified—to avoid a damaging conflict”), and conflict resolution (e.g., “Helping a close companion cope with family or roommate problems”). The items are scaled on a 5-point scale from “I’m poor at this” to “I’m extremely good at this.” Its vocabulary has been adapted for adolescent populations (Buhrmester, 1990).

The factor structure of the ICQ appears resilient to adaptation to other relationships and populations (e.g., Theriault, 1997). It is significantly related to college adjustment (Shaver, Furman, & Buhrmester, 1985), popularity, dating initiation and frequency, depression, well-being, loneliness, dating skill, assertiveness, social anxiety, shyness, masculine ideology, physical attractiveness, and emotional expressiveness (Bruch,

Berko, & Haase, 1998; Buhrmester et al., 1988) and to various measures of motivation, knowledge, and interpersonal skills (Spitzberg, 1990), with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate and varying considerably across dimensions. Although the subscales produced somewhat inconsistent results and varied by respondents' gender and by gender composition of the dyad, the ICQ was generally negatively associated with emotional reactivity, as expected (Bartle-Haring & Sabatelli, 1997). The measure has shown significant relationships to stress over time and small predictive relationship to subsequent psychopathology (Herzberg et al., 1998). Its adolescent self-report form showed consistently small to large relationships with sociability, hostility, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem, although the preadolescent form and "friend-rated" form of the measure showed more inconsistent results (Buhrmester, 1990).

The ICQ is one of the few measures developed to tap "relational competence." As such, it represents a fairly narrow domain of contexts and skills. The relative importance of the skills it taps shift considerably from one study to another, making generalizations about its subscale structure difficult. Finally, its item content is cast at a fairly high level of abstraction, meaning that it provides relatively little diagnostic information about actual behaviors involved in these interpersonal contexts. Within the domain of relational competence, however, it has received relatively strong support as a trait measure of interpersonal skills.

**Social Performance Survey Schedule (SPSS).** The SPSS is a 100-item Likert-scaled measure intended to assess positive (50 items; e.g., "Has eye contact when speaking") and negative (50 items; e.g., "Puts himself/herself down") interaction behaviors (Lowe, 1982, 1985; Lowe & Cautela, 1978). Factor analysis has exhibited a multidimensional structure (Lowe & D'Ilio, 1985), but this structure has not been replicated or consistently employed in research. An abbreviated version of the measure has shown statistically significant discriminant validity (Fingeret, Monti, & Paxson, 1985; Wessberg et al., 1981) and convergence across observers and contexts (Monti, 1983; Wessberg et al., 1981). The measure has also successfully predicted several conversational behaviors (Miller & Funabiki, 1983). Student leaders perceive themselves as engaging in significantly higher rates of positive behaviors than their parents perceived of their children, and girls report higher frequency of positive, and lower frequency of negative, behaviors than boys (D'Ilio & Karnes, 1987, 1992; Karnes & D'Ilio, 1989). The positive subscale was strongly correlated with depression, social activity, observer ratings of social skill, and introversion (Lowe, 1982). The measure exhibited convergent validity in predicting number of interactions, number of friends, peer likeability, talk time, eye contact, and self and observer in vivo skill ratings (Lowe, 1985). This scale, however, was also strongly related to social desirability (Lowe, 1982). The SPSS has withstood more rigorous tests than most competence measures. Its limitations are that it is long and relatively undifferentiated.

**Social Skills Inventory (SSI).** One of the few assessments with an explicitly theoretical approach, Riggio (1986) reported a dispositional self-reference measure intended to represent three dimensions of skills. Skills are conceptualized as serving expressivity (i.e., sending), sensitivity (i.e., receiving), or control (i.e., monitoring) functions. These skills involve sending, receiving, or monitoring emotional messages (i.e., communicating messages of affect, attitude, and status relationship) and social messages (i.e., verbal fluency and facility). The measure consists of 105 items scaled on a standard 5-point Likert-type response continuum, although some studies exclude the control scales.

The measure has generally produced expected convergent and discriminant coefficients with personality measures, attractiveness, social anxiety, self-consciousness, and nonverbal skills (Riggio, 1986). The measure also correlated with employment experience, social experience, and shyness (Riggio, 1986). The SSI was correlated to self-esteem, anxiety, and loneliness but not to locus of control or well-being (Riggio, Throckmorton, & DePaola, 1990; Vandeputte et al., 1999). The measure correlated largely as expected with various measures of communicative motivation, knowledge, and skill (Spitzberg, 1990). The measure exhibited few significant relationships between parents' and children's social skills (Segrin, 1994). The measure has displayed small but significant predictive and moderating effects in predicting psychosocial and academic problems over time (Segrin & Flora, 2000). There appear to be no birth order effects on the SSI scales (Riggio & Sotoodeh, 1989). Subscale composites produced moderate to large relationships with measures of empathy (Riggio, Tucker, & Coffaro, 1989) and small to moderate relations with use of others for coping types of social support (Riggio & Zimmerman, 1991).

Certain subscales and the total measure have predicted believability in deception tasks and deception skill (Burgoon, Buller, & Guerrero, 1995; Burgoon, Buller, Guerrero, & Feldman, 1994; Riggio, Tucker, & Throckmorton, 1988). Some of its scales display significant correlations with social desirability (Riggio, 1986). The SSI has received extensive application and performed very well. It has a clearly defined subscale structure and demonstrates solid psychometrics and validity coefficients. To date different applications have applied it in various ways, however, excluding subscales or summing across subscales, making generalizations about the validity of specific subscales of the SSI problematic. Finally, the contents of items vary considerably in their abstraction both within and across subscales, meaning that very different levels of inference are invoked.

**Miscellaneous Assessments.** A few additional measures deserve brief mention. These are scales that either have not received sufficient attention to review in full or that assess skills in contexts that are narrowly related to competent interaction. Schrader's (1990; Schrader & Liska, 1991) Refined Measure of Interpersonal Communication Competence is a 39-item measure based on items that best discriminated competent versus incompetent communicators. The Communicator Competence Questionnaire was developed to assess encoding (e.g., "My subordinate has a good command of language") and decoding (e.g., "My subordinate is a good listener") dimensions in the organizational context (Monge, Bachman, Dillard, & Eisenberg, 1982). Lorr, Youniss, and Stefic (1991; Schill, 1995) developed a 128-item, true-false Social Relations Survey of social skills assessing eight hypothesized bipolar domains: social assertiveness, directiveness, defense of rights, confidence, perceived approval, expression of positive feelings, social approval need, and empathy. Gambrill (1995) reported a 24-item Social Competence Scale referencing a variety of social behaviors (e.g., "offering friendly reactions," "maintaining conversations"), scaled in a straightforward competence continuum (i.e., not at all competent to very competent). For somewhat molar level assessment of episode-specific interpersonal competence, the Self-Rated Competence and Rating of Alter-Competence measures have been widely used (see Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998; Perotti & DeWine, 1987; Segin, 1994; Spitzberg, 1988; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Finally, although the measure is in its infancy, the development steps involved are so comprehensive that the Interpersonal Communication Competence Inventory should be mentioned (Bubaš, 2000; Bubaš, Bratko, & Marusic, 1999). It was developed with a relatively comprehensive attention to previous work in competence, and exhibits expected validity coefficients

with the Communication Functions Questionnaire (Burleson & Samter, 1990), the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (Buhrmester et al., 1988), the Social Skills Inventory (Riggio, 1986), and an Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire previously developed by Bubas. The ICCI reveals two second-order factors (communication effectiveness, other-orientedness) and up to six specific factors (decoding and encoding, social relaxation, expressivity, intentionality).

Several measures of interpersonal skills have also been developed to reference particular contexts. Inderbitzen and Foster (1992) developed a Teenage Inventory of Social Skills. In the dating context, measures such as the Dating and Assertion Questionnaire (Levenson & Gottman, 1978), Heterosocial Assessment Inventory for Women (Kolko, 1985), and Survey of Heterosexual Interactions (Williams & Ciminero, 1978) have been used extensively. Several scales have been reported that assess intercultural communication competence (e.g., Martin & Hammer, 1989). In the counseling context, Remer (1978) reports a Potential Interpersonal Competence Scale. In the marital context, the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996; Noller & White, 1990) has successfully predicted conflict-relevant marital outcomes. Similarly, the argumentativeness-aggressiveness construct has been applied as a proxy for communicative competence in conflict situations (e.g., Onyekwere, Rubin, & Infante, 1991).

## Direct Skills Assessments

**Role-Play and Scenario Methods.** Role-play methods represent a host of techniques for eliciting sample response behaviors from subjects. Role-play methods are not technically assessment instruments; however, so much behavior therapy and counseling research yokes similar types of assessment scales to role-play scenarios, and role-play scenarios are crafted carefully so as to elicit certain types of skills (e.g., assertiveness, heterosocial, etc.), that role-play methods have become widely considered a form of assessment. The behaviors elicited from role-play stimuli are subsequently either coded for the occurrence of behaviors assumed relevant to competence (e.g., amount of eye contact, number of gestures, etc.) or evaluated in terms of competence (e.g., unskilled–skilled, unattractive–attractive). The scenarios developed to elicit such response behaviors are developed to be reasonably relevant, realistic, representative, and engaging for the respondents.

Role-play methods have been the subject of considerable research examining their validity (e.g., Ammerman & Hersen, 1986; Bellack et al., 1978, 1979; Frisch & Higgins, 1986; Kazdin, Matson, & Esveldt-Dawson, 1984; Kern, 1982; Kern et al., 1983; Kolotkin & Wielkiewicz, 1984; Letherman et al., 1984; Letherman, Williamson, Moody, & Wozniak, 1986; Mahaney & Kern, 1983; McNamara & Blumer, 1982; St. Lawrence, Hughes, et al., 1983; St. Lawrence, Kirksey, et al., 1983). Most research has shown that role-play methods are highly sensitive to various forms of demand effects (Spitzberg, 1991), including degree of standardization of situational stimuli (Chiauzzi, Heimberg, Becker, & Gansler, 1985), expectation set of instructions (Ammerman & Hersen, 1986; Spitzberg & Chandler, 1987), mode of stimulus presentation (Galassi & Galassi, 1976; Perlmutter, Paddock, & Duke, 1985; Remer, 1978; Smit & van der Molen, 1996), confederate prompt delivery style (Mahaney & Kern, 1983; Steinberg, Curran, Bell, Paxson, & Munroe, 1982), gender of confederate (Eisler, Hersen, Miller, & Blanchard, 1975), sex of ratee (Gormally, 1982), familiarity with ratee (Gormally, 1982), and race of ratee (Hrop & Rakos, 1985; Turner, Beidel, Hersen, & Bellack, 1984). Nevertheless, carefully developed role-play methods can provide a relatively standardized approach to eliciting observable social behavior

from respondents for evaluating social competence. Some of the more relevant and widely used role-play methods are reviewed below.

**Simulated Social Interaction Test (SSIT).** The SSIT consists of eight role-play situation descriptions (Curran, 1982). The eight situations represent a range of potentially problematic social encounters: disapproval or criticism, social assertiveness or visibility, confrontation and anger expression, heterosexual conflict, interpersonal warmth, conflict with or rejection by parent or relative, interpersonal loss, and receiving compliments. Examples follow:

*Narrator:* You are at work, and one of your bosses has just finished inspecting one of the jobs that you have completed. He says to you,

*Confederate:* "That's a pretty sloppy job. I think you could have done better."

*Narrator:* You are at a party, and you notice a woman has been watching you all evening.

Later, she walks up to you and says,

*Confederate:* "Hi, my name is Jean."

These prompts can be played on audiotape, videotape, or presented by an assessor or by confederate. The subject's responses are typically recorded, and the responses to the eight situations are rated on two 11-point scales assessing social anxiety and social skill and summed across situations.

Research has examined the SSIT among a variety of subject populations, and it has been compared across various types of rater expertise (Curran, Monti, et al., 1980; Farrell, Curran, Zwick, & Monti, 1984; Fingeret, Monti, & Paxson, 1983; Fingeret et al., 1985; Mersch, Breukers, & Emmelkamp, 1992; Monti, 1983; Monti et al., 1984; Monti, Curran, Corriveau, DeLancy, & Hagerman, 1980; Monti & Fingeret, 1987; Monti, Wallander, Ahern, Abrams, & Munroe, 1983; Monti, Zwick, & Warzak, 1986; Steinberg et al., 1982; Wallander, Curran, & Myers, 1983; Wessberg et al., 1981). The research collectively indicates that the SSIT is a sensitive and valid measure of social skills.

**Social Interaction Test.** One of the persistent problems in assessing competence is that mere output of behaviors is rarely a measure of competence, because too little or too much of virtually any behavior can be incompetent. Trower, Bryant, and Argyle (1978) attempted to cope with this by developing an elaborate rating scale that encompasses parallel descriptions of too much and too little. The scale is applied to behavior stimulated in an *in vivo* "tell us about yourself" task in which confederate behaviors are manipulated. The rating scale has been adapted to alternative applications, and its item content adapted, since its original incarnation. A sample item, regarding volume of speech, is as follows:

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 0    | Normal volume                             |
| 1(a) | Quiet but can be heard without difficulty |
| 1(b) | Rather loud but not unpleasant            |
| 2(a) | Too quiet and difficult to hear           |
| 2(b) | Too loud and rather unpleasant            |
| 3(a) | Abnormally quiet and often inaudible      |
| 3(b) | Abnormally loud and unpleasant            |
| 4(a) | Inaudible                                 |
| 4(b) | Extremely loud (shouting).                |

Adapted forms of the measure have been used in a variety of applications (e.g., Caballo & Buela, 1988; Turner, Beidel, Dancu, & Stanley, 1989). The Fydrich et al. (1998) adaptation, for example, reduced the 29 item sets into five: gaze, vocal quality, length, discomfort, and conversation flow. The rating scale has been employed to examine self versus other impressions of competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1985), molar versus molecular impressions of skills (Caballo & Buela, 1988), and social anxiety (Turner et al., 1984). Because the rating scale and original stimulus context have rarely been applied consistently, it is difficult to generalize about the measure's validity, but its conceptual rigor and comprehensiveness show considerable promise.

**Marital Communication Assessments.** There is an extensive literature on assessing communication skills in the marital or intimate partner context. Many of these systems involve the rating or coding of marital interactions (Gottman & Notarius, 2000). These interactions generally surround problem-solving tasks but can be more mundane or positive in socioemotional content. Some examples of direct interpersonal skills assessments in the couples' context include the Clinician Rating of Adult Communication (Basco, Birchler, Kalal, Talbott, & Slater, 1991), the Marital Interaction Coding System (Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995), the Couples Interaction Scoring System (Gottman, 1979; Gottman & Rushe, 1995), and the Specific Affect coding system (Waltz, Babcock, Jacobsen, & Gottman, 2000). Other observational measures have been developed for rating or coding expressed affect in marriages (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Krokoff, 1991; Smith, Vivian, & Leary, 1990). These systems typically identify certain types of positive and negative affective exchanges, as well as interactional moves that work away from mutually respectful task-oriented problem solving (Butler & Wampler, 1999). Finally, the Communication Box test has been employed successfully to assess predictive accuracy, perceptual accuracy, and communication effectiveness in interacting couples (e.g., Burleson & Denton, 1992, 1997; Denton, Burleson, & Sprenkle, 1995; Gottman, 1994). Interactants take a turn at talk and then note what they intended the effect of that message to be on the co-interactant and what effect they predicted the message would actually have. The co-interactant then indicates what effect the message had and then engages in his or her own turn at talk. Measures are formulated from the discrepancies between the partner intended, predicted, and actual meanings.

**Children's Sociometric and Peer Assessments.** Some populations are not trusted to provide self-assessments of their social skills due to the particular nature of their inability to perceive the world in normative ways (e.g., people with schizophrenia). Other populations are included in the assessment process but are rarely trusted with the sole assessment role. One such population is children, for whom issues of popularity among peers is a highly relevant marker of interpersonal competence but is unlikely to be validly represented by self-assessment alone. There is an extensive literature on children's social and interpersonal skills (for empirically based reviews, see, e.g., Caldarella & Merrell, 1997; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993; also see Samter, this volume). Numerous studies of children's social skills have employed some variation of peer assessment, which most typically takes the form of sociometric rankings of popularity, attractiveness, likability, and so forth (Inderbitzen, 1994). These are viewed here as direct methods because the evaluator is presumed to be referencing experience with direct and observed interaction with the people being ranked. Although such approaches rarely refer to specific skills, they are often used as a measure of children's basic interpersonal skills. The typical approach in such a study

is to locate a relatively closed social system (e.g., a classroom or fraternity) and ask subjects to rank order their peers in this system according to some dimension of competence (e.g., social attractiveness). The average rank a subject receives represents that person's social competence. These measures are often compared with or combined with ratings of specific social skills observed by teachers, school personnel, parents, or peers (e.g., Cairns, Leung, Gest, & Cairns, 1995; Demaray et al., 1995; Feng & Cartledge, 1996; Flanagan et al., 1996; Matson et al., 1995; Newcomb et al., 1993). Other approaches have formulated coding systems (Santoyo, 1996) or elaborate rating systems (e.g., Bain, 1991) to assess interaction skills (e.g., Santoyo, 1996), but such methods have not been widely adopted.

**Miscellaneous Assessments.** Some direct assessments deserve brief note because of their relevance or relative lack of attention. Farrell and colleagues developed a set of "intermediate-level" rating scales that anchored various molecular behaviors on scales of appropriateness, along with descriptors and behavioral exemplars (Farrell et al., 1984, 1985). Haley (1985) developed 28 role-play scenes to assess social skills in negative assertion, positive assertion, and initiating social contact situations. Many efforts have been made to employ a "standardized patient" role-play assessment of interaction and patient-interviewing skills of current and prospective physicians (e.g., Boulet et al., 1998; Cohen, Colliver, Marcy, Fried, & Swartz, 1996; Gruppen et al., 1997). In the standardized patient assessment, subjects are asked to respond to a series of hypothetical patient presentations, which can be presented in live, recorded, or written forms, and the responses to these scenarios are then evaluated according to third-party skill ratings. Ralph and colleagues (Ralph, 1990; Ralph & Lee, 1994; Ralph & Thorne, 1993) have applied a verbal interaction coding system to assess competence in initiating and maintaining topics in interview situations.

## Alternative Assessments

There are alternative approaches to assessment that are not easily categorized by the Behavioral Assessment Grid. For example, there is extensive discussion of portfolio assessment of communication skills in instructional contexts, and such approaches have relevance to interpersonal skills (e.g., Jacobson, Sleicher, & Maureen, 1999). Efforts continue to develop an automated or computer-based program for social skills assessment (Holsbrink-Engels, 1997; Muehlenhard & McFall, 1983; O'Neil, Allred, & Baker, 1997). At this point, these efforts tend to be too diverse and nascent to review here. Nevertheless, they also suggest that there are still unexplored horizons in the assessment of interpersonal skills. Success in pursuing these horizons may well depend on the resolution of a number of key issues that still present significant obstacles to the valid assessment of interpersonal skills. Some of these issues are reviewed next.

## KEY ISSUES IN INTERPERSONAL SKILL ASSESSMENT

This highly selective review illustrates how diverse and extensive the options are for assessing social skills. In the context of so many options, the crucial question arises as to which assessment is "best." Selection of any assessment for any given project depends significantly on how one answers six key questions, which are discussed here under the abstracted rubric of what, when, where, who, how, and why (Spitzberg, 1987).

## What: Which Competence Domain(s) Will Be Assessed?

This basic question receives surprisingly little detailed consideration in assessment projects. Spitzberg and Cupach (1989; Spitzberg, 1994b) identified well over 100 factor-analytically derived labels of skills or dimensions attributed to interpersonal competence or skills. Does interpersonal competence consist of assertiveness, self-disclosure, heterosocial initiation, composure, other-orientation, empathy, role-taking, sensitivity, listening, attentiveness, articulation, wit, responsiveness, creativity, adaptability, control, expressiveness, clarity, understanding, or some other combination of social behaviors? Furthermore, even these skills vary considerably in terms of the more molecular skills that comprise them. Spitzberg and Cupach (in press) have suggested a perspective that categorizes molecular skills (e.g., asking questions, laughter) according to several more intermediate level skills (e.g., attentiveness, expressiveness), which then relate in multiple ways to higher order functional skills (e.g., empathy, excitement), which relate to even higher order functions (e.g., intimacy, novelty), and finally to the most fundamental interpersonal functions (i.e., moving toward or with another, moving away from another, moving against another). Although still highly speculative, this approach at least recognizes the importance of attempting to map a place for the entire terrain of potential skills at various levels of abstraction.

Most assessment projects would ordinarily employ theory to guide selection of skills. To date, however, there still are no widely accepted theoretical models that specify what skills comprise the essential competencies of social interaction. Furthermore, there are almost no models that specify the interrelationships among the components of social skill. Only a few studies have attempted to develop truly multivariate models of social skills in the larger social process (Bruch et al., 1998; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989; Lamke, Sollie, Durbin, & Fitzpatrick, 1994; Rubin, Martin, Bruning, & Powers, 1993). Even these models, however, tend to view social skills themselves as univariate constructs. For example, if competence is comprised of both empathy and assertiveness, how can such seemingly incompatible skills be combined in a given context (Lowe & Storm, 1986; Spitzberg et al., 1994)? Such complex multidimensional interrelationships need to be discerned both conceptually and empirically.

## Why: What Will the Relation of Assessment Be to Valid Social Outcomes?

The ultimate question for assessment projects is: Assessment for what? Why are people being assessed in the first place, and what uses can be made of the assessment? The answers to these questions are not as obvious as they might seem. In educational and clinical contexts, the general assumption is that assessment is being conducted to guide opportunities for remediation and enrichment of those being assessed. But in the educational context, assessment also can be used for accountability, as in evaluation or action research. In the clinical context, assessment can serve the purposes of publication, prestige, and grinding personal theoretical axes. Assessments developed for basic research are often ignored by those seeking more applied measurement schemes, and vice versa. Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are calling for more social validation of assessments, which requires establishing ecological and representational validity for those being assessed. Much research, for example, has presupposed the relevance of assertiveness to people's lives without ever asking people to identify aspects of their everyday lives in which more competent assertiveness

could have made a substantive difference in their social outcomes. It may be that assessments too often reflect what is relevant to the researcher, clinician, or educator, rather than what is relevant and important to the interactant.

## **When: Will Assessments Be Dispositional (Trait) or Episodic (State)?**

Is competence a state or a trait? Are interpersonal skills something that are manifest across time and contexts, or are skills contextually specific and unique to a given episode of interaction? It is generally considered axiomatic that competence is contextual (Spitzberg & Brunner, 1991). However, one of the most common purposes of assessment is to produce a diagnostic estimate of a person's abilities across contexts. If, in contrast, competence or skill is entirely episodic, then any assessment can be considered valid only in the context itself. To some extent this is an empirical question, and to date the evidence is not very encouraging (Segrin, 1998; Spitzberg, 1987, 1991). Dispositional and traitlike measures generally have not produced strong correlations with behavioral performance. Furthermore, episodic assessments such as brief role-play methods often do not generalize to other *in vivo* or naturalistic situations (Bellack et al., 1978, 1979). Although generally overlooked in the initial stages of assessment development, it is likely to matter what time frame the subject is asked to consider when rating competence. When assessing one's own competence, it makes a difference whether the last 2 weeks, 2 years, or 2 decades represent the time frame for assessment. Communication skills are developmental and contextually sensitive. Therefore, a person's competence during the college years may be different from his or her high school years, and even the freshman year may be different from the senior year (Rubin & Graham, 1988; Rubin, Graham, & Mignerey, 1990). Competence evaluations may become more self-focused, positive, and molar over time (i.e., specific behaviors are forgotten, whereas general themes and evaluations are recalled) over time (Spitzberg, 1987). Therefore, any approach to assessment must address the issue of the time frame in which competence is assessed.

## **Where: Will Skills and Competence Be Framed Within a Specified Context?**

The axiomatic assumption that competence is contextual refers to both time and "place." These are related but distinct issues. Contexts can be conceptualized along cultural, chronemic, relational, situational, or functional dimensions or typologies (Spitzberg, 2000; Spitzberg & Brunner, 1991). Research makes clear that competence evaluation does indeed vary along these dimensions and types (Argyle et al., 1981; Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995;Forgas, 1979; Heise, 1979). It follows, therefore, that any assessment project must determine what features of the context are relevant to the display of competence and design those features into the assessment method.

## **Who: Will Assessment of Competence and Skills Be Made by Interactants, Third-Parties, or Both?**

Some populations are assumed to be limited in their ability to provide self-referential data on competence. The mentally disabled, mentally ill, and infants, for example, generally are viewed as lacking the self-reflective ability to comment validly on their own social competence. Other populations are simply viewed as systematically biased in their self-assessments (e.g., depressed, lonely, etc.). "Bias" in evaluation of

competence can be viewed as intrinsic to any vantage point, however. Research is clear, for example, that self perceives competence differently from one's interactional partner (e.g., Spitzberg & Cupach, 1985; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987a; Sypher & Sypher, 1984) and from third-party observers or subsequent raters (Farrell, Mariotto, Cooper, Curran, & Wallander, 1979; Nelson, Hayes, Felton, & Jarrett, 1985). Furthermore, such disparities are exacerbated by such interactant states as depression, loneliness, and anxiety (e.g., Segrin, 1998) and rater characteristics such as gender (Conger et al., 1980; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987a) and ethnicity (Turner et al., 1984). Rater training may simply be a way of substituting one set of biases for another (Bernardin & Pence, 1980; Conger, Wallander, Ward, & Farrell, 1980; Corriveau et al., 1981). Finally, people are likely to assess the competence of a well-known person differently from a stranger, and various relational characteristics are likely to affect such evaluations (e.g., status difference, intimacy, affect, etc.). Thus, any attempt at developing a sound assessment presupposes that a reasoned decision has been reached regarding who is an appropriate source for competence assessment. When the skills being assessed involve episodes of interaction in a person's past, self-report, or other-report by someone well known to the subject, is likely to be most useful. Other-report and direct observation methods are more likely to be useful when the skills being assessed are very context specific and thus capable of being displayed in a single episode of interaction. Such methods will also be preferred when the subject being assessed is unable to provide an accurate appraisal, such as with small children or with disordered adults. Role-play methods will be useful when the skills assessed and the contexts that elicit them can be well defined.

## How: How Will Assessment Be Operationalized?

Many practical issues could be examined under this heading (e.g., how are instructions written, whether written scenarios are equivalent to audiotaped scenarios, etc.). Two issues are discussed here because they have received the least attention from assessment research: quantity versus quality of scaling and curvilinearity of scaling.

One of the first questions to answer is whether to scale items or skills in terms of their frequency or duration of occurrence or in terms of their quality of performance. Many role-play methods, for example, code the occurrence of certain behaviors (e.g., amount of eye contact, number of questions asked, etc.) and then correlate these with molar evaluations of the subject's overall episodic performance. This begs the question, however, as to what is competence in these studies. If it is the evaluations, then any unexplained variance in the ratings is unaccounted for competence. It exists, but its basis is unknown. Furthermore, if competence is in the molar evaluations, then it is an inference of those particular third parties and raises some of the "who" issues discussed above. If, in contrast, it exists in the behaviors or skills themselves, then what is the role of the molar evaluations? Eventually, assessment will need to "be directed at transforming the results from one frame of reference to another by developing mappings from the more objective measurement frames to those represented by participant and observer judgments" (Cappella, 1991, p. 111).

A more troublesome aspect of scaling issues is curvilinearity (Spitzberg, 1987). Virtually any behavior or skill is incompetent at the extremes of disuse or excessive use (Wiemann, 1977). Both a conversation with no eye contact and a conversation with 100% eye contact are likely to be viewed as incompetent by most partners or third parties. Yet scaling rarely reflects the possibility of this curvilinearity. A few measures have built in the possibility of curvilinearity (e.g., Trower et al., 1978), and

other scaling systems have overcome it by making the continuum of evaluation one of quality rather than quantity (e.g., Spitzberg, 1995). Regardless, if the quantity with which skills are displayed is viewed as relevant to the assessment method, then some manner of coping with the possibilities of curvilinearity are necessary.

A second issue related to "how" assessment is operationalized concerns the notion of competence thresholds. Competence can be arrayed along a continuum from "minimal" to an "optimal" achievement. As such, any assessment approach must address what ultimate criterion of competence must be displayed. Using the example of the "eye test," an assessment will reflect whether vision is assessed under optimal conditions, whether vision is instead challenged to determine its adequacy under less than optimum conditions, or whether only minimum levels of vision need be demonstrated. Similarly, the behavior-analytic approach to competence tends to reflect the assumption that competence is best assessed under conditions in which people's responses are substantially taxed by the complexity and difficulty of the situation. In contrast, many assessments merely ask people to judge their own ability to "make friends" or "make eye contact." Such measures may be interpreted at relatively low levels of expectation for performance. That is, if the person does not lose friends every day, it may seem that he or she "makes friends" competently. However, not losing friends frequently is quite different from establishing and maintaining highly satisfying friendships whenever needed and under awkward or trying circumstances (e.g., moving away to college, at a club, etc.). Assessment approaches need to address the conceptual implications of minimal versus optimal competence and how such implications alter the types of scaling used and the ways in which stimuli and scenarios are developed.

## CONCLUSION

The various assessment maps of interpersonal skills and competence are complex. But the territory to which the maps refer is inevitably more complex. The terrain of social interaction skills is clearly too complex for any one map to permit complete navigation of its subtleties. Attempts to use the landmarks on the map as representations of what is "really there" are risky at best and seriously misdirected at worst. An example from the past 20 years provides a good illustration. In the socially liberating zeitgeist of the 1960s in the United States armed with the motor skills model of social skills and the general pathos of emotional expressiveness, the assertiveness movement was embraced by clinical psychology (Galassi, Galassi, & Vedder, 1981). A more open, honest, and reasoned basis for societal interaction was envisioned. Elaborate training and assessment programs were instituted, and the behavior therapy literatures burgeoned with assertiveness coding systems, rating scales, self-report measures, and role-play scenarios.

In particular, a methodological paradigm arose befitting the law of the hammer. The paradigm study involved subjects in assertiveness role-play scenarios. The subjects' behavioral responses to these scenarios would be videotaped, coded for objective behaviors (e.g., eye contact, talk time, etc.), and rated by other third parties for overall social skillfulness. The molecular coded behaviors would then be correlated with the molar evaluations of skillfulness. Study after study confirmed that the more assertive one's verbal and nonverbal behavior, the more socially skilled the interactant was perceived to be by uninvolved third parties. However, no one seemed to be asking how the interactant's assertiveness was perceived by the conversational partners,

confederates, or significant others (e.g., spouses, friends, etc.). When programs of research began investigating just these types of questions, it was found that interactants whose verbal and nonverbal skills were more assertive were perceived as more effective, but also often as less attractive, likable, and appropriate (Spitzberg et al., 1994). In essence, when the underpinnings of the assessment paradigm are changed, a Dale Carnegie nightmare emerged in which large numbers of people were being trained "how to influence people and lose friends." Assessment is inherently ideological and theoretical, and before any assessment project is undertaken, the developers and users would do well to examine these underpinnings.

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CHAPTER

4

## METHODS OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

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An overwhelming body of evidence indicates that the possession of adequate social skills is necessary for maintaining social, psychological, and in many cases, occupational well-being. People who lack adequate social skills appear to be at risk for developing a truly amazing range of problems. In his seminal paper on the conceptualization of social skills, McFall (1982) noted that the documented association between social skills and different clinical problems "has become so widespread that it begins to strain our credibility and arouse our suspicions" (p. 2). Perhaps it follows logically that efforts to teach social skills have been applied so widely, to so many different populations, and as a treatment for so many different problems that they, too, are on the verge of straining believability. For example, social skills training has been used to treat schizophrenia (Smith, Bellack, & Liberman, 1996), social anxiety (Curran & Gilbert, 1975), loneliness (Adams, Openshaw, Bennion, Mills, & Noble, 1988), juvenile delinquency (Cunliffe, 1992), anorexia nervosa (Pillay & Crisp, 1981), alcoholism (Monti, Gulliver, & Myers, 1994), emotional and antisocial behavior problems in children (Verduyn, Lord, & Forrest, 1990), as well as depression (Becker, Heimberg, & Bellack, 1987). Aside from these clinical applications, social skills training has been used to improve the social and psychological functioning of people with mental retardation (Foxx & Faw, 1992) and diabetes (Gross, Johnson, Wildman, & Mullett, 1981) and to improve job performance in prisoners (Calabrese & Hawkins, 1988), increase marital satisfaction (Jacobson, 1982), prevent drug abuse in adolescents (Tobler, Lessard, Marshall, Ochshorn, & Roona, 1999), and enhance adolescent friendships (Inderbitzen-Pisaruk & Foster, 1990).

As evident from this partial list of applications, over the past several decades social skills training has begun to take on the status of a "cure-all" and "universal protector." On closer examination, however, it becomes rapidly evident that "social skills training" is at best a loosely defined concept that takes on a variety of forms and functions, some examples of which have little in common with others.

## WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS?

Although a thorough review of the definition(s) of *social skills* is beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Wilson, this volume), it is instructive to examine at least briefly what is meant by social skills to better understand how and why they are taught. First, readers should be aware that the concept of social skills is also referenced with a number of related terms that include interpersonal skill, interpersonal competence, social competence, and communication competence. In the literature, these terms tend to be used interchangeably. Some have tried to differentiate among these terms; however, such distinctions have never been widely recognized.

Conceptual definitions of social skills have ranged from “the ability to maximize the rate of positive reinforcement and minimize the strength of punishment from others” (Libet & Lewinsohn, 1973, p. 311) and the “ability to express feelings or to communicate interests and desires to others” (Liberman, King, DeRisi, & McCann, 1975, p. 1), to “the ability to express both positive and negative feelings in the interpersonal context without suffering consequent loss of social reinforcement” (Hersen & Bellack, 1977, p. 512). Others have defined the construct as “the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he may successfully accomplish his own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactants” (Wiemann, 1977, p. 198), and “the process of generating skilled behavior directed to a goal” (Trower, 1982, p. 418).

Although it has been rightfully pointed out that “there is no clear consensus on what social skill is” (Trower, 1982, p. 407), it has been argued elsewhere that at an abstract level, one can distill most of these definitions of social skills (and their associated aliases) to the ability to interact with other people in a way that is both appropriate and effective (Segrin, 1992, 2000; see also Spitzberg & Cupach, 1985, 1989). Appropriateness indicates that the actor’s behavior does not violate social norms, values, or expectations, that is, it is not viewed negatively by others. Effectiveness indicates that the actor’s behavior achieves or accomplishes his or her intended goal(s) in that interaction.

Despite the fact that appropriateness and effectiveness appear as dominant themes in most conceptualizations of social skills, the possibilities for that which constitutes appropriate and effective social behavior are extensive. Perhaps this is one reason a clear, comprehensive, and widely accepted definition of social skills may never come to fruition. Social skills are complex and, at least to some extent, influenced by person and situation. Trying to define social skills in a sentence is like trying to define some complex motor skill, such as being a good baseball player, in one sentence. There are many components to these skills. To produce a skilled performance, many component skills have to work in combination, and they have to be responsive to the roles and demands of various situations.

There are two major conceptual models that are followed, at least implicitly, by most who study social skills (McFall, 1982). The first is the trait model that treats social skills as a fairly stable and enduring personality trait. The second conceptual model is the molecular model that examines situation-specific behaviors in social contexts. In the social skills training literature, the molecular model is dominant, thus recipients are often taught particular behavioral skills such as appropriate use of eye contact, facial expressiveness, verbally expressing interest in a conversational partner, and other microscopic components of effective communication behavior.

## WHY TEACH PEOPLE SOCIAL SKILLS?

The essential rationale behind virtually all versions of social skills training is to improve the quality of life and well-being of the trainee. The mechanism by which this improvement is attempted is through enhanced social relations. By their inherent nature, human beings are social, gregarious animals. All but the most disturbed individuals seek at least some harmonious relationships with others. We do so out of both affiliative and instrumental needs, which if unmet can lead to profound distress.

The “theory,” if one can call it that, behind social skills training is to teach the trainee those ways of interacting that will be pleasing and attractive to others (to enhance affiliations with them) and to interact in ways that are effective (to enhance the attainment of instrumental goals through interacting with others). It is generally assumed that enhancement of these skills will ultimately lead to greater personal happiness and success, as well as to more positive and less negative affect in those who interact with the trainee.

This assumption, which is rarely stated explicitly, may explain why social skills training has become so prolific in the past 25 years. Increased satisfaction and effectiveness in relationships with other people would appear to benefit virtually anyone. From such a vantage point the opportunities and contexts for social skills training seem endless, and as we demonstrate here, social skills training has been effectively applied to a broad range of problems and populations.

## WHY DO SOME PEOPLE LACK SOCIAL SKILLS?

There are several reasons why some people might lack social skills and thus benefit from social skills training. Liberman, DeRisi, and Mueser (1989) identified four factors that can account for deficits in social skills. First, some people have never learned to interact effectively with others because they never had an appropriate role model from whom to learn. The vast majority of our social skills are acquired through informal observational learning, which places a high premium on the quality of our role models. Their absence will clearly impede the acquisition of effective social skills. Second, some people experience psychosocial problems that cause their social skills to deteriorate. People who develop depression, social anxiety, loneliness, alcoholism, and schizophrenia for example tend to become socially withdrawn and uncomfortable around other people. This leads to an atrophy of social skills, partly because of disuse and partly because of the way that psychological symptoms can disrupt social behavior. Third, environmental stressors can interfere with socially skilled behavior. Sometimes people with good social skills experience traumatic and stressful events in their lives that leave deep psychological wounds and scars that cause them to become anxious or withdrawn around other people or types of people. This can precipitate a dramatic decline in socially skilled behavior. Finally, Liberman et al. argued that in some cases our social environments may change in such a way as to reduce or take away positive social reinforcements that were once available. Incarceration, becoming homeless, entry into a nursing home, loss of a job, and moving to a new location all represent drastic environmental changes that can cause certain social skills to fall into disuse and atrophy.

In addition to the factors identified by Liberman et al. (1989), several other factors may contribute to a repertoire of poor social skills in some people. At a fundamental level, it is obvious that skilled social behavior is challenging. Human communication is a complex behavior that draws on cognitive processes such as decision making,

social perception and interpretation, and behavioral processes such as speech and nonverbal behavioral production and appropriate timing of behaviors, to name but a few. Additionally, some people may lack opportunities to practice social skills. For example, immediately after divorce, many people experience serious difficulties in trying to get back into dating. This is because throughout the years of marriage, people rarely have occasion to practice their dating skills. This contributes to an impoverished skills repertoire that may create anxiety about dating. Some may also lack a history of helpful feedback. Parents and teachers play an obvious role in socializing children. For a variety of reasons some people may be socialized in environments in which helpful feedback from such sources is unavailable. The absence of such feedback and presence of "nonhelpful" feedback such as excessive criticism and verbal aggressiveness may damage self-esteem, create social anxiety, and abbreviate the development of effective social skills.

Even a momentary consideration of the factors that lead to poor social skills suggests that the majority of the population are vulnerable to at least one such phenomenon at some point in the life span. This may be yet another reason so many people seem to have problems with social skills and why social skills training has been so widely applied to populations ranging from children (Van Hasselt, Hersen, Whitehill, & Bellack, 1979) to elderly adults (Gambrill, 1986).

## **WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF LACKING SOCIAL SKILLS?**

It is a sad reality, but there appears to be no escape from the consequences of social skills deficits. The range of problems that have been linked with social skills deficits pervades virtually all aspects of life. Socially, there is evidence to suggest that people with poor social skills are less popular among their peers (Hartup, Glazer, & Charlesworth, 1967) and less satisfied and successful with their romantic relationships or marriages (Burleson, 1995; Flora & Segrin, 1999) than those with better social skills. Psychologically, we know that people with poor social skills are at risk for depression (Segrin, 2000), social anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995), loneliness (Jones, Hobbs, & Hockenbury, 1982), and alcoholism (Miller & Eisler, 1977) to name but a few of the clinical problems that have been linked to social skills deficits. Occupationally, problematic social skills have been associated with academic underachievement (Hughes & Sullivan, 1988) and bad conduct discharges from the military (Roff, 1961).

Of course, an established association between poor social skills and social, psychological, and occupational problems does not prove that poor social skills caused these problems. As mentioned earlier, for some people, these problems cause the poor social skills. Nevertheless, social skills training can be and has been fruitfully applied to diminishing many such problems (Brady, 1984; Ogilvy, 1994). In contexts in which poor social skills play a role in the etiology of such problems, training can serve as a preventative measure. In contexts where poor social skills are the consequent of such a problem, training can treat one of most important symptoms of that problem and enhance the well-being of the trainee.

## **SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING PROCEDURES**

### **Theoretical and Historical Background**

Social skills training is deeply rooted in behaviorally oriented and learning-oriented theories. Skinner's (1938) pioneering work on behavioral shaping indicated that new

behaviors could be taught through the process of positive or negative reinforcement. To this day, this mechanism is extensively employed in most social skills training programs.

Many recognize Wolpe's (1958) book *Psychotherapy by Reciprocal Inhibition* as instrumental in forming what would later become social skills training. Wolpe emphasized treatment by focusing on observable behavior. Furthermore, he argued that problems were best treated by teaching people to replace maladaptive behaviors with new, more functional behaviors such as relaxation and assertion. His behavioral approach was further refined (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966) and put into practice in several different forms, one of which was assertion or assertiveness training that was in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, assertiveness is seen as only a small part of a larger program of social skills training.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) would have an indelible impact on the practice of social skills training. The demonstration that people could and would learn behaviors through observing another person performing those behaviors launched one of the most popular social skills training techniques that continues to this day: modeling. The early phases of many social skills training programs include modeling by the therapist or trainer, with encouragement for the client to imitate the performed behavior. The social skills training procedures that are most commonly employed today are applications of basic learning and behavioral principles that were spelled out decades ago.

## Training Procedures

Social skills can be taught through a variety of different methods and procedures. The more effective social skills training programs generally employ multiple procedures, often in a sequential fashion. Although many social skills training programs do not employ each and every one of the procedures and steps outlined below, most include at least some of these components. The training procedures described in this section are drawn from some of the better developed and established social skills training programs (e.g., Becker et al., 1987; Kopelowicz, Corrigan, Schade, & Liberman, 1998; Liberman et al., 1989; Trower, 1995).

**Assessment.** Although space limitations preclude an extensive discussion of social skills assessment (but see Spitzberg, this volume), it should be pointed out that social skills training is most effective when started with an assessment phase. Because social skills training is a nonspecific technique, decisions invariably have to be made about which types of social skills to focus on during the training. Given the extensive and complex nature of social interaction skills, it is unwise to assume that all people in need of social skills training are in fact in need of the same type of intervention.

The need to start social skills training with assessment is similar to the requirements of coaching athletes. If one had to coach a new baseball team, and had to do so over the course of only a few hours per week, it would be wise to first determine what the particular needs of the team and the various individuals are (e.g., hitting, throwing, base running, fielding, etc.). To proceed otherwise might result in spending time teaching skills that the players already possess and missing skill areas in which the players genuinely need improvement.

Liberman et al. (1989) stressed the value of starting the assessment phase by determining whether the potential trainees are even realistic candidates for social skills training. These authors suggested that, at a minimum, clients should be able to follow

instructions and pay attention in a structured learning process over the course of 15 to 90 minutes. They have to be able to use and understand simple sentences, listen to other people for 3 to 5 minutes without interruption, and perhaps most important, express a desire to improve the quality of their communication with other people. Without these prerequisites intact, the likelihood of successful social skills training is low. Keep in mind that the medium through which social skills are taught is social interaction, yet people who really need social skills training by definition have some problems with social interaction. For this reason it is important to determine the extent to which these problems will interfere with effective learning through social interaction. This is a particular concern when dealing with serious social perception, memory, or other cognitive problems (Bellack, 1997).

After determining candidacy for training, the second part of the assessment phase must entail an assessment of what communication skills are lacking or need improvement. This assessment, or "task analysis" (Smith et al., 1996), tends to be more individualized and will be influenced by the ultimate goals and needs of the trainer and trainee. To a large extent, the results of these assessments often dictate the focal points of subsequent training.

***Direct Instruction and Coaching.*** Jacobson (1982) stated that "at the core of every treatment program lies a set of systematic instructions for communicating more effectively" (p. 231). One of the most basic ways to teach is through verbal explanation. This can be achieved in a lecture format, small group discussion, more casual one-on-one conversation, and even through written manuals. Social skills training is often commenced with instructions about how to use various communication behaviors effectively, complete with a rationale for how and why the behaviors function as they do. Without any coaching or direct instruction, there is a risk that clients will learn the behavior without also learning the reason for using it, and without learning when and why to use it.

An example of direct instruction or coaching might involve explaining the functions and use of eye contact. The social skills trainer would start by stating that eye contact is one of the important ways that we show interest and attention to our conversational partners. This could be followed by information about what others infer from someone who makes too much or too little eye contact. Afterward, the trainer might talk about situations in which it is important to make eye contact, such as when making a request, when listening to a conversational partner, and so on.

To illustrate, Calabrese and Hawkins (1988) provided social skills training to female prisoners to increase their job-related skills. An early part of their training program involved definitions and descriptions of behaviors that had been identified as problematic (from their assessment phase) such as excessive flirtation, cursing, threatening others, and socializing involving non-work-related talk. An important part of their coaching, then, involved explaining the rationale for changing the behavior.

In their training program to reduce dating anxiety, Curran and Gilbert (1975) started with an instructional presentation and discussion of various skills. Their presentation covered giving and receiving compliments, talking about feelings, listening skills, assertion, nonverbal methods of communication, techniques for handling periods of silence, planning and asking for dates, enhancing physical attractiveness, and approaches to physical intimacy problems. When discussing these, the trainers would elaborate on the importance of the behavior and even illustrate the impact of the behavior with examples from their own lives. Although the instructional coverage of Calabrese and Hawkins (1988) and Curran and Gilbert (1975) differ dramatically

in scope, both are clearly reflective of the ultimate goal of the training program (i.e., enhancing job performance skills, reducing anxiety about dating).

**Modeling.** Modeling figures prominently among the methods by which humans acquire new behaviors (Bandura, 1977). As Bandura noted, "Virtually all behavioral, cognitive, and affective learning from direct experience can be achieved vicariously by observing people's actions and the consequences for them" (Bandura, 1999, p. 170). Capitalizing on this phenomenon, most social skills trainers are inclined to include modeling as an important part of the overall training package. In fact Liberman et al. (1989) argued that "the most effective way to teach complex social behavior is through modeling and imitation" (p. 102). Modeling is presented either on videotape or in live depiction. The purpose of modeling is to demonstrate the effective, and sometimes ineffective, use of certain behaviors. People who have difficulty saying and doing certain things when in the presence of others are sometimes more comfortable doing so after seeing someone else do it first. For this reason modeling is an important and effective component of many social skills training programs (Eisler, Hersen, & Miller, 1973).

In Curran and Gilbert's (1975) study on social skills training to reduce dating anxiety, subjects viewed videotaped presentations of models for 10 to 15 minutes. In the first scene, the actor modeled a deficiency in a particular skill. The therapists then asked subjects to comment on how the model might have behaved more appropriately. Following this discussion, a videotape of the same model was shown, this time behaving in a more skillful manner. This contrastive approach helps to identify the critical aspects of skilled performance by focusing attention on the particular behavior(s) that yields a problematic performance in one scene and an effective performance in another.

In a clever application of modeling, Michelson et al. (1983) worked with a group of children who exhibited social adjustment problems. The first step of the modeling involved the therapist demonstrating various interpersonal problems. The goals of this demonstration included identification of interpersonal problems and generation of appropriate goals for solving them. After the therapist modeled the behaviors for the children, Michelson then had the children model various behaviors to each other. Combined with other methods of social skills training, this behavioral program significantly improved participants' social skills, and these improvements were still evident at a 1-year follow-up.

There are several steps that social skills trainers can take to increase the likelihood of successful modeling and acquisition of the new behavior by the trainee (Bandura, 1977; Smith, 1982; Trower, 1995; Trower, Bryant, & Argyle, 1978). First, multiple models demonstrating the same behavior, or the same model repeating the demonstration, will increase the potential for learning the behavior. This is partly due to the repetition of presentation inherent with multiple models. Additionally, people become increasingly likely to feel that they can perform a behavior as they see more people model that behavior. In this way, multiple models challenge the idea that only one to two super-capable people can perform the behavior. Second, the more similar the model is to the client, in terms of sex, age, and other characteristics, the more likely the trainee is to imitate that model. If people who possess the same qualities as we do are capable of performing a behavior, then it stands to reason that we, too, should be able to perform the behavior. Models who are similar to the target implicitly send the message that "you possess the qualities needed to perform this behavior." Third, models who are rewarded for their actions are more likely to be

imitated. If the modeling can build in interaction with a second actor or confederate who rewards the model, the modeling process will be more effective. This is the cornerstone of observational learning: When we see people rewarded for performing a behavior, we are more likely to enact that behavior. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) explains that we learn if-then relationships by observing other people. So for example, someone might learn "if you ask politely, then you are likely to get what you want." This could be learned by observing others who make requests politely and get rewarded by having their request responded to favorably.

Modeling works because it gives people a template or guide for their own behavior. Bandura referred to this as "making the unobservable observable" (Bandura, 1986, p. 66). He noted that people cannot observe their own behavior. However, the observation of others' behavior gives people a mental picture of how the behavior can and should be performed. The primary outcome of successful modeling is the production of perceived *response efficacy*. This is the feeling that "this task can be accomplished" or "there are things that can be done to solve this problem or accomplish this goal." Response efficacy is an important component in reducing anxiety in social situations. When people have no sense of response efficacy, they may feel that the situation is hopeless and simply avoid it all together. The use of models that are similar to the self may also contribute to perceived *self-efficacy*. This is the feeling that "I can accomplish this task," or "there are things that I can do to solve this problem or accomplish this goal." Modeling is one important source of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1999).

One suggestion for using modeling is to avoid having the model give a masterful performance, but rather demonstrate a coping performance (Trower et al., 1978). In this way, the model shows that he or she is having some difficulty with the behavior, but is handling it effectively nevertheless. This method of modeling is useful in that some people become easily and immediately discouraged on realizing that things are not going exactly as planned or desired. Watching others struggle through these challenges may create more realistic and less perfectionistic expectations, in addition to demonstrating the value of perseverance in the face of difficulties. Also, social skills trainers are reminded that imitating a behavior is easier than producing it on one's own, and therefore modeling should eventually be phased out in favor of role plays and homework assignments that call for trainees to produce the behavior on their own (Jacobson, 1982).

**Role Playing.** The logical next step after modeling is role playing. Whereas coaching and modeling are passive techniques in that trainees simply absorb information presented by others, role playing calls for production and practice of actual behavior. The purpose of role playing is to get clients to practice the desired behaviors in a controlled setting where they can be observed and from which feedback and reinforcement can be offered (see Greene, this volume).

Typically, role plays are set up with a description of a fictitious scene that resembles the problematic situation in which new behaviors are desired. For example, in their social skills training with alcoholics, Foy and his colleagues had subjects role play drink refusal (Foy, Miller, Eisler, & O'Toole, 1976). The scene was set up as follows: "You are at your brother's house. It is a special occasion and your whole family and several friends are there. Your brother says, 'How about a beer?'" (p. 1341). The therapist who played the role of the brother would also counter refusals from the subjects with statements such as, "One drink won't hurt you." In their social skills training for adults with mental retardation, Matson and Senatore

(1981) focused on vocational and occupational skills. One of their role plays was set up by saying “You are at the workshop and have just received your paycheck for this month. You had missed several days of work last week. Therefore, your paycheck was much smaller than usual. Instead of receiving \$8.00, you received \$4.00. You are mad because you need the money. (Role model prompt) ‘Well, how do you like your paycheck?’” (p. 373). In all cases, the clients are instructed to act as if they were actually in that situation.

Of course, the use of role-playing in social skills training goes beyond the simple production and practice of behavior on the part of the trainee. It is vital that the trainer provide a detailed critique and plenty of positive reinforcement for appropriate and desired behaviors (Kopelowicz et al., 1998; Liberman et al., 1989). It is recommended that clients rerun the scene, performing it several times (Liberman et al., 1989), as two or three “takes” (at a minimum) are often required to perform the desired response adequately. The use of rewards for successful role playing is predicated on the assumption that the behaviors that are positively reinforced are more likely to be repeated in contexts outside of the training environment. It is essential that there be proportionally more positive reinforcement than negative criticism (Trower et al., 1978). It is rewarding to receive positive feedback, and this can intensify motivation and effort. Negative criticism, on the other hand, can be discouraging if it is too abundant and may inhibit subsequent attempts at performing the behavior. Trower et al. also noted that feedback must emphasize effect rather than appearance. For example, it is better to tell a trainee that “You made me feel like you did not know what you were talking about” rather than “you looked confused.” The emphasis on effect over appearance is predicted on the assumption that “skilled” behavior is ultimately a social perception that has to be created in others. A focus on appearance of the behavior may divert attention away from this impression management process in lieu of self-focused attention. In all cases, feedback following role plays should be detailed and specific, with a commentary on particular behaviors such as posture, vocal tone, eye contact, specific utterances, and so forth. Sometimes in group contexts, other clients are requested to offer feedback (a useful technique for getting them to practice social perception skills).

One of the reasons that role plays are such a useful part of social skills training is because they not only allow the client to practice the desired behaviors in a controlled setting, but they allow the trainer to make simple assessments of the client’s progress. Coaching and modeling alone provide the trainer with little feedback about the client’s understanding and readiness to demonstrate the focal skills.

**Homework Assignments.** Homework assignments call for in vivo practice of targeted behaviors. They are not for the debutante in social skills training. Without successful training and verification of primary social interactional skills through the techniques discussed in the previous paragraphs, homework assignments can set the client up for disaster. Of all the techniques covered in this section, homework assignments require the highest level of existing skill on the part of the trainee. At the same time they have perhaps the highest potential for payoff in that the client puts into actual practice the skills learned in the training setting.

Homework assignments that are commonly employed in social skills training include things such as asking directions from a bus driver, going to a business and asking for a job application, and calling up a friend and making a lunch date. Typically, homework assignments are graduated by difficulty, and “easier” tasks are assigned first. For example, a client might be asked to solicit information from the bus

driver first, and then to make a lunch date with a friend after successfully completing other “easy” homework assignments.

In a methodological tour de force in homework assignments, Arkowitz and his associates developed a “practice dating” training procedure to reduce dating anxiety in college students (Arkowitz, Hinton, Perl, & Himadi, 1978). This training program consisted of a series of practice dates, each with a different partner, over the course of approximately 6 weeks. The ingenious aspect of their design is that both dating partners were enrolled in the training program. Consequently, the fear of rejection was drastically reduced as both parties volunteered for participation in the program and supposedly wanted the dates. The program requires some careful screening and instructions for participants but, once in place, allows for repeated homework assignments in a semicontrolled context. The assignments provided little more than a name and phone number of a potential partner, with the instruction to call them, set up, and go on a date within 1 week. All the details of the date (who makes the call, where to go, what to talk about) were left entirely up to the participants. Participants were reminded that the goal of the training program was to provide them with practice in dating, not to locate an ideal partner. The effectiveness of this program at reducing dating anxiety is a testimony to the power of homework assignments.

Like role plays, homework assignments often benefit from a “debriefing” during which the client and trainer discuss and critique the performances. Here again, the use of praise and positive reinforcement is often used to enhance the effectiveness of the learning process. It has also been recommended that trainers appropriately prepare clients for the possibility of failures in future homework assignments (Liberman et al., 1989) and explain how people cannot realistically expect success in all of their social interactions. The goal of social skills training is simply to increase the probability of success in social interactions.

The adept trainer will capitalize on problems or failures that arise in the context of these homework assignments to highlight what went wrong and how it can be corrected. This “learn from your mistakes” approach can be an effective component of homework assignments, so long as these interpersonal failures are not disproportionately represented in the trainee’s experiences. Again, supportive feedback and encouragement are an important part of the analysis of interpersonal failures, if the trainee’s motivation level and self-esteem are to be maintained.

**Follow-Up.** The best social skills training programs involve some form of follow-up. Communication skills, like most other skills, will decay unless practiced somewhat diligently. There is little reason to believe that social skills training can be successfully accomplished via one-shot training procedures that teach skills before sending people out into the world with no follow-up. It is essential to monitor the clients’ successes and failures, with attempts to fine-tune their performances.

Follow-up training often begins with a reassessment of the clients’ social skills. There is some evidence to suggest that this could be a sobering endeavor for the trainer as performance improvements following social skills training do not always last far into the future (Scott, Himadi, & Keane, 1983). These reassessments are then followed by “refresher” training procedures that could involve more coaching, role plays, and homework assignments, for example.

## Summary

Like teaching any other complex skill, social skills training must start with an assessment and identification of clients’ existing skills. Training effectiveness is enhanced

by matching the skills training to the specific needs and deficiencies of the population to be trained. The more effective social skills training programs use a multistage approach to training that incorporates different steps or “modules” in the training program. These are best presented in order of difficulty for the client starting with the easiest. This will generally commence with direct instruction and coaching in which the client is a rather passive recipient in the training process. After this, modeling, role playing with feedback, and *in vivo* homework assignments may be used. In each step, the client becomes a more active participant in the training process, as the trainer recedes into the background. For different reasons, each of these techniques are effective in teaching social skills; however, each is best employed as part of a larger more comprehensive training package that capitalizes on the unique strengths of each training method, while hopefully canceling out the weaknesses of each.

## FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES TO SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

Functional approaches to social skills training represent the various purposes for which the social skills training is deployed. Social skills training has been successfully employed in the service of several different functions that include therapy, prevention, and upgrading. In this section, we review these three most common functional approaches to social skills training.

### Therapy and Treatment

Without doubt, the most common functional approach to social skills training is to offer it in the service of therapy for some problem (e.g., Adams et al., 1988; Argyle, Bryant, & Trower, 1974; Liberman et al., 1984; Reddon, Pope, Dorais, & Pullan, 1996). As noted earlier, the range of problems to which social skills training has been therapeutically employed is broad. The tacit assumption behind the prescription of social skills training for various problems is that people with these problems have interpersonal difficulties. In some cases the interpersonal difficulties may play a causal role in the development of the problem that brought the individual to therapeutic attention, as in the case of social anxiety, loneliness, and alcoholism. In other cases, the interpersonal problems are secondary to some larger problem, as in the case of mental retardation and stroke. Of course, in many instances the interpersonal problem and the clinical problem are entwined in a vicious cycle. Regardless of the causal path, it is assumed that social skills training will bring improvements to the interpersonal landscape of the afflicted individual. In so doing, it is believed that the overall quality of life for the afflicted individual will improve and bring concomitant improvements in symptoms of the problem.

The track record for social skills training as a form of therapy is impressive. An early review of controlled clinical outcome studies with psychiatric patients showed that social skills training is often effective at bringing improvements in both social skills as well as symptoms of the various problems (Brady, 1984). A meta-analysis of roughly this same body of literature showed that social skills training had a moderate to strong effect in increasing social skills and decreasing psychiatric symptoms (Dilk & Bond, 1996). Another meta-analysis that compared treatments for social phobia showed that social skills training was significantly more effective than a waiting-list control condition and generally equivalent in effectiveness when compared with cognitive restructuring and homework assignments (Taylor, 1996). It should be noted,

however, that social skills training did not appear to be any more effective at treating social phobia than a placebo condition.

In an impressive demonstration of the long-term effectiveness of social skills training, Foxx and Faw (1992) conducted an 8-year follow-up on subjects from three studies on social skills training for adults with mild to moderate mental retardation. Their analyses indicated that all subjects exhibited social skills that were superior to their baseline assessment and that approximately one third exhibited levels of social skills that were higher than posttest levels. Because mental retardation is not a problem that can be reversed as effectively as loneliness or social anxiety, probably the best that could be expected from these analyses is the prolonged maintenance and in some cases even improved social skills over posttest levels.

Like any therapy, social skills training is not a panacea and does not necessarily bring improvements to all people with any problem. There is no shortage of examples of clinical trials in which social skills training brought improvements only for some participants, and often it does not appear any more effective than other commonly employed treatments. Nonetheless, the preponderance of data indicates that the idea of treating problems such as depression, loneliness, schizophrenia, alcoholism, and mental retardation through improvements in interpersonal functioning (that are pursuant to social skills training) is a sound one.

## **Prevention**

The recognition that social skills training could be an effective treatment for various problems led some to apply it to "at-risk" populations who have yet to develop particular problems. Thus, over the past 15 to 20 years, social skills training has begun to be used increasingly as a preventative measure. The assumption behind such applications is that the interpersonal problems arising from poor social skills will themselves often lead to greater problems such as drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, and depression, for example. Enhancing premorbid social skills is, therefore, expected to have a prophylactic effect.

Many preventative applications in social skills training have been aimed at children and adolescents. A classic example of this approach is the use of social skills training to prevent drug abuse in adolescents (e.g., Botvin, 1983; Tobler et al., 1999). Arguing that substance abuse results from an amalgamation of social-influence processes and personal shortcomings such as low self-esteem and impulsivity, Botvin (1983) developed a "life skills" training program as a preventative intervention. This program is designed to increase personal and social skills, with particular emphasis on skills for coping with pro-substance-use social influences. These include persuasion resistance, verbal and nonverbal skills, and anxiety-reduction skills, all of which are taught with such standard techniques as instruction, modeling, rehearsal and feedback, and homework assignments. Botvin has produced impressive data concerning the preventative effectiveness of this program: a 75% reduction in new cigarette smokers over a 3-month period, and a 56% reduction in regular smoking over a 1-year follow-up period. The program appears similarly effective in reducing alcohol and marijuana use.

Social skills training has also been used to combat teen pregnancies in inner-city school-age mothers and in high school students (Glichrist & Schinke, 1983; Schinke, Blythe, & Gilchrist, 1981; Schinke, Gilchrist, & Blythe, 1980). An important component of Gilchrist et al.'s training package involved self-control and refusal skills, taught through role playing and modeling. Their results indicate that, compared

with control subjects, those in the skills training program had better knowledge of contraception, more positive attitudes toward birth control, and a lower incidence of intercourse without contraception. A more guarded view of social skills training in the prevention of teen pregnancy emerged from a recent study by Hovell et al. (1998). In this investigation, social skills training produced increases in assertiveness during condom negotiation, asking a friend about his or her sex or drug history, and discussing a friend's risk of AIDS but did not improve refusal skills. Because there were no measures of pregnancy or HIV infection in these studies, the ultimate success of the programs has yet to be determined.

Although social skills training enjoys popularity as a preventative measure, its success as a means of prevention is mixed. Some social skills training programs indeed appear to reduce the incidence of certain problems in the trained sample. For example, social skills training has been demonstrated to reduce the incidence of depression in children of divorced marriages (Zubernis, Cassidy, Gillham, Reivich, & Jaycox, 1999). However, certain social skills training programs for drug prevention, such as the DARE program (Ennett, Tobler, Ringwalt, & Flewelling, 1994) and a program for violence reduction in at-risk adolescents (Cirillo et al., 1998) have not been shown to be effective. Currently, there is some evidence to indicate that enhancing people's social skills can lead to reduced incidence of certain problematic outcomes. At the same time, it is important to note that there have been numerous attempts at social skills training to prevent or reduce the likelihood of certain undesired outcomes that have not been successful.

## "Upgrading" Skills

It has become increasingly common to see social skills training, broadly defined, applied to groups that are neither in the midst of significant clinical problems nor immediately at risk for the development of a serious problem. In such cases, social skills training programs are offered to "upgrade" or increase certain task-specific skills. Such training is usually applied to people or groups of people who are about to undergo, or have just undergone, a significant change in their social circumstances, such as premarital couples, new employees, or elderly people who have just moved into geriatric care facilities. Unlike the assumptions underlying social skills training as therapy, there is no assumption of a social disability of deficiency in these cases, but there is an identification of a new life task that may challenge existing social skills. It is assumed that by upgrading existing skills, trainees can better face the challenges of these tasks and lead a more enjoyable life as a result.

A prototypical example of social skills training to upgrade skills can be found in marriage preparation programs that are currently in vogue in American society (e.g., Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, 1986). In recognition of the alarming divorce rate, many religious and civic organizations offer premarital training or counseling programs for couples who are about to marry. In some cases, participation in such programs is an institutional requirement. These programs are rarely described as social skills training programs, but their essence is just that: teaching appropriate and effective communication skills in the marital context. These programs often have all of the ingredients of typical social skills training, including instruction and coaching, modeling, and homework assignments. As will be discussed in the section on applications, evaluations of the effectiveness as well as appropriateness of these interventions have been mixed (Markman, 1981; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, 1986).

As people age, they face new developmental challenges, and new challenges present themselves throughout the life span. The elderly are now recognized as a population for whom social skills training might prove to be beneficial (Gambrill, 1986). Gambrill identified a number of social challenges associated with aging such as planning ahead, coping with death and dying, managing contacts with professionals and service personnel, leisure skills, and relating to kin that may require new skills to be handled effectively. Training in specific social skills for dealing with these challenges holds considerable promise for enhancing quality of life among the elderly (Gambrill, 1986).

Leadership training for management employees has become commonplace (Fulmer, 1997; Metcalfe & Wright, 1986). Fulmer (1997) noted American corporations invest \$45 billion annually on management training and education. Effectiveness in this role is largely a function of the manager's social skills. Consequently, many companies have their management employees participate in development programs with a significant social or group skills component. These training programs have a long history, starting with sensitivity or T-Group training (Cooper, 1976), and variants on Outdoor Adventure Training (Creswick & Williams, 1979). Although the effectiveness of these early techniques is questionable (Metcalfe & Wright, 1986), that may have more to do with practice than principle.

Modern management training programs are generally far more comprehensive than their predecessors. These programs employ numerous components and are carried out often over the course of 6 to 12 months. Two examples reviewed by Vicere (1996) are the LeaderLab developed by the Center for Creative Leadership, and AT&T's Leadership Development Program (LDP). Developed in 1991, LeaderLab employs a series of action-oriented techniques to improve managers' effectiveness. The program starts with a series of classroom discussions (direct instruction) and progresses to exercises, simulations (role plays), and the use of learning journals. The learning journal allows the trainee to keep a log of reactions to the concepts learned as well as the development of plans for future actions. A unique aspect of LearningLab is the inclusion of a "process advisor." This individual acts as a personal coach to the trainee. Over the 6-month duration of the program this coach assists and supports the trainee both at the program site and over the telephone once the trainee is back in the work environment. The use of "personal trainers" appears to have been imported from sports training and represents an innovative and unique aspect of this skills training program.

AT&T's LDP was started in 1988 as a 2-week residential program. The objectives of the program are to create leaders and agents of change who will transform the company's culture. The LDP focuses on themes such as risk taking, influence skills, and learning from mistakes in the management process. Like LeaderLab, the program involves classroom discussions but also includes experiential exercises in which participants work in teams on an assigned task. These metaphorical role plays often demand group leadership and cooperation skills for their successful accomplishment. As part of a comprehensive skills training package, the LDP also includes "holistic activities" such as physical exercise and discussion of work-family balance, and action plans in which participants develop and document a course of action that they will pursue in their management after the program.

Vicere (1996) noted that programs such as LeaderLab and LDP have been largely successful both in terms of producing positive change in management trainees, as well as in the receipt of praise from participants. Leadership and management training programs are presently in vogue as a cost-effective means of enhancing the skills that

managers use in their day-to-day relations with their employees and customers (e.g., DuBrin, 1997; Kaagan, 1999). There is an undeniable desire for this type of social skills training within many corporations throughout the world, and this movement stands as a unique and successful application of social skills training.

## APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

In this section we examine in some detail work that is illustrative of the various rationales for social skills training: upgrading, prevention, and therapy. The coverage in these sections is somewhat skewed toward therapy, reflective of the abundant applications for social skills training in this context.

### Upgrading Skills

***Enhancing Marital Communication.*** Although divorce rates decreased in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, couples marrying for the first time still face a 50% chance that their marriage will end in divorce. Additionally, many other couples never divorce but remain in distressed or abusive relationships (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992). Marital distress and destructive marital conflict constitute major risk factors for many forms of dysfunction and psychopathology. Specifically, marital distress has been associated with higher levels of depression in adults (especially women) and conduct disorders in children (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995). Breakdowns in communication are implicated as a cause of marital dysfunction in all of the major theoretical models of marital distress; that is, communication deficits appear to be central to marital conflict, and as such, communication training is thought to be the most effective treatment for reducing it (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 1993; Jacobson, 1982).

Marital therapy is often initiated too late to repair the damage caused by years of destructive conflict. Furthermore, by the time couples become distressed and headed for divorce, they often do not have access to or fail to consider the option of treatment. A viable alternative to treating the problems of marital distress can be found in the prevention and enrichment literatures. Research evidence suggests that marital problems are easier to prevent than to modify after the fact. That is, premarital and newlywed couples are much more amenable to change-oriented programs because they tend to be younger, happier, and more emotionally engaged (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). The fundamental theoretical premise underlying prevention and enrichment programs is that couples need to learn a basic set of skills and procedures for handling negative affect and for resolving conflict (Markman, 1991). Social skills training to upgrade and enhance marital communication skills can be grouped into three general substrategies starting with marital preparation programs, progressing to marital enrichment programs, and finally to marital interventions.

***Preparation for Marriage.*** Programs that offer couples preparation for marriage (i.e., interventions for couples prior to the development of marital discord) have been available since the 1930s (Christensen & Heavey, 1999). Typically, preparation programs offer a semistructured series of meetings involving brief lectures, couple exercises, group or couple discussions, and skill practice. Most preparation programs are geared toward teaching couples a set of skills that will facilitate the maintenance

of a healthy relationship. Two meta-analyses have examined the effectiveness of preparation programs (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Hahlweg & Markman, 1988). Results indicated that the average couple in the treatment group was functioning better than were control couples but that the effects of the treatments dissipate over time. Of all of the preparation programs, the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is the only one with data showing improvements in functioning beyond 6 months (Sayers, Kohn, & Heavey, 1998).

The PREP is an empirically based intervention program designed to prevent marital distress and divorce by teaching couples the skills associated with marital success (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Lewis, 1986). It is geared toward couples who are not currently experiencing relationship difficulties and teaches them the skills that have been identified through research as predicting happy, healthy relationships, and ways in which to thwart those behaviors that are predictive of later marital distress. PREP's focus on prevention distinguishes it from other forms of therapeutic intervention. The program incorporates principles and procedures from behavioral marital therapy with an emphasis on problem-solving skills.

PREP is generally offered in two formats. The extended version consists of six weekly sessions of approximately 2 to 2.5 hours each. Groups of four to eight couples attend a series of brief lectures on communication skills and relationship issues. Each couple is then assigned to a communication consultant as they privately practice the skills. The condensed version takes place over the course of a single weekend and is typically held at a hotel. Between 20 and 40 couples listen to the lectures (direct instruction) in a large group setting and then retire to their rooms to practice the skills (homework assignments).

In an effort to assess both the short- and long-term effectiveness of PREP, Markman and his colleagues conducted the longest running longitudinal investigation of the development of marital distress and its early identification (Renick et al., 1992). Over the course of the investigation, couples have participated in each of the following research sessions: preassessment (before the intervention), postassessment (immediately following the intervention), and yearly follow-up sessions. The analyses are conducted by comparing PREP couples with decline couples (those who declined participation in or partially completed PREP) and control couples.

The effects of the PREP program appear to be fairly stable over time, with similar results emerging from the yearly follow-ups (Renick et al., 1992; Markman et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 1995). For example, at the 5-year follow-up, intervention (as compared with control and decline) couples had higher levels of positive and lower levels of negative communication skills and lower levels of marital violence. These effects are suggestive of the significant impact of the intervention on couples' functioning years after the intervention (Markman et al., 1993). More recent follow-ups have failed to detect differences between intervention couples and decline and control couples. It is unclear, however, whether this inability to detect differences is due to attenuation of intervention effects or is the result of subject attrition and the changes in the makeup of the groups as couples broke up or dropped out (Stanley et al., 1995). The fact that effect sizes and the number of significant effects have attenuated gradually since the 5-year follow-up suggests the probable value of booster sessions for couples seeking to keep their marriages both stable and happy over time.

Although the PREP program was originally developed with premarital training in mind, Markman and his colleagues have increasingly been adapting and disseminating the material with couples in all stages of relationships and have done so with positive effects (Stanley et al., 1995). For example, there are few programs that attend

to the transition for couples as they move from marital dyad to family triad, and yet the birth of a child can have a major impact on the marital relationship, sometimes resulting in increased marital conflict and decreased marital satisfaction (Stanley et al., 1995). There is reason to believe that a PREP program adapted for new parents would have a high degree of efficacy. Additionally, PREP's material is generic in terms of content, and as such, is readily adapted to differing populations and settings. In an effort to increase the exportability and generalizability of the program, Markman and colleagues are exploring ways to disseminate PREP in various religious institutions as well as internationally (e.g., Markman & Hahlweg's, 1993 German replication and extension study).

**Marital Enrichment.** The line between prevention and enrichment programs has become increasingly blurred (Johnson & Lebow, 2000). Both are geared toward the development of communication and problem-solving skills. Enrichment programs are aimed at identifying areas of relational strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of facilitating change, growth, enhancement, and development of already-present ingredients in the relationship. Most enrichment models teach skills of communication, conflict resolution, and decision making. Several studies have demonstrated the efficacy of marital enrichment programs (Giblin et al., 1985; Hof & Miller, 1981; Zimpher, 1988), and several have looked specifically at the relative effectiveness of different marital enrichment programs (Hawley & Olson, 1995; Hickmon, Protinsky, & Singh, 1997).

In a study that compared the effectiveness of two marriage enrichment programs, Hickmon et al. (1997) randomly assigned participants to one of three groups: an adventure enrichment treatment group, an Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME) treatment group, or a no-treatment control group. Adventure experiences are vaguely defined as providing a holistic experience that involves mind, body, and emotions and are based on challenges with risks for the purpose of building intimacy. ACME involves educational lessons followed by role playing and skill practicing, and it, too, is primarily concerned with increasing couples' level of mutual intimacy. Results indicated support for both treatment approaches, with the ACME program being slightly more effective than the adventure program, and both treatments being superior to the no-treatment control.

In a similar study, Hawley and Olson (1995) evaluated the effectiveness of three marital enrichment programs with a newlywed population. Learning to Live Together (Bader & Remmel, 1987) is an eight-session program consisting of viewing and discussing educational lessons presented on videotape and completing homework exercises. Growing Together (Dyer & Dyer, 1990) is also an eight-session program that relies on three primary methods: brief presentations by a group leader (direct instruction), group discussion, and private couple exercises (homework assignments). Training in Marriage Enrichment (TIME; Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1984) consists of 10 sessions, emphasizing encouragement, communication, and conflict resolution skills through the use of facilitator presentations (direct instruction), group discussion, and couple exercises (homework assignments). Couples were divided among the three treatment groups or assigned to a no-treatment control group. Results showed modest support for the three treatments relative to the control group, suggesting that the effects of enrichment on couples may not be as great as has been previously supposed. Ultimately, comparison among the three programs yielded results indicating that none was clearly superior to the others.

**Marital Intervention.** Sometimes referred to as couple therapy, marital interventions are geared toward couples who are in distress. Based on the accumulation of research findings on marital interventions compared with no treatment, couple therapy has been found to increase satisfaction (Christensen & Heavey, 1999). Although a number of different interventions for couples have been investigated, only three have more than one published study showing their effectiveness: behavioral couple therapy (BCT), cognitive behavioral couple therapy (CBCT), and emotion-focused couple therapy (EFCT).

Of all interventions, BCT has received the most thorough investigation. BCT, based on principles of social learning theory, views marital satisfaction in reinforcement terms. That is, individuals are satisfied to the extent that their ratio of reinforcement to punishment is positive. As a result, BCT is geared toward increasing levels of reinforcing exchange. The three major areas of intervention involved in BCT are behavior exchange, communication training, and problem-solving training.

In contrast to BCT, CBCT assumes that behavior is not the only thing that matters in determining levels of satisfaction, but also partners' interpretations of the behaviors. As a result, CBCT incorporates a number of cognitive restructuring strategies aimed at modifying attributions and expectancies in an effort to alter assumptions and standards. Cognitive restructuring alone has been found to be an effective treatment for marital distress (Emmelkamp et al., 1988).

EFCT, in contrast to BCT and CBCT, focuses on the emotional responses and constricted interactional patterns characteristic of maritally distressed couples (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999). Next to BCT, EFCT is the second most validated form of marital intervention (Denton, Burleson, Clark, Rodriguez, & Hobbs, 2000; Johnson & Talitman, 1997). EFCT conceptualizes distress in close relationships in terms of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). That is, the disruption of attachment bonds is implicated in the development of relationship distress through the stimulation of primary emotions such as fear of abandonment. EFCT focuses on these emotions and is used to reestablish attachment bonds. It represents a synthesis of experiential and systemic approaches, emphasizing both intrapsychic and interpersonal processes. The two main areas of intervention within EFCT are an assessment and a reprocessing of emotional experiences in an effort to restructure interaction patterns.

As far as which of the three intervention approaches is the most effective, studies that have shown the superiority of one treatment over the others have generally favored the investigator's treatment and have not been replicated (Christensen & Heavey, 1999). Because of this lack of independent replication, there is no strong evidence that any one approach is superior to the others.

## Social Skills Training With the Elderly

Evaluation of the effectiveness of social skills training for the elderly is still in the exploratory stages (Gambrill, 1986). Although most social psychological research has shown that the elderly experience increased feelings of helplessness, lack of control, and a reduction in competence, few investigations have been conducted on social skills deficits in the elderly (Furnham & Pendleton, 1983; Vaccaro, 1990). The investigations that have been conducted have mostly focused on the institutionalized elderly; however, the majority of people aged 65 and over lead independent lives and manage their own affairs. Only 5% of people over 65 live in institutions (Gambrill, 1986).

One of the particular problems that older people face is that of developing and maintaining friendships (see Sampter, this volume). A substantial number of elderly people live alone and are lonely, and as such, experience some degree of social isolation (Hollin & Trower, 1988). Factors that contribute to the development of social isolation include retirement, physical disability, and the loss of significant others through illness or death (Hollin & Trower, 1988; Praderas & MacDonald, 1986). In terms of the institutionalized elderly, an additional factor seems to be the relational style residents learn as a result of the contingencies operating in geriatric settings. That is, within the institution, staff generally interact with residents only to provide some sort of care; interaction for the sole purpose of socializing is infrequent. This is thought to result in the establishment of a contingency whereby dependent and self-centered behaviors are reinforced and independent and relationship-oriented social behaviors are extinguished (Praderas & MacDonald, 1986). The goal of social skills training with the elderly is the development of competence in social interaction, which is thought to have potentially beneficial effects on both personal adjustment and quality of life (Furnham & Pendleton, 1983).

Praderas and MacDonald (1986) evaluated the effectiveness of a comprehensive training program for enhancing the conversational skills of socially isolated and impaired elderly nursing home residents. Four elderly residents (designated by the nursing home's social worker as socially isolated with moderate cognitive and/or emotional impairment) volunteered to participate in the program. Subjects were trained on four content-related conversational components: expressing common courtesies, making positive self-disclosures, asking questions, and making interjections and acknowledgements. The training procedures included instructions, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, feedback, and reinforcement. Results showed positive effects with all four subjects, suggesting that social skills training programs can be efficacious for socially isolated and impaired elderly persons.

Fernandez-Ballesteros, Izal, Diaz, Gonzalez, and Souto (1988) designed a conversational skills training program for the institutionalized elderly, the aim of which was to produce improvement in social interaction. Sixteen residents in a care home for the elderly volunteered and were trained in a social skills program geared toward enhancing conversational skills. Subjects were randomly assigned to three groups, one experimental and two control (placebo and waiting list). The techniques used in the experimental condition were behavioral rehearsal, feedback, modeling, discriminative reinforcement, verbal instructions, and homework assignments.

Relative to the control groups, experimental subjects showed significant increases in conversational skills and assertive responses and decreases in aggressive and inhibited responses. A follow-up assessment, conducted 3 months after the initial investigation, revealed that these positive changes remained, suggesting the potential utility of social skills training programs for the institutionalized elderly.

The studies reviewed above provide encouraging evidence for the effectiveness of behavioral interventions; however, the social validity of these approaches remains limited (Fisher & Carstensen, 1990). Specifically, treatment effects have rarely been observed to generalize outside of the experimental setting or to be maintained over time, and this could be due, at least in part, to the fact that elderly individuals are rarely involved in determining their own treatment goals. In a study designed to overcome both of these limitations, Fisher and Carstensen (1990) investigated the efficacy of training elderly nursing home residents in the use of general behavior principles so that they could more effectively influence their social environments. Three nursing home residents, ranging in age from 74 to 89, were selected from a pool of residents

identified as expressing dissatisfaction in their current living situation, complaining of problems such as loneliness or boredom. During a preliminary interview, a social situation that was identified as problematic for all three of the subjects was initiating and maintaining a conversation.

Prior to and at the completion of training sessions (assessment), direct observations of social interactions with staff, visitors, or other residents were conducted during structured (e.g., meals) and unstructured activities. Additionally, a behavioral role-play test was administered prior to and at the completion of training, consisting of nine social situations described as being problematic for nursing home residents. Subjects listened to the nine tape-recorded situations and were asked to imagine themselves in the situation and to respond out loud, as if they were actually experiencing the situation. Training was conducted individually, in hour-long sessions, where subjects received direct instruction in the use of a specific skill (e.g., initiating conversation).

The training format included the following steps: problem presentation, coaching content, behavioral principles training, modeling, role-playing, feedback, and discussion. The procedure was repeated during each session until the subject achieved mastery of the specific skill in two rehearsals. As a result, the number of training sessions varied across subjects. The results of the study indicated that subjects were able to identify social situations that presented problems for them, and observations of their behavior in their environments indicated that they were able to learn skills that enabled them to increase the frequency and quality of their social interactions. Ultimately, allowing subjects to determine their own treatment goals and teaching principles applicable to a broad range of situations not only empowers the individual, but enhances the transfer and maintenance of skills to the natural environment.

## **PREVENTION**

### **Preventing Relationship Problems Due to Dating Anxiety**

It may be plausible to consider social skills training to reduce dating anxiety as a form of therapy rather than prevention. However, the long-term goal behind this application of social skills training is to prevent significant problems in the development of romantic relationships by helping people manage their anxiety associated with such relationships and interactions. Therefore, this application entails both the management of current social difficulties and the prevention of long-term maladjustment. Social skills training with adolescents and emerging adults has proven to be useful for addressing normal social problems, such as assertiveness, heterosexual interaction, relations with authority figures, job-interview skills, and delinquency, as well as abnormal or clinical difficulties, such as mental handicap, autism, aggression, and learning disabilities (Hollin & Trower, 1988).

Interpersonal anxiety, which can be generated by interactions with members of the opposite sex, is pervasive within the adolescent and young adult population (Essau, Conradt, & Petermann, 1999). The inability to interact effectively with members of the opposite sex can be a severe behavioral deficit, leading to negative consequences for the individual later in the course of the life span. Individuals who suffer from heterosocial anxiety may never progress to more intimate relationships and marriage (Arkowitz et al., 1978). Social anxiety has also been found to be associated with other problems such as depression and substance use disorders (Essau et al., 1999; Faravelli et al., 2000) and is thought to stem, at least in part, from a deficit in social and interpersonal skill (Hope & Heimberg, 1990). Social skills training,

aimed at alleviating heterosocial anxiety, may also have positive effects on other areas of the individual's life and as such is geared toward not only the management of current social difficulties, but toward the prevention of long-term maladjustment as well.

In one of the premier studies of social skills training for dating anxiety, Curran and Gilbert (1975) compared the effectiveness of social skills training with systematic desensitization in reducing dating anxiety and improving interpersonal skill. They hypothesized that although both treatments would be effective in reducing heterosocial anxiety, the skills training program would produce more significant increases in interpersonal skill. Their sample consisted of 35 college students, who were randomly assigned to one of the two treatment conditions or to a minimal contact control group. Participant inclusion in the study was based on pretest scores indicating the presence of heterosocial anxiety, as well as an expressed interest in the experiment. Both self-report and behavioral indicators of heterosocial anxiety and social skill were collected at a posttreatment session and then again at a 6-month follow-up session.

The results of the study supported the hypothesis that both treatments would be equally successful in reducing heterosocial anxiety. Both treatment groups were significantly improved in comparison to the minimal contact control group. The hypothesis that the skills training group would demonstrate greater increases in interpersonal skill received mixed support. Specifically, at posttest, the two treatment groups did not differ significantly from one another; however, at the follow-up session 6 months later, the skills training group demonstrated significant improvement in interpersonal skill relative to the systematic desensitization group. This finding suggests that the effects of social skills training are enduring and may be generalizable to other areas of the individual's life as well. Other studies have found similar results with regard to the efficacy of social skills training with heterosocially anxious adolescents (Arkowitz et al., 1978; Curran, 1975; Twentyman & McFall, 1975).

In an intriguing application of social skills training for dating anxiety, Muehlenhard, Baldwin, Bourg, and Piper (1988) developed a computer program to help shy women initiate conversations with men. Aside from the novelty of offering computer-based social skills training, this study also had multiple control groups and focused on training women rather than men. The research literature on social skills training for dating anxiety almost exclusively involves training male subjects (Hope & Heimberg, 1990).

Women in the Muehlenhard et al. (1988) study worked with an interactive computer program that included pictures, music, and beeps and even called the woman by her name during the sessions. Following the direct instruction approach, modules in the program covered topics such as starting conversations, making eye contact, maintaining conversations, animated speech, showing interest in a conversation, giving compliments, and smiling. In addition to provision of information and instruction, subjects were presented with scenarios and asked to select the most appropriate of three responses. If correct, they were praised and told why the response was appropriate (reinforcement and information); if incorrect they were told why their choice would not be the best (corrective feedback). This training regime was compared with a written manual training program (similar to the computer program but obviously less interactive) and to two no-treatment control groups. Results indicated that women who participated in either the computer-based or written manual training programs evidenced increased self-reported social skills and increased dating frequency from pre- to posttreatment, when compared with the no-treatment control groups. Furthermore, these improvements continued between posttreatment and follow-up 4 months later. This study shows that cost-effective written and

computer-based training methods can bring significant improvements in dating and heterosocial interactions.

Social skills training for dating anxiety continues to be applied to unique and diverse populations. A recent program used the technique to enhance dating skills in a group of 18- to 50-year-old adults with mild to moderate developmental disabilities (Valenti-Hein, Yarnold, & Mueser, 1994). Training was delivered in 12 biweekly sessions, consisting of traditional direct instruction (on topics such as initiating conversation, listening, expressing emotion, identifying similarities between oneself and others, and asking for a date), modeling, and role playing with feedback. Subjects who participated in the program improved their social skills and social knowledge from pre- to posttreatment, and these improvements were maintained at an 8-week follow-up. At posttreatment and follow-up their skills levels were also significantly higher than a wait-list control group.

## **Substance Abuse Prevention for Children and Adolescents**

The use of social skills training for children and adolescents is generally geared toward the amelioration of some difficulty in social functioning, or the prevention of long-term developmental problems, or both (Hollin & Trower, 1988). The application of social skills training to substance abuse prevention for children and adolescents is geared toward serving both of these purposes. Most of the research on substance abuse prevention has focused on adolescent populations (e.g., Botvin, Baker, Dusenbury, Tortu, & Botvin, 1990; Pentz, 1983; Shope, Copeland, Maharg, Deilman, & Butchart, 1993; Wagner, Brown, Monti, Meyers, & Waldron, 1999); however, research indicates that the younger a child initiates alcohol and other drug use, the higher the risk for serious health consequences and adult substance abuse (Belcher & Shinitzky, 1998).

Alcohol and drug use during childhood and adolescence has been found to be associated with academic, social, and emotional problems and to have the overall effect of interfering with normal psychosocial development (Botvin et al., 1990). Moreover, the continuation of alcohol and drug use into adulthood has been found to lead to physical, psychological, financial, legal, and interpersonal problems (Botvin et al., 1990). Unfortunately, substance abuse prevention programs that target children have not been studied with the same intensity as those designed for adolescents. Specifically, early intervention strategies targeting preschool and elementary school children are underrepresented in the research literature (Belcher & Shinitzky, 1998).

Belcher and Shinitzky (1998) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on substance abuse prevention programs during a 10-year period. A common goal of most of the prevention programs reviewed was to promote protective factors (e.g., positive self-esteem, self-concept, self-control, assertiveness, social competence, and academic achievement) and to reduce risk factors (e.g., poor self-image, low religiosity, poor school performance, parental rejection, family dysfunction, abuse, under- or overcontrolling by parents, and divorce) through the use of school-based curricula including social resistance skills and normative education.

Their review indicates that although prevention curricula have been developed for children from preschool ages to young adulthood, most prevention programs have been targeted toward adolescents, as it is the period representing the greatest risk for substance abuse. One such program, and easily the most widely disseminated and promoted program, is the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) curriculum. Despite its popularity, however, studies have found little difference in the drug use

patterns of students who have participated in the program compared with students who have not (Clayton, Cattarello, & Johnstone, 1996; Ennet et al., 1994). The DARE program, as well as others like it, appear to have little impact on actual drug use behavior. The ineffectiveness of this type of program is thought to stem, at least in part, from an overemphasis on information dissemination and a lack of emphasis on teaching actual resistance skills. Based on their review of the literature, Belcher and Shinitzky concluded that substance abuse prevention programs aimed at enhancing protective factors and social skill development through interactive parent-child curricula, in collaboration with communities and schools, will likely render the most effective and enduring results.

Botvin et al. (1990), conducted a 3-year study, testing the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral approach to substance abuse prevention. Their sample was composed of 4,466 seventh-grade students from 56 urban and rural schools in New York state. In a randomized block design, schools were assigned to one of three conditions: prevention program with a 1-day teacher workshop and implementation feedback by project staff, prevention program with teacher training provided by a videotape without implementation feedback, or a comparison control group.

The Life Skills Training (LST) program was the prevention strategy used in this research. The main purpose of the LST program is to facilitate the development of personal and social skills, with an emphasis on skills for coping with social influences to smoke, drink, or use drugs. It consists of 12 curriculum units, designed to be taught in 15 class sessions, using a combination of techniques including demonstration, behavioral rehearsal, feedback and reinforcement, and behavioral homework assignments for out-of-class practice. Students in the two prevention conditions also received booster sessions, designed to review and reinforce the material covered during the first-year intervention, in the second and third years of the study.

The results of the study indicated significant prevention effects for both of the experimental conditions, relative to the control condition. Specifically, prevention effects were found for cigarette smoking, immoderate alcohol use, and marijuana use, with the strongest effects being found for smoking. Prevention effects were also found for normative expectations and knowledge concerning substance use, interpersonal skills, and communication skills. The results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of the LST program, as well as the importance of implementing ongoing activities throughout the critical adolescent period.

Shope et al. (1993), conducted an assessment of adolescent refusal skills in a longitudinal alcohol misuse prevention study. A one-third random sample ( $n = 1,012$ ) of 10th graders participating in the study was assessed individually. The researchers had students rate their own refusals, which were simultaneously rated by trained observers. The results indicated that adolescents refused the offer of a beer only somewhat convincingly. Interestingly, the adolescents who displayed better refusal skills also had higher levels of alcohol misuse prevention knowledge, reported less susceptibility to peer pressure, had greater internal locus of control and self-esteem, and less alcohol use and misuse. These results provide support not only for teaching refusal skills in substance abuse prevention programs, but, more important, for assessing refusal skills in the evaluation of those programs.

## Therapy

**Depression.** Lewinsohn's behavioral theory of depression (Lewinsohn, 1974, 1975) represented one of the first efforts that featured the role of social skills in

the development of depression. Lewinsohn hypothesized that people who lacked adequate social skills would be unable to obtain positive reinforcements and avoid punishments from their social environments. Such a state of affairs was assumed to culminate in a state of depression. There is a substantial body of research evidence indicating that many depressed people do indeed exhibit deficits in social skills (Segrin, 1990, 2000).

Shortly after the presentation of the behavioral theory, Lewinsohn tested the effectiveness of social skills training as a therapy for depression (Zeiss, Lewinsohn, & Munoz, 1979). Clinically depressed patients randomly received cognitive therapy, pleasant activities schedules, or social skills training for 12 sessions over the course of 1 month. The social skills training covered assertiveness, expressive behavior, and reduction of social anxiety. This training method started with therapist modeling, followed by patient rehearsal with feedback, and ultimately *in vivo* practice. Follow-up assessments indicated that subjects in the social skills training condition became more socially active, more comfortable with social interaction and assertion, and were rated by coders as more socially skilled than they were before treatment. Moreover, these subjects' depression levels improved significantly over the course of the study; however, so did the depression level of all other subjects in the study. This nonspecific improvement effect suggests that social skills training is effective at reducing symptoms of depression, but no more so than other standard forms of therapy for depression.

Lewinsohn's behavioral theory of depression also coincided historically with the initiation of research on social skills training therapy for depression by Bellack, Hersen, and Himmelhoch (e.g., Bellack, Hersen, & Himmelhoch, 1981, 1983; Hersen, Bellack, & Himmelhock, 1980). Their work represents some of the rare examples of truly programmatic research on social skills training. In an early set of investigations (Hersen et al., 1980; Wells, Hersen, Bellack, & Himmelhoch, 1979), small numbers of patients received a thorough social skills assessment, followed by a systematic social skills training regime over the course of the next 12 weeks. Training focused on situations that clients found to be most problematic in their lives. Therapists would array the situations in a hierarchy ranging from least to most difficult for the patient, and this ranking determined the order in which the patient and therapist would tackle the problem. Training consisted of coaching on molecular communication behaviors such as eye contact, appropriate verbal responses, etc., followed by role playing, feedback, modeling by the therapist, and positive reinforcement for the performance of desired behaviors. Ultimately clients were encouraged to practice the newly learned skills in the natural environment. In each study, results indicated that patients' social skills improved significantly following the training, as did their levels of depression compared with baseline assessments.

Having demonstrated the efficacy of social skills training in alleviating depression, Bellack and his colleagues set out to compare the effectiveness of social skills training with other popular treatments for depression. A second pair of studies compared social skills training with traditional psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy (Bellack et al., 1981, 1983). In each case, patients in the social skills training condition received the 12-week regime of instructions, modeling, role playing, feedback, and behavioral homework assignments. Consistent with the findings of Zeiss et al. (1979), these studies indicated nonspecific improvement effects, in that all therapies appeared equally effective in reducing symptoms of depression. However, those in the social skills training condition exhibited stronger social skills at the end of the trial than those in the psychotherapy or pharmacotherapy condition.

In addition, those who received social skills training plus a placebo had by far the lowest dropout rate over the course of the study (15–24% vs. 53–56% in the pharmacotherapy condition). In addition to being an effective treatment for depression, social skills training appears to be a more palatable form of therapy, compared with drug therapy or psychotherapy, for many patients.

The social skills training program developed by Hersen, Bellack, and Himmelhoch focuses on basic and pragmatic communication skills such as positive and negative assertion, making apologies, and expressing affection. Hersen and his colleagues attempt to teach clients how to use these skills with strangers, family, friends, and coworkers (Hersen, Bellack, & Himmelhoch, 1982). The efficacy of this training program as a therapy for depression has been conclusively demonstrated (Becker et al., 1987; Bellack, Hersen, & Himmelhoch, 1996) and stands as one of the testimonials to the success of social skills training.

It should be noted that a number of social skills training studies have included follow-up assessments of depressive symptoms anywhere from 1 to 8 months later (e.g., Miller, Norman, Keitner, Bishop, & Dow, 1989). In general, these tests indicate sustained improvements in depressive symptomatology as a result of social skills training, although in some cases booster or maintenance training sessions were offered (see Jackson, Moss, & Solinski, 1985, for a review).

Recently, social skills training has been applied to the treatment of childhood depression (e.g., Fine, Forth, Gilbert, & Haley, 1991; Reed, 1994). For example, Reed (1994) worked with 14- to 19-year-old students, training them on social skills primarily for family interaction contexts. The familiar instruction, modeling, role play, and feedback regime was used, including feedback from peers and group leaders and encouragement to practice the skills at home and in the community. The social skills training appeared to be effective in bringing improvements in depression; however the effect held primarily for men but not women. Less promising results came from Fine et al.'s (1991) investigation in which social skills training proved to be less effective than a therapeutic support group for alleviating depression among a group of 13- to 17-year-olds. After a 12-week program that included training with rehearsal, role playing, modeling, videotaping, and frequent practice, there was no significant improvement in adolescents' depressive symptoms. At a 9-month follow-up, however, those in the social skills training condition realized improvements in their depression that equaled those in the therapeutic support group, suggesting a sleeper effect for social skills training.

The effectiveness of social skills training as a therapy for depression has a substantial track record, fueling its popularity as a treatment for depression. Although it does not appear to be more effective than other common treatments for depression, it does appear to be associated with a far lower dropout rate than other treatments, something that is of definite concern to therapists. Whether similar social skills training programs may constitute effective therapy for childhood depression is unclear at this time. These are complex skills that may not be acquired as rapidly and competently in a population whose cognitive and emotional facilities are still in the early to middle developmental stages.

**Alcoholism.** Alcoholism is a major public health problem with serious consequences both for the afflicted individuals as well as society more generally. Although the cause and course of the disorder are influenced by a wide variety of variables, increasing attention has been paid to the significant role of interpersonal factors in the disorder, particularly family interactions (e.g., Jacob & Seilhamer, 1987; Steinglass,

1979, 1981). There is reason to believe that many alcoholics have difficulty interacting with other people and that the frustration they experience from these negative interactions and relations activates problem drinking. Consequently, social skills training has enjoyed both popularity and success as a treatment for alcoholism (Chiauzzi, 1991; Monti et al., 1994; Van Hasselt, Hersen, & Millions, 1978).

Contact with clients at the Veteran's Administration center in Jackson, Mississippi, led Foy and his colleagues to note that many of the alcoholics seeking treatment reported having interpersonal problems (Foy, Massey, Duer, Ross, & Wooten, 1979). In particular, these clients appeared to have difficulty with their coworkers and bosses that caused job-related problems. These problems appeared to stem from a lack of communication skills for refusing unreasonable requests at work. Foy et al. offered the clients a social skills training program that involved modeling videotapes of five on-the-job situations as well as role playing of similar situations that called for assertiveness. Emphasis was placed on requesting changes in behavior from others, being assertive, making eye contact, and using appropriate speech duration. Most of the clients in this study exhibited moderate increases in the skilled use of the target behaviors, and although the clients reported that the training was useful to them at follow-up, there was no assessment of changes in problem drinking.

Studies that have included assessments of changes in alcohol intake provide additional evidence for the utility of social skills training as a treatment for alcoholism. In an impressive longitudinal study, social skills training was compared with traditional supportive therapy as a treatment for alcoholism (Oei & Jackson, 1980). The social skills training was conducted in 12 sessions of 2 hours each. In these sessions, subjects were presented with instruction, role played various situations, and finally received feedback from a videotape of their role-play performance. The training focused on appropriate use of nonverbal behavior, refusal of unreasonable requests, making difficult requests, replying to criticism, expressing and receiving positive feedback, and initiating conversations. In addition to improvements in social skills (e.g., assertiveness, self-rated social skills, etc.), alcohol intake showed a greater reduction in the social skills training versus supportive therapy condition. Three-, six-, and twelve-month follow-ups indicated that the superiority of social skills training over traditional supportive therapy became more pronounced over time. This study is significant in showing that social skills training is both superior to traditional supportive therapy in treating alcoholism and that its effects hold up well over time.

Further evidence of the therapeutic effectiveness of social skills training for alcoholism was demonstrated in a study conducted in Norway in which social skills training was compared with supportive discussion groups, similar to self-help groups (Eriksen, Bjornstad, & Gotestam, 1986). Eriksen and his colleagues offered a diverse package of social skills training in the form of eight 90-min sessions that included instruction, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, feedback, individualized role plays, and homework assignments. Much of the modeling and homework assignment was focused on seeking alternatives to drinking. Subjects were then followed over the course of 1 year. On average, those in the social skills training group drank approximately two thirds the amount of alcohol that the subjects in the discussion control group did. They also had about twice as many sober days and twice as many working days during the year than those in the discussion control group. However, all subjects in the social skills training condition had drunk alcohol after 143 days (versus 31 days for the control group), and on those days when they did drink, those in the social skills training condition consumed almost twice as much alcohol as those in the control group. Although social skills training appeared to be more effective overall

than structured discussion groups, this study illustrates how resistant alcoholics can be, even to in-depth and carefully tailored therapy.

It has been noted that “the majority of episodes of alcoholic relapse are preceded by situations of anger or frustrations, social pressure to drink, or interpersonal conflict” (Monti et al., 1994, p. 628). Social skills training has been demonstrated to be an effective means of providing clients with the communication skills to cope more effectively with these stressors. As a result, those who undergo social skills training often exhibit improvements in both their social skills and problem drinking behavior.

**Social Anxiety.** Compared with its relative neglect in the mental health literature, social anxiety has had a long history of interest among social skills researchers. The main findings, indicating a clear relationship between levels of social skill and social anxiety, have remained fairly robust across a substantial number of studies (Trower, 1986). Socially anxious people have been found to engage in fewer social interactions, to be less assertive, to exhibit disrupted turn-taking abilities during social interaction, and to be perceived by themselves and others as less socially skilled (e.g., Segrin & Kinney, 1995; Trower, 1986).

Social anxiety is currently recognized as a potentially debilitating disorder. The diagnostic category of social phobia was first introduced into the official psychiatric nomenclature in 1980, with the publication of the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Social phobia is a more profound and acute form of social anxiety. It appears to follow a chronic and unremitting course, with a reported lifetime prevalence rate of 3% to 13%, making it the third most common mental disorder, after major depression and alcohol dependence (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Social anxiety has been found to limit educational attainment, career advancement, and social functioning (Juster & Heimberg, 1995; Taylor, 1996). It has been associated with substance abuse, mood disorders, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Juster & Heimberg, 1995). Because a lack of social skill can increase anxiety in social interactions, social skills training offers a potential remedy for social anxiety (Shear & Beidel, 1998). With regard to social skills training, however, the state of the research on social phobia is relatively new and inconclusive (Antony, 1997).

**Social Phobia.** In a review of long-term treatment studies of social phobia, Juster and Heimberg (1995) found that the bulk of treatments fell into one of four general categories: exposure therapy, cognitive restructuring techniques, social skills training, or some combination of the three. Social skills training presumes that interpersonal anxiety is a result of a deficiency in social skills and incorporates such techniques as modeling of appropriate behaviors, behavioral rehearsal, corrective feedback, social reinforcement, and homework assignments.

The long-term efficacy of social skills training as a treatment for social phobia has shown mixed results. Patients treated with social skills training appear to fare well immediately following treatment and tend to maintain these gains during follow-ups ranging from 3 to 24 months (van Dyck, 1996). General conclusions about the long-term effectiveness of social skills training are difficult to draw due to a lack of methodological rigor, however. Specifically, few treatment studies of social phobia have included a no-treatment control group (Juster & Heimberg, 1995; Mersch, 1995).

Social skills training has demonstrated better promise for the treatment of social phobia when the training encompasses multiple different components and techniques. “Package” approaches such as Social Effectiveness Therapy (Turner, Beidel,

Cooley, Woody, & Messer, 1994), which involves direct instruction, modeling, behavioral rehearsal and feedback, and carefully programmed *in vivo* homework assignments, and Personal Effectiveness Training (Wlazlo, Schroeder-Hartwig, Hand, Kaiser, Munchau, 1990), which also entails a combination of modeling, role plays, and so forth tailored to the specific needs of the client, have proven to be particularly effective at both increasing social skills and decreasing anxiety, even up to 2.5 years after treatment (Wlazlo et al., 1990). Despite some inconclusive findings in the literature, social skills training appears to be making a comeback in the treatment of social phobia, especially as part of a multicomponent treatment package.

A recent meta-analysis examined cognitive-behavioral therapies commonly used to treat social phobia (Taylor, 1996). Such treatments include prolonged exposure to social stimuli, cognitive therapy, which attempts to restructure maladaptive beliefs about social situations and the opinions of others; a combination of cognitive therapy and prolonged exposure; and social skills training, involving both exposure to social stimuli and training in interpersonal skills. Results of this meta-analysis indicated that all of the interventions were effective relative to waiting-list and control subjects and that the effects of the various treatments tended to increase during the follow-up periods (Taylor, 1996). This analysis lends further credence to the efficacy of social skills training as part of a multicomponent package for treating social phobia.

**Communication Apprehension.** For more than 50 years, communication researchers have been concerned with identifying and investigating the impact of communication apprehension (CA) on communication behavior and the methods for ameliorating or reducing it (Dwyer, 2000; Hoffman & Sprague, 1982). CA has been defined as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated oral communication (McCroskey, 1970). The terms *shyness* and *reticence* have often been used interchangeably with CA, and the distinctions among them are unclear and subject to debate (Kelly & Keaton, 1992). One of the major characteristics of high CA individuals is their tendency to avoid social situations in which they feel inept. Based on the accumulation of research findings, there is considerable evidence to suggest that highly apprehensive individuals are negatively affected socially, academically, and economically (Glaser, Biglan, & Dow, 1983).

Academically, high CA students score lower on college entrance examinations, have lower overall grade point averages (McCroskey & Anderson, 1976; McCroskey, Daly, & Sorensen, 1976), and have been found to be at a higher risk for dropping out of college compared with low CA students (Ericson & Gardener, 1992; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989). Overall, they are considered less competent, composed, and attractive when compared with more outgoing individuals. They are less likely to receive job interviews and, when hired, are less likely to seek career advancement (Adler, 1980). The negative consequences associated with CA have been found to result in an overall diminished sense of self (Robinson, 1997).

The vast majority of research on CA has been directed toward helping college students manage their anxiety in the context of a basic public speaking course (Dwyer, 2000). Moreover, communication researchers have documented the impact of instruction on reducing apprehension and improving competence and success (Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997). Of all of the treatment approaches investigated to date, the three most popular treatments of CA involve one or more of the following: skills training, systematic desensitization, and cognitive modification and restructuring (Allen, Hunter, & Donahue, 1989), with skills training being the most common technique used (Robinson, 1997).

In an effort to evaluate integrated versus unitary treatments for reducing public speaking anxiety, Whitworth and Cochran (1996) conducted a study comparing the efficacy of treatment procedures. They hypothesized that a combination of treatments would result in a greater reduction of CA than would any individual treatment approach alone. Their sample consisted of 232 undergraduate students, who were assigned to one of three experimental groups or to a control group. The three experimental groups were composed of 161 students enrolled in a basic public speaking course, and the control group was composed of 71 students enrolled in an introductory psychology course, who had never taken a college level public speaking course.

The first treatment group consisted of students who received a combination of three treatments: Communication Orientation Motivation Therapy (COM therapy), a form of cognitive restructuring; visualization training, incorporating characteristics of both cognitive restructuring and systematic desensitization; and skills training, involving direct instruction on speaking skills, research methods, outlining strategies, and behavioral rehearsal of speech delivery. The second treatment group consisted of students who received both skills and visualization training. The third treatment group consisted of students who received skills training only. The control group consisted of students who received no treatment.

The results of the investigation indicated that the multiple treatment approaches were the most effective in reducing public speaking anxiety. Specifically, both the three-treatment and the two-treatment combinations showed the greatest reductions in anxiety compared with skills training alone or the control group. The finding that skills training alone is less effective than a multiple treatment approach has been independently replicated (Allen, 1989; Allen et al., 1989). Furthermore, the results suggest, but do not statistically support, that the combination of three treatments was superior to the two-treatment combination of visualization and skills training. Unfortunately, the experimental design limited the ability to compare the relative effectiveness of the three- versus two-treatment conditions. Ultimately, these findings suggest that a combined treatment approach involving some cognitive restructuring and relaxation treatments in addition to skills training will be more effective than any single treatment alone. Furthermore, the order in which the treatments are administered can have a substantial effect on the overall outcome of the training regime (Greene, Rucker, Zauss, & Harris, 1998; Hopf & Ayres, 1992). In particular, Hopf and Ayres (1992) found training was most effective when it started with cognitive or affective components, as opposed to starting with behavioral components of training.

The most recent research on CA has reconceptualized it as a biological predisposition characterized by neurotic introversion (Beatty & McCroskey, 1998; Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998; McCroskey & Beatty, 1998); that is, due to recent advances in neuropsychology, the etiology of CA has been linked to biologically based personality factors. The communibiological paradigm places innate individual differences in the sensitivity of neurobiological systems at the center of CA (Beatty & Valencic, 2000). It suggests that CA is a biological temperament that is not amenable to change (Dwyer, 2000), which obviously has serious implications in the treatment of CA. In response to the communibiological paradigm, several scholars have argued that treatment of CA is still necessary and appropriate (Dwyer, 2000; Kelly & Keaton, 2000).

Dwyer (2000) tested a multidimensional model for teaching students to self-manage CA by self-selecting treatment techniques. The research was motivated by the belief that although there are numerous techniques available to help manage CA,

the difficulty lies in determining which techniques will be most beneficial to the individual in targeting his or her specific needs. The multidimensional treatment model employed in this research study was based on seven interactive personality dimensions, or modalities, involved in CA: behavior, affect, sensation, imagery, cognition, interpersonal relationships, and biologic functions. The multidimensional model is intended to serve as a guide in helping individuals analyze their own problems and in self-selecting the most appropriate treatment techniques.

The following techniques were matched to the seven interactive personality dimensions: skills training (involving textbook and audiotaped instruction of techniques, direct instruction, discussions, and behavioral rehearsal, and homework assignments), systematic desensitization, visualization, cognitive restructuring, and interpersonal support. Participants consisted of high CA undergraduate students enrolled in basic public speaking courses. The experimental group consisted of students who took a version of the basic public speaking course designed especially for students high in CA. The control group were students enrolled in the standard basic public speaking course, which focused on skills training alone.

Results indicated that the multidimensional model was highly effective in helping students reduce CA in a variety of contexts (i.e., public speaking, interpersonal conversations, and group discussions). Additionally, the results supported previous findings that the multidimensional model had a significantly greater impact on reducing CA than skills training alone. Although the control group, who received skills training via a public speaking course, did experience an overall reduction in anxiety level, the multidimensional model that the treatment group received had a significantly greater impact. Furthermore, this study challenges the basic assumption of the communibiological paradigm, in that it provides evidence that change due to intervention is possible: high CAs report change in anxiety levels and can be helped to manage the CA that negatively affects their lives.

**Schizophrenia.** Schizophrenia is disturbance in the form of thought that is associated with substantial problems in cognition, affect, and behavior. Social disabilities figure prominently in this disorder (Bellack, 1997) and generally take the form of social skills deficits (Bellack, Morrison, Wixted, & Mueser, 1990). Schizophrenia is one of the first mental health problems for which serious theoretical and empirical attention focused on the role of interpersonal communication in the etiology and course of the disorder (e.g., Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). To this day, family interaction patterns and poor social skills are seen as important contributors to this serious mental health problem.

There is a long history of using social skills training to improve the interpersonal landscape of people afflicted with schizophrenia (e.g., Bellack, Turner, Hersen, & Luber, 1984; Goldsmith & McFall, 1975; Hogarty et al., 1986; see Kopelowicz et al., 1998; Mueser, Wallace, & Liberman, 1995; Smith et al., 1996; Wallace et al., 1980 for reviews). It is generally believed that the possession of poor social skills will generate stressors, or interact with environmental stressors to produce maladaptive and disruptive outcomes for the person with schizophrenia (Bellack, 1997; Kopelowicz et al., 1998).

A recent investigation at the West Los Angeles Veteran's Administration Medical Center compared social skills training with standard group supportive therapy (Marder et al., 1996). Schizophrenia patients in the social skills training condition participated in a series of training modules (see Kopelowicz et al., 1998) over the course of approximately 2 years. Before addressing actual social skills, they started with medication

and symptom self-management. These modules focused on recognizing symptoms and side effects, monitoring medication, negotiating medication issues with doctors, and avoiding street drugs and alcohol. This module was followed by a social problem solving module that was designed to teach patients how to identify problems and generate effective solutions in their community life. Finally, patients participated in a more personalized social skills training module that featured cognitive restructuring principles, behavioral rehearsal, video modeling, and positive reinforcement from the training staff.

It is notable that this research group started training patients by focusing on fundamental issues such as drug management that, once mastered, would allow the patients to better focus their attention on the more demanding and complex social problem-solving and interactions skills. The cognitive and affective impairments that are symptomatic of schizophrenia, if left untreated, can impair the learning processes inherent in social skills training programs (Bellack, 1997). Results of this study indicated that social skills training generally produced more favorable outcomes for patients' personal well-being, particularly when combined with active drug supplementation, than the supportive group therapy.

Two meta-analyses indicate that social skills training is an effective form of treatment for schizophrenia (Benton & Schroeder, 1990; Corrigan, 1991). Benton and Schroeder (1990) identified 27 such studies and noted that social skills training (vs. no training) improves behavioral measures of social skills among schizophrenia patients (effect size  $d = .76$ ), self-rated assertiveness ( $d = .69$ ), general functioning as rated by others ( $d = .34$ ), self-rated symptoms ( $d = .32$ ), hospital discharge ( $d = 1.19$ ), and relapse rates ( $d = .47$ ). So not only does social skills training improve the social skills of schizophrenia patients, it also appears to improve indicators of their psychological well-being such as hospital discharge, self-rated symptoms, and relapse. In Corrigan's (1991) meta-analysis, a number of different dependent variables (e.g., maintenance of acquired skill, reduction of symptoms, etc.) were averaged to produce an overall effect size of 1.31 for social skills training among samples primarily composed of schizophrenia patients. The size of the effect for social skills training on both the symptoms and social skills of people with schizophrenia suggests that its impact is indeed substantial.

Finally, it has been observed that the focus on practical skills that allow for the experience of success along the way, inherent in most social skills training programs, has a genuine appeal to patients (Bellack, 1997). Bellack argued that because patients see these skills as relevant to their lives they are often far more willing to participate in social skills training programs than other forms of therapy. That in itself may provide some indication of why social skills training is such a popular and effective tool in the treatment of schizophrenia.

## CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

Given the enormity of the social skills training literature and the benefit of well over 30 years of hindsight, one can easily see a number of problem issues that face future practitioners and researchers of social skills training. If time, money, and other resources are to continue to flow into social skills training programs, it will be advisable to attend to, if not resolve, many of these issues.

Perhaps the most fundamental hurdle to be passed concerns the necessary prerequisites for documenting the effectiveness of social skills training. The ideal social skills training study would assess posttraining social skills as well as symptoms of

the problem it was designed to prevent or treat, or indicators of the well-being it was designed to improve. A staggering proportion of social skills training studies do not assess any symptoms of problems or signs of well-being (aside from social skills themselves). Such studies lack a critically important dependent variable and thus do not make a strong case for social skills training. A smaller proportion of studies measure clinical or wellness-related outcomes but do not assess posttreatment social skills. In such cases, one cannot be confident that the changes or improvements in symptoms or well-being were the result of social skills training per se. Ogilvy (1994) offered several recommendations for evaluating the effectiveness of social skills training (see also Scott et al., 1983). First, the program must successfully teach the skills that were targeted. Second, the skills taught must generalize to real-life settings and hold up over time. Third, the skills must be demonstrated to have made a difference in the life of the trainee in terms of a socially valued outcome. The number of studies that document all three of these criteria is alarmingly small.

An additional problem to emerge in the social skills training literature concerns the background of the person or persons who actually conduct the training. Social skills training has been conducted by individuals whose backgrounds are as varied as the problems to which the technique is applied. A meta-analysis of the literature on social skills training with children revealed that effects, on levels of social interaction for example, were considerably more powerful when the trainers were psychologists or their assistants ( $r = .48$ ) rather than school teachers ( $r = .20$ ). It has been argued that many instances of social skills training with children are carried out by beginners (Schneider, 1989) and there is ample reason to suspect that one can find debutants offering social skills training to many other populations. Teaching social skills requires as much training, if not more, than teaching any other complex skill. As all teachers know, it requires one level of knowledge and skill to do something but quite another level to actually teach others how to do it. Social skills training will often be most effective when the person or persons carrying it out themselves have training in how to train others. As Hollin and Trower pointed out, in many cases "the fault of any 'failure' lies with practitioners, not necessarily with the technique" (Hollin & Trower, 1988).

Another problem that has inhibited demonstration of the effectiveness of social skills training is the indiscriminate application of the technique to large numbers of people. Commenting on the application of social skills training to clinical populations, Bellack (1997) noted "the traditional practice of assigning all patients to the same treatment groups in lock-step fashion is fundamentally flawed" (p. 141). However, this is exactly how many clinical trials of social skills training are conducted. Social skills training is best preceded by a "task analysis" (Smith et al., 1996) that identifies the particular needs of the individual. A social skills training program that might be appropriate for one person or group of persons may be inappropriate and ineffective for another. For example Reddon et al. (1996) argued that certain aspects of psychosocial problems such as somatic concerns and anxiety are less amenable to treatment via social skills training than associated problems such as poor self-esteem and social introversion. The need for a priori assessments and tailoring of social skills training should be obvious, but as Kopelowicz et al. (1998) pointed out, many instances of social skills training "were designed more to meet the convenience of the investigator (e.g., completion of a doctoral dissertation) than the needs of the patients" (p. 315).

Finally, it is essential that practitioners and researchers document and evaluate the extent to which their social skills training programs produce generalization

(Marzillier & Winter, 1978). Generalization means that the training conducted in the classroom, clinic, or other venue holds up in and extends to other settings, times, persons, and responses (Scott et al., 1983). In their review of 114 empirical investigations of social skills training generalization, Scott et al. (1983) found that generalization across time was assessed in just 37% of all the training studies and that among those, only 64% found that improvements in social skills were maintained over time on at least one measure. Similarly, only 38% of the training studies at that time had attempted to assess generalization across settings, and among those, 65% obtained positive results. Among the 60% of studies that assessed generalization across persons (i.e., from one target to another), 73% demonstrated that skills learned will generalize to people other than those present during the training.

The results that are currently available for evaluating the generalization of social skills training programs raise many questions about the extent to which social skills training programs have real impact outside of the classroom or clinic. Clearly some do, but others do not, and for the majority, we simply do not know. It is therefore important that researchers continue to make follow-up assessments, and examinations of improvements in social skills made outside of the training setting. There is reason to suspect that social skills training may also produce a sleeper effect (e.g., Fine et al., 1991; Oei & Jackson, 1980). Some studies suggest that improvements in social skills are not always evident immediately after training programs have ended. Rather, improvements in skills often become more evident over extended periods of time. This may be the result of practice and reduced anxiety. Each of these takes time to realize and can significantly impact effective social behavior. Evidence of a sleeper effect in social skills training indicates that those who do not conduct follow-up assessments may miss improvements over time.

## CONCLUSION

Although social skills training has an extensive background and history, it has yet to reach a state of maturity that is exemplified in other well-established therapies and training programs. However, the evidence accumulated thus far suggests that social skills training has great promise for improving the condition of people who are dealing with an amazingly vast array of challenges in life. These improvements follow the use of social skills training to upgrade current communication skills and to prevent psychosocial distress, in addition to the more traditional application of social skills training as a treatment for some problem assumed to have interpersonal origins or consequences.

The more effective social skills training programs are generally multimodal, that is, they employ multiple different techniques for social skills training. These include methods such as direct instruction, modeling, role playing, and “real-life” homework assignments and practice. Although social skills training need not involve each of these methods, effectiveness appears to be increased by using more than just one or two methods. This may be because different training modalities tap into different learning processes that may vary from person to person. The probability of connecting with the learning styles and strengths of various individuals is obviously enhanced through the employment of multiple methods of training.

Despite its widespread success in a broad context of circumstances, social skills training is not a panacea. There are some popular applications of social skills training that are as notorious as they are unsuccessful. In such cases, it is unclear if social skills training is simply inappropriate for addressing the problem or issue for which

it was intended or whether the particular program was poorly designed or perhaps just poorly executed. Inherent in these possibilities are some difficult questions that behavioral scientists have yet to address much less answer. For example, who should teach social skills? Are police officers well equipped to teach drug resistance skills to adolescents? Does being a member of the clergy qualify one to teach marital communication skills? Further research is needed to address these issues with a focus on designing skills training programs that are even more effective and efficient than those that presently exist.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for social skills training is the concept of maintenance. It is essential to understand that social skills, like virtually any other complex skill, must be practiced (see Greene, this volume). Again, some of the strongest training programs provide trainees with a great deal of practice and follow them over time both to provide follow-up "booster" training, as well as to assess progress and improvements. If social skills training is to have any consequential payoff, trainers and program designers must take steps to ensure that the skills, once learned, are maintained over time.

Over the past 20 to 30 years, social skills training has come of age and is beginning to be recognized for its potential in diverse and ever-expanding contexts. With a careful recognition and analysis of past mistakes and triumphs, which is admittedly rare in this body of literature, paralleled with advances in our knowledge of what creates and constitutes effective social interaction and relationships, social skills training has the potential to be an effective and powerful mechanism for greatly improving the interpersonal aspects and psychosocial well-being of people's lives.

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PART

# II

## FUNDAMENTAL INTERACTION SKILLS



CHAPTER

# 5

## NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS\*

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It is the nature of the human condition that, try as we may, we cannot enter into the reality of another individual's experiences, thoughts, or feelings. Imprisoned as we are within our own bodies, the fallible process of communication is the primary agent currently available for crossing the psychological expanse between two or more individuals. Clearly, if communication is the sole means of accomplishing such a feat, then skill in this enterprise is integral to any interaction and, perhaps more important, to any theory of interaction.

Far too often, however, theoretical and practical conceptions of communication skill emphasize the role of verbal cues while discounting the importance of nonverbal behaviors in the actualization of this endeavor. This is particularly alarming given estimates that upwards of 60% of the meaning in any social situation is communicated nonverbally (Birdwhistell, 1955; Philipott, 1983) and research indicating that nonverbal cues are especially likely to be believed when they conflict with verbal messages (for summaries of this work, see Burgoon, 1985; Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996).

Fortunately, the last four decades have witnessed a growing interest in the matter of nonverbal social skills. Related publications now number in the hundreds, and an impressive arsenal of instruments has been amassed to assess skill levels. Warranting this extensive attention to skills is the impressive evidence that nonverbal social skills are potent predictors of success or failure in virtually all social arenas, be they personal, social, professional, or political. For example, Goleman (1995, 1998) compiled an impressive array of data indicating how nonverbal skills separate life's success stories and star performers from those with undistinguished histories. Such evidence has even led to claims that such skills are genetically determined and influence profoundly the health and longevity of the human species.

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Yet the picture emerging from this body of work is anything but simple or clear. Toward the objective of increased clarity and coherence, this chapter provides a comprehensive review and synthesis of research concerning nonverbal communication skills as they relate to various functions of communication in social interactions. Specifically, we first explore extant conceptual and operational definitions of nonverbal skill, including a wide range of instruments and techniques used to assess such skills. We also review what is known generally about cultural, situational, and individual differences that moderate expressive (i.e., encoding) and interpretive (i.e., decoding) nonverbal abilities. Then, following the lead of Burgoon (1994), Patterson (1982), and Riggio (1992), among others, we survey literature related to the communicative goals or functions that nonverbal behaviors accomplish—(a) expressive communication, (b) conversational management, (c) relational communication (which includes social support, comforting, and conflict management), and (d) image management and influence processes<sup>1</sup>—for purposes of discerning what constitutes competent or incompetent achievement of each. We conclude with some suggestions for future research concerning nonverbal skills.

## THE NATURE OF NONVERBAL SKILLS

Nonverbal skill is an integral aspect of overall social competence or social skill. Social competence, according to Feldman, Philipott, and Custrini (1991), is a “hypothetical construct relating to evaluative judgments of the adequacy of a person’s performance [within the context of a social interaction]” (p. 331). Others regard social competence as a combination of knowledge (i.e., cognitions) and translation of that knowledge into performance (i.e., behavior), although this distinction is not meant to diminish the importance of affect, which is featured prominently in conceptualizations of emotional intelligence (see Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In either case, nonverbal and verbal skills are manifestations of that competence. Social interactions (and their subsequent evaluations) include a variety of verbal and nonverbal codes and cues that are predicated on an individual’s knowledge of the display rules for a given social and cultural context. To be a competent communicator requires mastery of both nonverbal and verbal streams of communication.

That said, and despite the fact that the study of nonverbal communication began sometime in the 19th century, there are seemingly as many definitions and conceptualizations of nonverbal skills as there are scholars researching it. Still, some common threads do appear.

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<sup>1</sup>In light of the now-commonplace characterization of skillful interpersonal communication as goal-oriented and the variety of taxonomies that have been advanced for communication functions and goals, it is perhaps worthwhile to clarify the correspondence of these nonverbal functions with other goal classifications. Although early work (e.g., Clark & Delia, 1979) identified a triumvirate of instrumental, identity, and relational goals, more recent work (e.g., Dillard, 1989, 1997; Schrader & Dillard, 1998) has distinguished between primary goals, which motivate and define an interaction, and secondary goals, which shape and constrain it. Five classes of secondary goals include (a) *identity goals*, which correspond to the nonverbal functions of identity management and impression management, (b) *interaction goals*, which are most closely aligned with the nonverbal functions of conversation management and structuring interaction, (c) *relational resource goals*, which are closely linked to relational communication, (d) *arousal management goals*, which are related to emotional expression, and (e) *personal resource goals*, which may be the direct object of influence attempts or ancillary to them.

## Conceptual Definitions

One of the most enduring concepts in the social sciences is that the capacity to accurately transmit to and acquire information from other individuals is crucial to the functioning of social relations (Buck, 1983). Indeed, early evolutionary theorists like Darwin (1872) posited that the ability to transmit internal states to others is not only an important element of interaction but is integral to the survival of any social species, given that it provides a directive framework for the subsequent behaviors of others (as well as oneself).

The aspects of nonverbal behavior thought to contribute to accurate exchange of social information, however, are highly dependent on scholars' individual orientations toward the importance or role of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication skill is typically described (either overtly or tacitly) as individual differences in sending (i.e., encoding) and/or receiving (i.e., decoding) abilities. Unlike the tendency in other writings about communication skill, in which skill is typically equated with the production but not the reception of messages, nonverbal scholars tend to take a broader perspective by also acknowledging the importance of receptive sensitivity to nonverbal cues. However, there also is often a narrowing of perspective by focusing on skills as they relate to the affective features of interpersonal interactions. As Friedman (1979) asserted, the field of nonverbal communication research has its roots firmly implanted in the study of emotions and feelings. As we argue here, nonverbal skills extend far beyond the emotive domain. Conceptualizations also differ according to what nonverbal cues and codes are featured. For example, in some cases (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1976) the focus is on facial cues, whereas in others (e.g., Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979), it is on the voice, body, and face. These differences in code foci notwithstanding, nonverbal skills are typically thought to be manifested when nonverbal sending and receiving abilities "enhance the course of a social interaction and the goals of the interaction are more likely to be achieved" (Feldman et al., 1991, p. 321). That is, consistent with conceptualizations in other areas of communication, scholars embrace a goal-oriented perspective and use as a primary criterion for judging success the extent to which goals are met (although as the above quotation implies, whose goals—sender's or receiver's—and which goals are often unarticulated, making for indeterminancies in what would constitute skillful communication when various goals are incongruent or in conflict). Within this general parameter, several key distinctions have been offered to further delineate what constitutes nonverbal skill.

**Sending/Encoding and Receiving/Decoding Abilities.** One approach has focused on decomposing nonverbal skills into their constituent encoding and decoding abilities. Nonverbal sending ability—called *nonverbal expressivity* by Rosenthal et al., (1979)—entails the capacity to encode and express emotion and affect in ways that can be received and decoded correctly by others. These abilities may be rooted in a biologically based system of temperament that is further shaped by social learning processes (Buck, 1983). This conclusion is supported by evidence that sending ability is relatively stable across a wide array of situations and strongly associated with tendencies toward internal and external expression (see Buck, 1975, 1977, 1979; Buck, Miller, & Caul, 1974; Buck, Savin, Miller, & Caul, 1972; Crider & Lunn, 1971; Eysenck, 1967; Gray, 1972; Zuckerman, Hall, DeFrank, & Rosenthal, 1979). In contrast, receiving ability—called *nonverbal sensitivity* (Rosenthal et al., 1976)—consists

of the ability to decode emotion and affect accurately. This ability has been found to be highly dependent on what Buck (1983) calls *decoding rules*. Analogous to display rules (which are critical in any analysis of sending ability), decoding rules are “cultural rules or expectations about the attention to, and interpretation of, nonverbal displays” (Buck, 1983, p. 217), with attention being a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of interpretation. In other words, a person may learn to attend to certain nonverbal cues while not attending to others, and such attention can be situationally specific such that some cues are attended to only under certain situations.

**Emotional Intelligence.** Closely related to descriptions of sending and receiving abilities is the concept of emotional intelligence. Defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997) as “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 5), emotional intelligence is a multidimensional construct. Specifically, the Mayer and Salovey model includes dimensions related to (a) *attention* (perception of the cues), (b) *clarity* (i.e., the granularity of emotional discriminations and emotional knowledge), (c) *knowledge* (which includes facilitation and assimilation of emotions in thinking), and (d) *reflective regulation* of own and others’ emotional states (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 1999; Salovey, 1999). Each of these is highly relevant to nonverbal encoding and decoding skills. In addition, there is Goleman’s (1995, 1998) typology, which identifies five competencies: (a) *self-awareness* (knowing and following one’s own feelings), (b) *self-regulation* (managing one’s emotions in a facilitative manner, delaying gratification, and handling distress), (c) *motivation* (striving and persevering toward one’s goals), (d) *empathy* (recognizing others’ feelings, establishing rapport, taking another’s perspective), and (e) *social skills* (handling emotions well and accurately in interpersonal relationships). Whereas the Mayer and Salovey approach tends to be more individualistic and psychological, the Goleman approach includes more interpersonal and social dimensions, distinguishing between personal competence (e.g., self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation) and social competence (e.g., empathy, social skills). Similarly, Bar-On’s (1997) dimensions include (a) stress management, (b) interpersonal skills (which also includes empathy), and (c) adaptability (although the latter has strong cognitive connotations in Bar-On’s descriptions). Moreover, the concept of generalized intelligence implies some manner of heightened abilities and, in that respect, is closely aligned with the concept of skill or competence.

## Techniques for Assessing Nonverbal Skills

Three techniques typically have been used by researchers to assess nonverbal skills: (a) standardized performance measures, (b) individualized performance measures, and (c) self-report measures (Riggio, Widaman, & Friedman, 1985). In the case of standardized performance measures, respondents are presented with audio or video stimuli (or both) about which they make judgments such as perceived emotional state, interpersonal relationship, and the presence of deception. Examples of these measures include the Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT; Archer & Costanzo, 1988), the Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (PONS; Rosenthal et al., 1979), the Nonverbal Discrepancy Test (DePaulo, Rosenthal, Eisenstat, Rogers, & Finkelstein, 1978), the

Affect Sensitivity Test (AST; Campbell, Kagan, & Krathwohl, 1971), the Brief Affect Recognition Test (BART; Ekman & Friesen (1974), the Facial Affect Scoring Technique (FAST; Ekman, Friesen, & Tomkins, 1971), the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy-Adult Prosody scale (Baum & Nowicki, 1998), the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), and the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I; Bar-On, 1996, 1997).

Individualized performance measures, on the other hand, involve videotaping participants while they enact various emotions, participate in live interactions, and engage in deceptions and then showing these videotapes to another sample of judges. Examples of these measures include Buck's (1976) Communication of Affect Receiving Ability Test (CARAT) and Archer and Akert's (1977) Situations Interpretations Task (SIT). Lastly, self-report measures involve participants assessing their own nonverbal abilities, as in the cases of Riggio's (1986) Social Skills Inventory and Schrader's (1990) Inventory of Communicator Characteristics. Although self-report measures do not show inordinately high levels of correspondence with standardized measures that require actual encoding or decoding (see Riggio et al., 1985; Segrin, 1998b), both have been shown to predict communicative performance with some reliability (see Snodgrass & Rosenthal, 1985) as well as to correlate with a wide range of criterion measures that conceptually should have positive relationships with social skills (see Riggio, 1986). For example, sizeable correlations have been found between measures of sending and receiving abilities on the one hand and measures of extraversion, self-esteem, and cognitive style on the other.

## FACTORS MODERATING NONVERBAL SKILLS

The plentiful efforts to develop instruments measuring nonverbal encoding and decoding skills have typically validated those measures by examining the extent to which they correlate with or discriminate among other personality measures, are responsive to situational differences, or both. Consequently, much of the literature addressing factors that moderate nonverbal encoding and decoding is not specific to a particular communication function and therefore warrants some discussion before examining separate functions because these moderators can place significant qualifications on the general knowledge claims about nonverbal skill. Further moderator relationships are discussed under the individual functions.

### Culture

At the most global level is the influence of culture. Volumes have been written about cultural variability in nonverbal customs, norms, and display rules. Although disagreement surrounds the extent to which there are innate and culturally universal displays of such elemental relational messages as threat, aggression, association, pair-bonding, and play (see, e.g., Burgoon et al., 1996), there is little dispute that cultures overlay on any existing universal substrata a host of unique display rules, resulting in tremendous variation in how people express and interpret nonverbal cues (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). For example, nonverbal immediacy in the form of high expressivity, close proximity, direct facing and eye contact, touch, and the like are valued and expected in some cultures but considered overly direct, aggressive, or invasive in others (Lee et al., 1992).

## Sex or Gender

A second moderator attracting significant empirical attention is sex or gender.<sup>2</sup> The most comprehensive analyses were completed by J. A. Hall (1978, 1979, 1984, 1998), who has conducted numerous meta-analyses to identify differences in how men and women encode and decode nonverbal behaviors, how large the magnitudes of difference are relative to other sex or gender differences, and how large the magnitudes of differences are relative to other correlates of the same nonverbal expressions or interpretations. Her work, and syntheses found in various nonverbal textbooks and summary chapters (e.g., Burgoon, 1994; Noller, 1992; Riggio, 1992), support the following conclusions:

1. Women and men differ in their nonverbal expressivity. Women are typically more expressive in public or social settings: They smile more, use more eye contact, are more facially and vocally expressive, give and receive more touch, and have more fluent speech than men. Their expressions are also read more accurately by others. One exception is that men use more expansive gestures and movements than women. Some of these differences evaporate when in private or alone.
2. Women also show more social responsiveness and affiliativeness than men: They talk less, listen more, interrupt less, accommodate more to the interaction style of a partner, are less dominant conversationally, adopt closer interaction distances, give more signals of receptivity or interest (such as the head tilt or backchannel cues), display less restlessness, and are better at facial recognition than men.
3. The differences between men and women in encoding ability are highly reliable and are large enough to be socially meaningful (they yield “medium effect sizes” in terms of variance accounted for). For example, women’s rate of smiling averages 65% compared with 35% for men; this magnitude of difference exceeds most of the sex differences in other domains of psychology (Hall, 1998).
4. Women show consistently higher accuracy in decoding others’ nonverbal cues than do men, with the correlation averaging around .20 across three decades of research. This advantage is most evident when judging the face rather than other nonverbal channels, when judging longer displays, and when judging nondiscrepant displays. Men’s acuity increases for brief, discrepant, and vocal displays.
5. The magnitude of women’s decoding advantage also exceeds that of most other sex differences and falls within the range of other cognitive and psychological correlates of nonverbal sensitivity, except for direct measures of interpersonal sensitivity.

## Individual Differences

Other individual differences that have been investigated include a host of personality characteristics, age, and intelligence. As summarized in Rosenthal’s volumes on nonverbal skill (Rosenthal, 1979; Rosenthal et al., 1979), in work by Buck and colleagues (Buck et al., 1974; Sabatelli, Dreyer, & Buck, 1979), and subsequently in other volumes (e.g., Burgoon, 1994; Burgoon et al., 1996; Knapp & Hall, 1992; Riggio, 1986, 1992), the following conclusions are warranted:

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<sup>2</sup>Although *sex* and *gender* are often used interchangeably, the former refers to biological differences, the latter to psychosocial sex role orientation. Because male and female differences typically are a function of both sex and gender, any comparisons between men and women are likely to reflect both or either, although they are not flagged as such.

1. Encoding and decoding ability are correlated: Those who are better senders tend to be better receivers and vice versa, but the relationship is modest.
2. Ability to encode in one channel (e.g., the face) tends to be positively related to ability to encode in another channel (e.g., the voice).
3. Encoding ability is positively related with a variety of personality traits. Those who are more extroverted, nonreticent, expressive, high in self-esteem, high in self-monitoring and public self-consciousness, nondogmatic, and physically attractive tend to be more skillful in nonverbal encoding.
4. Decoding ability is positively correlated with being sociable, nonanxious, publicly self-conscious, empathic, independent, psychologically flexible, and intellectually efficient. Decoding also improves with maturation, practice, and training but is curvilinearly related to age in that decoding is poorer among the very young and the elderly.
5. Encoding skill is unrelated to race, education, or intelligence but somewhat related to occupation in that more skilled individuals gravitate to people-oriented jobs. Decoding skill shows a modest positive relationship to mental abilities as measured by IQ, standardized tests, or amount learned from a teacher and is characterized by a stronger relationship to cognitive complexity.

These relationships bolster the conclusion that a significant component of individual social skill is attributable to abilities to encode and decode nonverbal behaviors and that certain individuals and subgroups (such as women) tend to have a significant advantage. These conclusions are further reinforced by Hall's (1998) meta-analytic summary of other correlates of nonverbal sensitivity. Individuals scoring higher on nonverbal sensitivity actually exhibit such markers of skillful performance as being more proficient at role playing, being more accurate in judging others' social competence, being more accurate in decoding the behavior of familiar others, and creating impressions of warmth, dependability, reassurance, sensitivity, and nonhostility. Despite all of these positive relationships, however, individuals who qualify as more socially skilled do not necessarily rate themselves as more sensitive, empathic, or accurate. Put differently, subjective judgments of ability do not show a high correspondence with objective measures of ability (see, e.g., Rosenthal et al., 1979; Marangoni, Garcia, Ickes, & Teng, 1995).

## Channel, Cue Type, and Congruence

Ability to encode and decode nonverbal cues is also influenced by which nonverbal channel(s) are entailed and whether the verbal and nonverbal channels are congruent with one another. On the encoding side, Ekman and Friesen (1969), in advancing their leakage hypothesis related to deception (discussed below), argued that among nonverbal channels, the face is most closely monitored and most controllable, thus allowing communicators greater capacity to modulate expressions according to their intentions. The voice is posited to be the least controllable.

On the decoding side, substantial evidence points to a visual primacy effect such that people are drawn to visual cues (and especially those involving the face) over auditory ones, and they tend to be more successful at decoding these types of cues than others. For example, some research (e.g., DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979; Rosenthal et al., 1979) has shown a reliance ratio of 4:2:1 or 3:2:1 for facial to body to auditory cues, and the correspondence between attention to a given channel and accurate

decoding of it increases as one moves from voice to body to face. This preference for visual information is particularly associated with accurate judgments of positivity information (e.g., liking or disliking, love vs. hostility) and is stronger among women than men. By contrast, men show relatively greater dependence on auditory cues, which may advantage them in judging dominance information, which is more often communicated through the auditory channel.

Channel and cue congruence also influence accuracy in decoding. An early, highly comprehensive program of research crossing different combinations of facial, body, and auditory presentations of positive and negative, dominant and submissive, and truthful and deceptive samples of behavior revealed that (as expected) among the four samples studied, people were more skilled at decoding pure (as opposed to mixed) messages; this was particularly true when the mixed messages were deceptive as well as discrepant (DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979). Skill in decoding discrepant messages was also distinct from skill in decoding pure messages. In other words, ability to accurately decipher messages presented inconsistently across all nonverbal channels does not translate into ability to do the same when various channels convey inconsistent or conflicting information. Subsequent research has shown that other factors such as the extremity and degree of negativity of the various verbal and nonverbal cues present and the availability of contextual normative information also influence the ease with which they are interpreted, but nonverbal cues largely retain primacy (see Burgoon, 1985; Stiff, Hale, Garlick, & Rogan, 1990).

## **NONVERBAL SKILLS AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS**

In the remainder of this chapter, we consider the ways in which nonverbal behaviors contribute to the skillful achievement of various communication functions. Because summaries elsewhere nicely detail the relationship of nonverbal communication skill to improved health, psychosocial well-being, larger and more effective social networks, better marriages, enhanced job opportunities, more effective teaching, and the like (see, e.g., Noller, 1992; Philipott, Feldman, & McGee, 1992; Riggio, 1992), our emphasis here is less on what desired outcomes are achieved by nonverbally skilled communicators and more on how nonverbal behaviors and constellations of behaviors are implicated in accomplishing desired (or undesired) communication objectives. The literature is organized around those functions that serve as primary communication goals. Our objective is to focus on the particulars of nonverbal skills so that theoreticians and practitioners alike can better understand the essential role that nonverbal skills perform in the full gamut of human conduct.

As a preface to reviewing the relevant scientific literature, a distinction cropping up in the literature that requires a note of explanation is between analyzing nonverbal behaviors as observable, objectively measured entities and analyzing them according to the behavioral gestalts and subjective impressions they form. An approach that has gained adherents in the nonverbal literature is use of a Brunswikian lens model (see, e.g., Bernieri, Gillis, Davis, & Grahe, 1996; Scherer, 1982), in which these are labeled as distal cues and proximal percepts, respectively. Distal cues refer to such concrete and quantifiable features as vocal amplitude, conversational distance between two interactants, or configurations of facial muscles that form a particular emotional display. Proximal percepts refer to the perceptions generated by one or more distal indicators. So, for example, a voice with high amplitude (perceived as loudness), low fundamental frequency (perceived as pitch), high energy at fundamental frequency (perceived as emphasis), and downward pitch contour might

create the perception of a threatening voice. Whereas it is common in communication, speech science, or ethological literature to see nonverbal cues examined as discrete distal indicators, it is relatively more common in much of the psychological literature to see them examined as percepts. The psychologist, for example, may be more interested in whether a voice is perceived as warm or cold than in what vocal features foster that impression, whereas the communication scholar may be more interested in decomposing the impression into its constituent predictors. We find it useful to adopt a Brunswikian lens perspective in which we try to ascertain which distal cues lead to which proximal percepts and, in turn, how those percepts affect achievement of various communication functions. Where possible, we will adopt this approach in reviewing the literature.

As a further frame for the discussion that follows, it is important to underscore the polysemous nature of nonverbal behaviors as well as their substitutability. A single nonverbal cue may have multiple meanings, and the same meaning may be conveyed by a number of different nonverbal cues. This multiplicity of potential meanings attending any single nonverbal cue, coupled with the potential for various cues to substitute for one another in expressing the same information or being interpreted in a similar fashion, implies that nonverbal skill must be examined at the level of constellations of cues and with cognizance of the social context and actors' goals, which may constrain and guide the selection of meaning. From the standpoint of what constitutes a skillful performance, this means that a variety of behavioral patterns may achieve the same end, with the relative superiority of one pattern over another being dictated by the goals, expectations, rules, roles, and obligations associated with the type of episode under consideration.

## Emotional Expression and Management

Early views of nonverbal emotional expressions as largely cathartic and indicative of an individual's internal states rather than social in nature have given way to a recognition that displays of emotions are both highly communicative and intended for reception by others (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986; Buck, 1984; Chovil, 1991). Indeed, Chovil's (1991) findings provide evidence that "facial displays are more likely to be exhibited in social interactions and illustrate the important role in conveying messages to others in face-to-face communication" (p. 153). Moreover, as Planalp (1998) suggested, because some emotional expressions are displayed solely in public situations, they cannot be simply expressions of internal emotional states, but rather must be forms of interpersonal communication. Some researchers (e.g., Fischer & Tagney, 1995) have gone so far as to suggest that emotions function as organizational structures that give rise to social scripts that, in turn, produce particular communicative actions on the part of both senders and receivers. Emotions and emotional messages do not occur within a vacuum—they are frequently situated within dynamic sequences of interpersonal behavior and interaction. In other words, individuals bring their emotions with them into interactions, and these emotions not only affect how they behave toward others, but also how others behave toward them (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Moreover, an individual's emotional state may be changed through interaction. For this reason, skill at encoding, decoding, and managing emotions is of utmost importance.

**Encoding Emotions.** Nonverbal skill in emotional encoding consists of representing the internal experienced states of emotion in such a manner that others can decode them accurately and, consequently, help one to achieve his or her desired

end state (such as receiving help when one is sad). Put differently, nonverbal encoding skill entails the ability to express and manage emotional displays in a manner that is consistent with socially and culturally determined display, decoding, and management “rules.” Although emotions are communicated via a variety of nonverbal and verbal cues, their expression is typically viewed as the province of nonverbal behavior. In a study of emotional cues present in everyday life, Planalp (1998) reported that verbal cues of emotion, such as telling one’s partner “I’m very angry with you,” appeared with far less frequency than (a) facial cues, such as eye rolling or smiling; (b) vocal cues, such as pitch, volume, and rate; and (c) bodily cues such as pacing, dancing around, or sitting with a droopy posture. In other words, not only is emotion communicated through a variety of channels and cues, but individuals tend to rely on those that are nonverbal in nature (as opposed to verbal) when expressing (as well as interpreting and attempting to manage) emotions.

The ability to express positive emotions has been linked to psychological well-being and so probably represents one of the more elemental aspects of skillful nonverbal expression. Happy individuals are typically socially outgoing, seek contact with others, and in general, communicate feelings of well-being to others (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O’Connor, 1987). Research also suggests that happiness functions communicatively to reinforce pleasant experiences for individuals involved in interactions in which this emotion is expressed. Indeed, it has been shown to create positive contagion, as well as reciprocity of positive affect (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). As Van Hooff (1972) suggested, the sharing of happiness may actually function as a display of appeasement or indicate one’s willingness to engage in a positive social relationship, given that individuals rarely experience happiness when they are in danger or violent. Moreover, there is evidence that individuals who emanate happiness are viewed by their peers as being more attractive and more popular than individuals who appear to be less happy (Sommers, 1984). Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987) noted that the communication of emotions such as happiness “leads each actor to become aware of the other’s euphoric feelings, and a euphoric mutual emotion is created. Such emotions act to cement social relations” (p. 46). Hence, the expression of happiness can lead to positive experiences and outcomes for all individuals present in such an interaction. Moreover, the capacity to express more intimate forms of positivity, such as love, is foundational to the establishment of close relationships. Indeed, as Andersen and Guerrero (1998) assert, “It is hard to conceive of an emotion that is more interpersonal than love” (p. 75).

How are these positive emotional states expressed by skillful communicators? Extensive work on the cues associated with happiness (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1969, 1975; Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1972) has confirmed that it is communicated through positive facial cues such as smiling and vocal cues such as resonance and relaxed laughter (Shaver et al., 1987). Likewise, joy (defined as a stronger, more positive version of happiness) is expressed by large amounts of smiling, laughing, and spirited talk (Shaver et al., 1987). Importantly, people tend to smile more while in the presence of others than when alone (Kraut & Johnson, 1979; Rimé, Mesquita, Philipott, & Boca, 1991), suggesting that happiness is usually communicated to others. As for love, despite common conceptions that love is communicated through eye contact and other forms of facial expression, Fischer and Tangney (1995) cautioned that research has not yet been able to identify a prototypical facial expression for love; however, a variety of kinesic, vocalic, proxemic, and haptic cues used by humans and other species are associated with successful signaling of attraction and courtship (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993; Givens, 1978). Courtship cues tend to

convey openness or accessibility, interest, coyness, submissiveness, babyishness, and simultaneous inclusiveness with target and exclusion of others. Many of the relevant cues coincide with those used to signal involvement and rapport (discussed under relational communication). Additionally, blushing, facial relaxation, smiles, head tilts, mutual gaze, and pupil dilation are exhibited when individuals experience a surge in arousal, which is one correlate of feelings of love (Bloch, Orthous, & Santibanez, 1987; Rubin, 1973; Shaver et al., 1987).

In contrast to the more positive emotions of love and happiness, expressing negative emotions has mixed consequences. Anger can function to communicate distance to others, frighten an offending partner, or reestablish power (Shaver et al., 1987). Clearly, its origins are firmly rooted in protection instincts, as well as self-defense. Fear likewise originates in an individual's impulses toward self-protection (DePaulo, 1992). Fearful communication likely functions to calm aggressors, prompt rescue, avert impending disasters, or warn others of danger (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). Many forms of sadness (e.g., extreme grief), although often involuntary, may also serve to gain sympathy and help from others. In these respects, the ability to express these negative emotions can be beneficial components of nonverbal skill.

However, negative emotional expressions also carry risks to perceived and actual social competence. As Andersen and Guerrero (1998) suggested, "The frequency of quarrels with friends, family and strangers, and the high level of interpersonal violence in our society demonstrates that anger is often manifested inappropriately" (p. 77). Fear and sadness, too, can easily undermine an individual's public or interpersonal image in that they can be viewed as indicative of cowardice, weakness, or incompetence. Hence, individuals frequently attempt to control negative emotions such as fear or to avoid situations in which such emotions may be elicited (Stearns, 1993), and acting unafraid and composed is an important goal of self-presentation in that it can reduce aggression and maintain face (Shaver et al., 1987). Unfortunately, due to the intensity of the experience of these emotions, individuals often "leak" their feelings of fear and, in turn, undermine such self-presentation goals (DePaulo, 1992; Ekman, 1985).

The cues associated with negative emotions are articulated more fully elsewhere, but it is worth noting some of the involuntary cues that may undermine skillful communication. Among these are spontaneous facial expressions of fear or anger, sober facial expressions, frowning, reduced smiling, slouching, indirect body orientation, threatening gestures, crying or whimpering, monotone voice, decreased eye contact or hostile glares, long response latencies, and breaking things (e.g., Buck, 1984; Canary, Spitzberg, & Semic, 1998; Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Ekman et al., 1972; Guerrero, 1994; Magai & McFadden, 1995; Shaver et al., 1987; Scherer, Banse, Wallbott, & Goldbeck, 1991; Segrin, 1998a; Segrin & Abramson, 1994). Moreover, sad individuals not only have difficulty focusing on others during interactions, but they exhibit negative tones and unskilled verbal communication (Segrin, 1998a).

**Regulating Emotional Displays.** Emotional expressions are subject to numerous contingencies that will affect when, where, how, in what forms, and by whom they are considered socially appropriate (a key factor in all skilled communication). Among these contingencies are culturally dictated *display rules* (Ekman & Friesen, 1975), which reflect the need to manage the expression of particular emotions in particular circumstances. These rules concern how emotional expressions ought to be modulated or regulated through (a) simulation, (b) intensification, (c) deintensification or miniaturization, (d) masking, (e) neutralization or inhibition, or a combination of

these (Andersen, Andersen, & Landgraf, 1985; Ekman, 1978; Porter & Samovar, 1998; Shennum & Bugental, 1982). In the case of *simulation*, individuals act as though they feel an emotion when it is not actually present, as in instances in which one smiles when actually unhappy. People may simulate emotions to conform to politeness rituals and situational appropriateness (e.g., pretending to be happy when a barely familiar coworker announces he is getting married) or to gain something they want (e.g., pretending to be scared so as to elicit comfort from someone). Similarly, *intensification*, involves giving the appearance of having stronger feelings than are actually being experienced; however, unlike simulation, intensification involves actually experiencing a less intense form of the emotion than is communicated to others. For instance, people may laugh enthusiastically at a date's joke when, in reality, they found it only mildly amusing. *Deintensification or miniaturization*, on the other hand, involves communicating an emotion at a level that is less intense than one is actually feeling. It is often used to conform to social appropriateness rules, as in cases in which individuals raise their voices rather than yell. *Masking* entails communicating an emotion that is different from what an individual is actually experiencing (as in cases in which one does not wish to show fear in public), whereas *neutralization or inhibition* involves giving the impression of having no feelings when one is actually experiencing an emotion, as in cases in which one might want to hide anger from a spouse.

These display rules are learned throughout the life span through teaching, unconscious observation, and imitation (Buck, 1983). They "govern which emotions may be displayed in various social circumstances, and they specify the intensity of the emotional display" (Porter & Samovar, 1998, p. 457). Consequently, skilled nonverbal communication of emotions involves adhering to and exemplifying culturally and socially specific display rules to achieve specific goals.

Individual differences in ability to regulate emotional displays are a major component of emotional intelligence. A major study of Fortune 500 executives (first conducted in the 1980s by the Center for Creative Leadership and followed up in the 1990s) reveals that those whose careers were derailed showed less ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses in check than those who were successful (see Goleman, 1998). Conversely, those who are more skillful at expressing and regulating emotional displays (i.e., those who stifle angry outbursts in the face of criticism, are disinclined to be moody and abrasive, and display calm in the face of crisis) convey tact and empathy and engender trust by others.

**Decoding Emotions.** Although we have identified some of the behaviors that people display when experiencing or attempting to communicate various emotions to others, it is important to note that this does not necessarily mean that receivers recognize these cues or attribute the meaning intended by the sender. Consequently, to be nonverbally skilled in the area of emotional communication, one must also be skilled at accurately decoding others' emotions.

Decoding nonverbal cues of emotion has a long history of study, including research on empathy, social intelligence, and person perception, and tends to focus on facial and vocal behaviors. In general, people are more skilled at decoding pleasant facial expressions than unpleasant ones such as anger, sadness, disgust, and fear (Custrini & Feldman, 1989; Feinman & Feldman, 1982; Horatçsu & Ekinci, 1992; Wagner, MacDonald, & Manstead, 1986). Although there are particular behaviors that are distinctive to each emotion, there appears to be enough similarity among facial expressions of emotions that observers make consistent mistakes (Wagner et al., 1986; Wiggers, 1982). For example, observers often mistake fear for surprise

because of the brow and eye positions. Likewise, fear and anger are often confused because of eyebrow movement. Indeed, Schlosberg (1952, 1954) went so far as to suggest that, much like the emotions they represent, facial expressions can be arrayed along two or three dimensions such that emotions that are similar in activity, intensity, and pleasantness will be similar in expression and more likely to be confused by observers. Consequently, people are unlikely to confuse disgust with surprise or happiness with anger, but they may confuse happiness with surprise or disgust with anger. Moreover, such confusion is likely to be increased when one encounters blended facial expressions, given that most blends contain similar or related emotions (see Ekman & Friesen, 1975).

As is the case with facial expressions, the ability to decode vocal expressions of emotions varies according to the emotion displayed. Whereas anger, sadness, happiness, and nervousness are among the most easily identified emotions in the voice, disgust, shame, fear, jealousy, love, satisfaction, and sympathy are less accurately judged (Apple & Hecht, 1982; Banse & Scherer, 1996; Pittam & Scherer, 1993; Scherer et al., 1991). As with mistakes at decoding facial expressions, receivers frequently confuse these latter emotions with others. They mistake surprise or happiness for sadness, love for sympathy or sadness, fear for sadness or nervousness, and interest for happiness or pride (Apple & Hecht, 1982; Banse & Scherer, 1996). Again, the reason for this appears to be that vocal expressions for certain emotions exhibit similar features but differ in quality, intensity, or valence.

Skill at decoding emotions appears to be predicated on a working knowledge of what Buck (1983) called decoding rules. Analogous to display rules in the investigation of sending accuracy, decoding rules are "cultural rules or expectations about the attention to, and interpretation of, nonverbal displays" (p. 217). Not surprisingly, then, decoding ability is influenced by culture. A recent meta-analysis by Ambady (1999) found that when judging emotions across cultural boundaries, accuracy is higher when cues are static (rather than dynamic), when the displays are facial (rather than vocal or from other nonverbal channels), when the emotions being displayed are anger or happiness, and when judges are members of the same ingroup as those displaying the emotions (although minority members are more accurate than majority group members, reinforcing the assertion that skill in judging emotions accrues a survival benefit).

A number of other factors influence decoding ability—for instance, the nature of the emotional expression itself. Because people can feign emotions to cover up internal distress, as when masking anxiety with a smile or laugh, expressions are easier to judge when the external display is consistent with the internal state (Ansfield & DePaulo, 1999), although people are capable of differentiating between fake and felt smiles. Moreover, posed expressions are easier to decode than spontaneous expressions (Fujita, Harper, & Weins, 1980; Motley, 1993; Motley & Camden, 1988; Zuckerman et al., 1976). Emotions that are more intensely felt by the encoder tend to be decoded more accurately by receivers (Horatçsu & Ekinci, 1992; Zuckerman, Lipets, Koivumaki, & Rosenthal, 1975), and when available, decoders integrate contextual information into their judgments of emotional expressions (Barrett, 1993; Cupchik & Poulos, 1984; Fernandez-Dols, Wallbott, & Sanchez, 1991; Horatçsu & Ekinci, 1992; McHugo, Lanzetta, & Bush, 1991). Additionally, several individual differences matter. Apart from the earlier-cited differences in dimensions of emotional intelligence, one is age: Decoding skill improves from infancy into early adulthood, but it declines again at advanced ages as one's sensory capacities (e.g., eyesight and hearing) become impaired (Ludemann & Nelson, 1988; Matsumoto & Kishimoto, 1983; Montepare & Tucker, 1999; Segrin, 1994). As noted earlier, another major factor

is sex or gender: Women tend to be better decoders than men (see, e.g., Wagner et al., 1986; Zuckerman et al., 1976). Finally, individuals who are good encoders tend to be good decoders of emotional expressions, in general; however, good encoders of a particular emotion may not be good decoders of the same emotion.

If one considers the interdependency of social interactants, the implications of skillful decoding of emotions are clear. Because these findings have been summarized in detail elsewhere (see, for instance, Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Goleman, 1998), suffice it to say that skilled nonverbal decoders tend to have more positive and rewarding social interactions with peers, as well as with strangers. Moreover, sensitive people are more popular and have larger social circles than less sensitive people, and they are less likely to experience social anxiety (Riggio, 1986; Riggio, Throckmorton, & DePaola, 1990; Rosenthal et al., 1979). In other words, the ability to skillfully decode emotions translates into improved social relations, which is the benchmark of general social skill.

## **Conversational Management**

Feldman et al. (1991) proposed that nonverbal skill is manifested when encoding and decoding abilities "enhance the course of social interaction and the goals of the interaction are more likely to be achieved" (p. 321). This view presages the very central role that nonverbal behavior plays in the accomplishment of coordinated and comprehensible interaction. Nonverbal cues are essentially "the 'traffic cops' of conversation, regulating the initiation, termination, and ongoing sequence of interaction" (Burgoon et al., 1996, p. 338). They are the "lubricant" that keeps the machinery of conversation well oiled. Interactants use them to manage how they enter and leave conversations, who speaks when (and to whom), how they change topics, and how they coordinate actions with others throughout such interactions. Hence, the ability to use nonverbal cues to regulate conversations is perhaps the most fundamental form of nonverbal communication skill.

Nonverbal skills are at work long before even the first words of an interaction are exchanged. At the beginning of an interaction, spatial arrangements, artifacts in the interaction environment, physical appearance, cues of status, and the like identify for the participants what kind of communication is both appropriate and expected (e.g., social or task oriented, formal or informal). In addition to these static features, dynamic qualities such as kinesic demeanor clarify role relationships among participants and, consequently, help to define the nature of the social situation. By illuminating the purposes of an interpersonal interaction as well as the course of behaviors that are called on in said interaction, such cues aid in regulating the interaction that follows.

In addition, subtle nonverbal cues are at the center of greeting and leave-taking rituals. They signal awareness of the presence of others and a willingness (or unwillingness) to become involved in an interaction, as well as the time and appropriate manner in which to end an interaction. Specific nonverbal behaviors (on the part of both speakers and listeners) denote changes in the topic or tone of an interaction, feedback cues that control speaker behavior, the influence of interruptions and other cues on floor-holding or conversational flow, and factors influencing the smoothness of interactions (e.g., Drummond, 1989; Erickson, 1975; Feldstein & Welkowitz, 1978; Gurevitch, 1989; Hodgins & Zuckerman, 1990; Kendon, 1990; Rosenfeld, 1978; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990; Wiemann & Knapp, 1975). Because the nonverbal means by which people initiate and terminate interactions have been articulated in detail

elsewhere by other researchers (e.g., Kellermann, Reynolds, & Chen, 1991; Kendon, 1990; Knapp, Hart, Freidrich, & Schulman, 1973; Morris, 1977; O'Leary & Gallois, 1985), we will not discuss them in depth here. Suffice it to say, however, that although the specific rituals of greeting and termination patterns do vary considerably by culture, they share the degree to which they signal accessibility and establish (or reestablish) the intimacy level of interactions.

Having noted the role of nonverbal cues in the management of conversational episodes, it is not difficult to imagine that skill in encoding, decoding, and adapting to such cues would be important, if not essential, to the smooth functioning of interpersonal interactions. Specifically, nonverbal skill likely not only undergirds the process of creating and maintaining smooth conversations and interactions, but it likely also provides the essential punctuation and “chunking” that allows order to emerge from the chaotic stream of signals being exchanged (see Waldron, 1997). Undoubtedly, one could argue that skill in the nonverbal management of conversations and interactions is the foundation for successful social functioning (Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995), including the actualization of the various communication functions outlined in this chapter, as well as those throughout this book.

## Relational Communication

Relational communication concerns the ways in which people define their interpersonal relationships through nonverbal (or verbal) indications of how they regard one another and the relationship itself. Relational communication operates in service of relational goals (e.g., pair-bonding, supporting, comforting, helping) but also serves as a frame for interpreting instrumental and self-expressive activity and thus is a central feature of social life. In pioneering work on this topic, Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) distinguished between the content and relational dimensions of human interaction and contended that the latter was an omnipresent meta-communication directing or “commanding” interlocutors how to interpret the (presumably verbal) content being exchanged. In this manner, nonverbal communication came to be equated with relational communication and vice versa. Burgoon (1994) argued against treating the two as synonymous, because relational communication may occur at the verbal level and nonverbal messages may themselves be the content rather than an auxiliary to the content. Notwithstanding, relational and nonverbal communication are highly correlated, making skill in relational communication largely a nonverbal matter.

Although relational communication is not confined to dyadic interaction, it is typically analyzed at the dyadic level, focusing on the dynamic stream of cues pairs of people exchange about the current status of their relationship and the (usually) implicit meanings assigned to those cues. It is through relational messages that individuals come to know “where they stand” vis-à-vis one another during a given interchange and from which they infer the more general definition of their relationship. The themes of these relational messages have a universal quality to them, forming what Burgoon and Hale (1984) defined as the fundamental topoi of relational communication. A synthesis of literatures ranging from the ethological and anthropological to the sociological, linguistic, and psychotherapeutic led Burgoon and Hale (1984) to propose that relational communication can be decomposed into as many as 12 nonorthogonal themes, including (a) intimacy and its subthemes of affection–hostility, involvement–uninvolvement, depth–superficiality, trust–distrust, and inclusion–exclusion; (b) similarity–dissimilarity; (c) dominance–submission;

(d) the interrelated themes of composure–noncomposure and emotional arousal–nonarousal; (e) formality–informality; (f) and social versus task orientation. These themes can be viewed as the multifaceted meanings that skillful communicators must master during the course of any interchange and to which they must continually attend as they manage the evolving definitions of their interpersonal relationships.

Relational communication inevitably interrelates with other communication functions or goals. Because expressions of involvement are central to accomplishing the goal of conversational management (i.e., the ways in which pairs of individuals can signal their degree of engagement in a conversation or a task), we have already discussed or alluded to many of these behaviors under that function. Similarly, because composure and arousal are intimately linked to emotional expression, nonverbal expressions and interpretations related to those dimensions have already been covered in that preceding section. Other key relational dimensions, such as expressions of dominance, formality, and task orientation, factor into impression management and influence goals and so are discussed under that heading. In this section, we thus focus on the constellation of relational messages related to intimacy and similarity.

What constitutes effective relational communication, of course, depends on communicators' goals and the meanings they intend to convey to a co-interactant; it is the finesse with which one can engage in "relational multitasking"—accomplishing this multiplicity of goals and meanings in a manner that avoids sending conflicting or incongruent messages—that is the indubitable mark of the skillful communicator. Failure to do so constitutes a failed or invalidated performance in the Goffmanesque sense (Goffman, 1959) and may even be regarded as deceptive (Bond, 1999; Buller & Burgoon, 1996). It seems self-evident that considerable cognitive complexity and performance sophistication are required (a) to recognize, for any given situation and interaction partner, all the relational goals and face-needs that are salient; (b) to select the appropriate responses from among the vast array of potential responses; and (c) to possess a repertoire of sufficient breadth and flexibility that allows one to actually put the "best" (i.e., most appropriate, efficient, or effective) response into practice. For example, imagine the unpleasant task of informing a close friend that you have won admission to a prestigious organization for which you were both under consideration but he or she has not. The situation calls for controlled rather than unfettered displays of joy, as well as for tact and empathy but not cloying sympathy for the friend's hurt and embarrassment. In addition, it calls for understanding if the friend is not enthusiastically congratulatory and for temporary distancing if the friend wishes privacy rather than conversation. It is easy to imagine a less-than-skillful communicator, despite "knowing" what the situation calls for, still inadvertently leaking true feelings through micromomentary facial displays or subtle vocal cues and thus sending signals that are inconsistent with the intended verbal message. Incongruities among the various channels can come across as smug, insincere, or patronizing.

The complexity of selecting the right behaviors to convey intended meanings is further compounded by cultural differences in what nonverbal behaviors are considered acceptable (or unacceptable) for display and what interpretations are assigned to them. To illustrate, same-sex touch is eschewed in some cultures because it may signal sexual interest, whereas in other cultures, it is a common means of expressing platonic friendship. Another example is gift giving: Whereas a gift of flowers in one country may signify a simple expression of appreciation for another's hospitality or a kindness shown, in another place, it may constitute the prelude to a proposal of marriage. Skillful relational communication, then, is not just a matter of selecting and producing the right nonverbal displays but also of integrating an array of verbal and nonverbal cues into a coherent whole that does not create relational "misstatements."

It is not just a matter of interpreting single nonverbal cues correctly but of making sense of the full complement of messages that are sent concurrently and sorting the intentional from the unintentional. Put differently, audience and situation analysis are no less a nonverbal than a verbal matter, and the complexity of coordinating all the verbal and nonverbal channels increases in proportion to the number of potentially competing goals that are present.

That different goals call for differential emphasis on various relational message themes is illustrated in a study by Schrader (1994) in which more than 400 observers watched a segment of the film *The Twelve Angry Men* and judged the 12 target characters' nonverbal relational communication for the potential to fulfill three classes of social goals (relational, instrumental, and self-presentational). Twenty nonverbal behaviors were measured and clustered through factor analysis to represent four orthogonal dimensions of (a) intimacy or similarity, (b) immediacy, (c) dominance, and (d) anxiety or composure. Results showed that targets were judged as most able to fulfill the relational and self-presentational goals of "feeling better about yourself," "seeking comfort and reassurance," "seeking advice," and obtaining critical feedback if they exhibited such intimacy behaviors as facial pleasantness, postural relaxation, laughter, smiling, eye contact, forward lean, and fluent speech. Intimacy and immediacy together also were key in achieving the instrumental goal of "convincing an adversary." By contrast, achieving the instrumental goal of "getting even" was most strongly influenced by dominance and immediacy behaviors. Thus, different combinations of nonverbal cues were implicated in achieving different goals. In an earlier study of verbal rather than nonverbal behavior, Schrader and Liska (1991) found that a deferential linguistic style was preferred to a nondeferential one for each of five goals (e.g., expressing negative feelings, requesting compliance, requesting reassurance). When discussing the advisability of displaying dominance versus deference, the researchers noted that "if one's goal is to be perceived as warm, friendly, and likable, deference . . . is the choice. . . . However, perceptions of success, power, and credibility appear to be facilitated by an assertive (but probably not aggressive) style" (pp. 40–41). The explanation offered for preferences for a nondominant style was that it comports with politeness theory's fundamental tenet of preserving another's "face."

With this caveat duly registered—that designation of behavioral displays as competent or skillful depends on the goal(s) to be achieved as well as the cultural mores associated with such displays—it is still possible to identify some features of nonverbal communication that more often than not will express empathy, trust, closeness, affection, depth, receptivity, similarity, and the like. These are discussed next, followed by discussion of issues related to skill in decoding relational messages.

**Nonverbal Encoding of Intimacy and Similarity.** We have already noted that one of the cardinal principles for achieving smooth, coordinated conversation is the exhibition of nonverbal involvement. The cues associated with involvement also share much of the responsibility for communicating relational intimacy. If cues of positivity and similarity are added to these, a profile emerges of how skillful communicators convey relational closeness, receptivity, depth, immediacy, trust, and common ground.

Several investigations have sought to identify this profile of intimacy, similarity, and rapport cues. Three reviews of this literature (Burgoon, 1994; Burgoon & Le Poire, 1999; Grahe & Bernieri, 1999) summarize both encoding and decoding literature and offer a fairly comprehensive picture of how these messages are conveyed nonverbally. Cues of involvement, when combined with similarity and positivity

cues, create messages of affection and rapport. In general, intimacy, similarity, and rapport are expressed and interpreted along seven dimensions: (a) immediacy, (b) expressiveness, (c) altercentrism, (d) conversational management, (e) relaxation, (f) positive affect, and (g) indications of connection or identification between partners or in-group members. More specifically, the following sets of cues convey each of these dimensions:

1. *Immediacy*: close proximity, forward lean, direct facing and body orientation, direct and frequent gaze, and touch (e.g., handshakes or incidental and brief touches in nonromantic relationships; pats, hugs, soothing contact, kissing in more intimate relationships)
2. *Expressiveness*: animated face and body, frequent and expressive gestures (illustrators, emblems, affect displays, regulators), expansive gestures, expressive voice (pitch variety, tempo variety, rapid tempo, louder voice, greater intensity)
3. *Altercentrism*: attentive listening, avoidance of self-focused gestures, postural mirroring, absence of interruptions
4. *Relaxation and composure*: moderate (rather than hyper or hypo) degrees of postural relaxation, relaxed voice (but also nervous vocalizations), absence of object-manipulation gestures
5. *Good conversational management*: smooth turn switching, fluent speech, short response latencies, few and brief silences, interactional synchrony
6. *Positivity*: smiling, head nodding and other affirmative backchannel cues, resonant and warm voice, relaxed laughter, head tilt, gift giving
7. *Tie signs*: indicators of identification with the partner or group such as identical dress, group insignias, matching rings or other jewelry, similar hairstyles or grooming practices, body contacts such as arms around waist

These patterns are applicable to platonic and social, as well as romantic, relationships. In more intimate relationships, additional factors moderate these associations. Beyond the moderators identified earlier, patterns for expressing intimacy and similarity are qualified by attachment styles and relational happiness or distress. Guerrero (1996), Guerrero and Burgoon (1996), and Le Poire, Shepard, and Duggan (1999) found that levels of involvement, pleasantness, and expressiveness varied as a function of one's own, parents', and partner's attachment styles. People who have *secure* attachment styles (i.e., have positive models of self and others) and those who are *preoccupied* with external validation (i.e., have negative models of self but positive models of others, leading to desire for intimacy but fear of abandonment) tend to express higher levels of intimacy than do *dismissively avoidant* individuals (i.e., those who dismiss relationships and avoid intimacy out of a positive view of self but negative view of others). Degree of adaptation to partner also differs according to the combinations of attachment styles. For example, women with preoccupied romantic partners display more involvement, expressiveness, and pleasantness when interacting with their insecure partners. The implications for nonverbal skill are that different patterns may be needed and preferred, depending on the approach and avoidance orientations present within each couple. It might be tempting to conclude that couples who are most adept at adapting to each other's communication style may be regarded as most skillful. For example, women who step up their pleasantness and involvement with "needy" male partners may help to allay the partner's fear

of abandonment. However, adaptation need not always take the form of increasing involvement and pleasantness and may not always contribute to positive functioning by the couple. For example, the tendency of “role-reversed” men (those whose parental attachment styles required them to be the caregiver and who become fearful of excessive intimacy in adulthood) to exhibit less, rather than more, involvement with preoccupied women suggests that some patterns that compensate for one’s own intimacy needs may be counterproductive in satisfying one’s partner’s intimacy needs. Thus, whether reciprocity or compensation is the most “skillful” response should vary with the attachment styles of the couple.

Research on expressions of intimacy and positivity among married couples affirms this, having uncovered different patterns of expression for happy versus unhappy couples and for wives versus husbands (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Noller, 1980, 1981; Noller & Ventardos, 1986). People in happy or well-adjusted relationships are more likely to reciprocate a partner’s pleasant and involved communication style: If the wife displays positivity, the husband responds in kind and vice versa. Well-adjusted couples are also better able to encode messages in a way that can be read accurately by their partner or by outsiders. Wives tend to be the better message senders, especially of positive messages—a finding that is highly consistent with the general superiority of women in nonverbal encoding and expressivity noted earlier. However, wives who exhibit low levels of marital adjustment tend to send more discrepant messages (typically sending positive visual but negative verbal or vocal messages) than do husbands or well-adjusted wives.

This latter finding begins to point to which nonverbal cues are especially relevant to successful encoding and decoding. Among the nonverbal cues used by wives to send positive relational messages are the smile, head tilt, and head down; among the cues used by men are the eyebrow raise, eyebrow flash, and head up. These could be viewed as appropriate cues to enlist in skillful performances of positive relational messages, particularly in light of their intimacy-related connotations of involvement, affection, and receptivity. Conversely, men and women may communicate negative relational messages such as contempt and belligerence via loud, sarcastic voices, disgusted facial gestures, frowns, scowls, glares, gaze avoidance, or distancing. These negative expressions obviously would qualify as unskillful if the objective is to create a close and loving relationship, but they would qualify as skillful if the objective is to signal one’s level of distress and dissatisfaction with a relationship.

**Nonverbal Decoding of Intimacy and Similarity.** Less has been written explicitly about what constitutes competent interpretation of relational messages, but three bodies of literature are germane: (a) that on interpretations of inconsistent verbal and nonverbal messages, (b) that on empathy and empathetic accuracy, and (c) that on general interpersonal or nonverbal sensitivity. Regarding the first line of work, research in the 1970s and 1980s attempted to discover the relative impact of verbal versus nonverbal cues in deriving meaning in social interactions by combining nonverbal and verbal cues in various consistent and inconsistent patterns. For example, by pitting a dominant verbal message against a nondominant verbal one, or a hostile vocal cue against a friendly verbal one, it was expected that the relative weights of nonverbal and verbal information could be assigned. Although the strategy of drawing conclusions about relative variance accounted for by different independent variables has since been discredited because of the difficulty of verifying that the independent variable manipulations were of equal strength before being combined, some insights into interpretational skill can still be gleaned from this work. As summarized in Burgoon

(1985) and Burgoon et al. (1996), these studies showed, first, that nonverbal cues tended to outweigh verbal ones in people's judgments about interpersonal relationships and affect. Normatively speaking, this might imply that skill in interpreting nonverbal relational information confers benefits. Given that women have been shown to have superiority in decoding most forms of nonverbal cues and are regarded as the more socially sensitive sex, it is easy to make the inferential leap that greater attunement to nonverbal relational cues is an essential element in social skill. Certainly, most of the measures of social skills that were reviewed earlier take this as a matter of presumption. But it can be as easily argued that hypersensitivity to relational information can at times be debilitating—even paralyzing—leading to neuroticism and failure to achieve certain goals. Thus, as with other aspects of nonverbal sensitivity, greater capacity to decode nonverbal relational messages is neither invariably an advantage nor a marker of superior skill, if skill is judged by outcomes. In fact, one of the more interesting hypotheses that has been advanced in regard to women's nonverbal sensitivity is the "accommodation hypothesis" that women are especially adept at "tuning in" to others' intentional messages, while politely ignoring all those other potentially inadvertent, leaked cues (Rosenthal & DePaulo, 1979). From this perspective, skill resides not as much in reading the available information as in deciding which information to process and which to ignore.

A second major set of conclusions to be drawn from the aforementioned channel reliance literature concerns which channels or types of cues are most influential on people's interpersonal judgments. When incongruent messages are presented, people tend to rely on nonverbal cues over verbal ones, visual over vocal ones, negative over positive ones, and extreme over neutral ones. From an information-processing standpoint, this implies that individuals do not combine social information additively. Speculatively, the ability to recognize incongruities and, when various forms of information conflict, to place greater reliance on negative or intense information may reflect a primordial social skill: Because it increased the probability of early detection and avoidance of dangers, as well as adaptation to changing circumstances, such skill likely conferred survival benefits on individuals who were able to discriminate novel and unusual stimuli. We take up this issue of recognizing discrepant information again when we discuss deception.

Third, research on channel reliance revealed individual differences in channel reliance. People could be classified according to whether they depended primarily on the verbal channel, on nonverbal visual or vocal channels, or were flexible in shifting their reliance according to the situation. Whether flexibility in channel reliance better equips communicators to tune in to the most relevant social information—verbal or nonverbal—is an empirical question that remains to be answered.

The other two bodies of literature relevant to decoding relational communication are closely related. Work surrounding empathy and related constructs of interpersonal or affective sensitivity has variously been conceptualized as the capacity to understand another's emotional, visual, or cognitive perspective; to take another's point of view; to make similar attributions as another or recognize the implications of another's plight; to express concern for another; to feel the same emotions another is feeling; or a combination of these (Hogan, 1969; Hubbard, 1996; O'Connell, 1995). In principle, the presence of empathy would best be validated by demonstrating some overt manifestations of it. However, the linkage between felt and expressed empathy is complex and in some cases counterintuitive. Hubbard (1996), for example, found that self-reported or induced empathy did not necessarily translate into nonverbal manifestations of greater responsiveness to a partner, and higher scores

on one subdimension of empathy—emotional contagion—were actually negatively related to showing appropriate responses to a partner. This raises questions as to what actually constitutes empathy and casts some doubt as to whether the various subdimensions associated with it constitute skillful communication. Nonetheless, it is routinely regarded as a marker of social sensitivity.

From a decoding standpoint, then, the role of empathy is examined as accurate empathy (a clinical version which reflects correspondence between therapists' and clients' views of the client's self-concept) or empathic accuracy, which is operationalized as the ability to project what another is feeling or thinking (e.g., Ickes, 1993; Ickes, Stinson, Bissonnette, & Garcia, 1990). Although empathic accuracy derives partly from previous knowledge of the individual and what is self-disclosed verbally, some of it is based on interpreting nonverbal cues; however, the nonverbal indicators most responsible for accurate judgments have not been systematically identified. Most closely relevant is work on marital interaction which has examined marital couples' ability to read one another's nonverbal cues and, more generally, the body of work on person perception, or what in the nonverbal literature is referred to as impression formation. The primary difference is that empathic accuracy or interpersonal sensitivity is thought to reflect the ability to judge transitory states, whereas impression formation literature focuses on judgments of fairly stable traits. Importantly, reliable cross-situational individual differences in empathic accuracy (Marangoni et al., 1995) imply that it may be more of a trait, itself, and reflect what has been labeled the "good judge" (Funder & Harris, 1986).

The earlier cited research on marital and couple interaction has revealed that, like encoding, accuracy or errors in decoding partners' communication is related to a couple's degree of adjustment or satisfaction with the relationship. Happy and better adjusted couples, just like better adjusted individuals, are more accurate in identifying partners' nonverbal messages, thoughts and feelings, and intentions. Marital distress takes more of a toll on husbands' nonverbal sensitivity, because these men have more decoding errors than those in nondistressed marriages; the impact of marital distress on wives' encoding and decoding is not as strong. Husbands and wives also differ in the direction of their errors, with women erring on the side of judging ambiguous or neutral messages as positive and men erring on the side of judging them as negative. Interestingly, husbands do better judging videotaped examples of their wives' communication when they only have vocal rather than visual information available, which implies that men may become accustomed to tuning in to tone of voice rather than facial expressions to glean "true" meaning.

## **Impression Management and Influence**

A final set of interlocking communication objectives in which nonverbal encoding skills surface as centrally important is impression management and social influence. One of the time-honored canons of persuasion is that establishing ethos or credibility facilitates social influence. The more favorably a communicator is regarded, the greater the opportunity to influence others. At the same time, earning others' favorable regard may be, not just the means to a persuasive end, but an end in itself. Skillful deployment of nonverbal behavior may serve both of these goals. This becomes particularly evident in the special case of deception, which some have argued should be regarded as a matter of impression management (e.g., Burgoon et al., 1996) and others have argued should be viewed as a matter of influence (e.g., Stiff & Miller, 1993). Regardless of whether they are addressed under the rubric of impression management or social influence, the nonverbal behaviors that enable successful

deceit are largely coextensive with the cues that promote favorable images and enable communicators to influence others' attitudes and behaviors.

Burgoon et al. (1996) and Burgoon, Dunbar, and Segrin (in press) have proposed several nonexhaustive strategies according to which the relevant nonverbal tactics can be grouped. These include (a) appeals that project power, status, and authority; (b) appeals that maximize social, physical, and task attractiveness; (c) relationship-based cues related to intimacy and similarity; (d) direct application of rewards and punishments; and (e) expectancy signaling and expectancy violations.

**Power, Status, and Authority Cues.** Fundamental to the functioning of all societies, be they human or nonhuman, is the ability to define the power and status relationships that are operative. Nonverbal behavior is a major avenue for communicating power, dominance, and status in everyday interactions and may even form a universally recognized vocabulary by which a given social community interprets and expresses privilege and control (Burgoon & Dillman, 1995; Henley, 1995). Consequently, social organization itself, as well as individuals' own ability to achieve their desired ends, rests on successful encoding and decoding of such displays. Raw displays of power and dominance may be effective in achieving immediate compliance, but their wholesale use is rarely judged as the most skillful means of effectuating influence. If we accept the intuitively appealing principle that, more often than not, competent communicators strive to simultaneously achieve tripartite instrumental, relational, and identity goals, then more subtle, tempered, and adaptive displays may be regarded as the most skillful. Recent work on the personality and behavioral attributes associated with dominance support this latter view. Dominant individuals are seen as self-assured, influential, poised, dynamic, and expressive, leading Burgoon and Dunbar (2000) to define interpersonal dominance as a socially skilled pattern of behavior.

Before considering what might distinguish skillful from nonskillful performances, it is necessary to differentiate among the concepts of power, status, and dominance cues, which are closely intertwined but not isomorphic. Power refers to the potential to influence others by virtue of actual or implied authority, expertise, capacity to bestow rewards, capacity to withhold or apply punishments, persuasive abilities, or possession of interpersonal qualities with which others may identify. Status refers to one's position in a social hierarchy. Status often confers power and vice versa, but people may sometimes have status yet be relatively powerless (as in the case of Great Britain's royalty) or may exert power (e.g., use of weapons to threaten someone) from a position of low status. Dominance refers to the overt behavioral displays that succeed in gaining acquiescence or compliance from another. Power is often put into practice via dominance displays but can also be achieved through submissiveness, as in the case of apparent helplessness eliciting assistance from others.

Burgoon and colleagues (Burgoon, 1991, 1994; Burgoon, Buller, Hale, & deTurck, 1984; Burgoon et al., 1996; Burgoon & Dillman, 1995; Burgoon et al., in press; Burgoon, Johnson, & Koch, 1998; Burgoon, Newton, Walther, & Baesler, 1989) and others (e.g., Berger, 1994; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Henley, 1995; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986) have synthesized extensive literatures to identify a host of nonverbal dominance and power displays that may be used to exert influence. Following is a brief synopsis of those findings, organized by code, along with the implications of each for qualifying as skillful communication.

Among *kinesic cues*, eye contact is a primary cue that functions in complex ways to communicate dominance, power, and status. In mainstream U.S. culture, powerful

and high-status individuals are entitled to surveil and stare at others, to make direct eye contact (i.e., look another squarely in the eye), and to break eye contact last. Yet they actually make less frequent eye contact (especially while listening) than individuals in low power and status positions. The latter gaze more at high-power individuals—presumably because they need to be vigilant about what powerful individuals may do—but they are expected to avert their gaze, rather than make direct eye contact with the powerful individual. Staring connotes dominance and possibly threat, whereas averting gaze communicates submission, deference, and attentive listening. The proportion of time spent looking while speaking versus during listening can be used to compute a visual dominance ratio, such that those whose proportions are relatively equal are considered more visually dominant than those who have a disproportionately high degree of looking while listening. Individuals of higher status not only display more visual dominance (i.e., more looking while speaking and less looking while listening) but are also judged by others as being more powerful.

These patterns together imply that skillful performances depend on one's preestablished position in a status or dominance hierarchy. Those who hold positions of higher rank may mark and reinforce those positions by making direct eye contact, engaging in moderately frequent eye contact while speaking, and reducing the amount of gaze while listening. Those in subordinate roles may signal deferential respect by maintaining relatively higher degrees of gaze, especially while listening. It is important to reiterate, however, that these patterns vary by culture, ethnicity, and gender, among other factors. For many American Indian, Asian, and African cultures, direct or frequent gaze may be regarded as rude, insolent, or a violation of privacy. Higher amounts of gaze are also more common and more expected from women than from men. Thus, despite the potentially universal connotations of gaze as a signal of dominance, sociocultural considerations may dictate whether such behavior is associated with social skill or is fraught with negative connotations.

In addition to eye contact, various gestures such as pointing at another, steepling the hands, and using expansive gestures have been associated with power, dominance, and status (although the amount of controlled research on the subject is limited). Gestural, facial, and bodily activity in general are also seen as more dominant. The sheer physical activity associated with dynamic expressive displays connotes potency and forcefulness. The absence rather than the presence of smiling is also seen as more dominant.

Finally, posture is a relevant indicator of dominance. In addition to wider and taller stances being associated with this dimension, postural relaxation serves as a marker of dominance and status. Norton's (1983) work on communicator style revealed that the most attractive style combined dominance with relaxation. This implies that dominance can also be coupled with nonrelaxation—a pattern that fits a less appealing, authoritarian style—but relaxation, in itself, more often connotes dominance and co-occurs with it than the alternative pattern of high dominance–low relaxation. For example, in mixed-status groups, individuals of higher rank typically exhibit greater relaxation (e.g., adopting asymmetrical standing and seating positions with arms akimbo or putting feet up on the desk); individuals with lower rank, like soldiers at attention, are expected to show more postural restraint. However, extremes in postural relaxation function as negative expectancy violations and therefore presumably would constitute unskillful performances, with hyperrelaxation probably being more detrimental if displayed by a low power/status person and hyporelaxation being more detrimental if exhibited chronically by a high power/status individual. The former would contradict the requisite impression of deference expected of socially skilled

subordinates, whereas the latter would undermine the impression of poise expected of powerful individuals.

Within the *vocalics* domain, dominance has been associated with numerous cues, including rapid speaking tempo, short response latencies, loudness, speaking initiation, interruptions, and a high proportion of speaking time. Faster speaking, quicker uptake of speaking turns, and louder voices connote confidence and authority. Individuals expressing anger—a dominant type of expressive behavior—also typically speak louder than nondominant individuals. More dominant members of a dyad are more likely to initiate conversations or topic switches within conversations, to interrupt others, and to hold the conversational floor twice as long as less dominant partners. In turn, people who speak first in a group interaction typically speak the most and are perceived as highest in status. Except for interruptions, these vocal patterns tend to create favorable impressions and therefore would likely be viewed as constituents of a skillful performance.

Silence can also be used to signal differences in dominance and status. Subordinates must wait to be acknowledged by their superiors, and they must wait for superiors to speak first. Failing to recognize another person or giving someone the “silent treatment” can be a potent reminder of status differences, even when done unintentionally. Here, such behavior may be regarded as “skillful” in service of one’s own objectives if the goal is to convey power but regarded as “unskillful” in terms of protecting another’s face.

*Proxemics* (use of distancing and space) and *haptics* (use of touch) typically work in tandem. Although the extent to which humans have innate needs for territory, personal space, and physical contact is disputed, the fact that humans show strong physiological and psychological reactivity to spatial adjustments and presence or absence of touch is indisputable. Consequently, nonverbal spatial, distancing, and touch behaviors are primordial vehicles for signifying one’s power, status, and dominance, signaling as they do such elemental messages as approach and avoidance on which all species rely to create social order and differentiate friend from foe.

Among humans, invasions of personal space and physical aggression—hits, slaps, punches, kicks, and the like—constitute the most extreme and unequivocal attempts to gain preeminence over another. They elicit fight or flight. But, as with other species, humans in daily interaction typically rely on more abbreviated and symbolic forms of dominance to achieve the same ends. High-status, powerful, and dominant individuals are afforded more personal space than lower status and nondominant individuals. They occupy and control access to larger and more desirable territories, and they take up more space with their body and possessions than those low in status. People in positions of power and status are also entitled to deviate from normative interactional distances for sitting and standing. Extremes in conversational distance—closer and farther—convey greater status and dominance than adopting an intermediate interpersonal distance. Dominance is also associated with standing in front as opposed to behind, preceding rather than following, standing as opposed to sitting, and being elevated. Elevation provides both a symbolic hierarchical function as well as giving the dominant individual an advantage in both surveillance and protection. Submissiveness may also be elicited by the presence of territorial markers (indicators such as signs, barriers, personal possessions) that signify that a territory belongs to a given individual or group. A highly predictable (and usually unconscious response) when entering what is clearly another’s territory is to show deference.

Nonreciprocal touch communicates power, status, and dominance. Status-equals engage in mutual touch, touching each other in similar ways and in similar body

regions. Among status-unequals, touch is largely unidirectional, with high-status individuals touching their subordinates more often than vice versa and with more familiar forms of touch. The type of touch as well determines whether it is perceived as powerful. Direct poking with a finger can be seen as a dominant type of touch, especially when the response is a recoiling or cowering from the submissive partner.

Finally, message intensity typically increases as more cues are added to the mix. For example, the combination of gaze, close proximity, and touch is regarded as highly dominant, whether communicated by a man or a woman, but especially when displayed by a man. When cues are incongruent with one another, however, such as when a submissive smile is coupled with far distance, proximity carries the most weight in determining the meaning of the message.

As with space, time is considered a valuable (if intangible) commodity, at least in Western and industrialized societies. Therefore, use of *chronemics* becomes a marker of status and prestige. Access to more and “better” time (e.g., more leisure time, better seating times at a restaurant, priority listing on waiting lists) and control of own and others’ time signify higher status and power. Those who keep others waiting or give others short lead time are seen as more powerful than those who wait or who must meet short deadlines. Focusing on one task (monochronism) or one person at a time instead of doing many things at once (polychronism) also communicates that the task or person is important; polychronic use of time (e.g., taking a phone call in the midst of a business meeting with others) communicates the opposite in cultures that typically follow a monochronic norm.

On the one hand, “power plays” that manipulate space, touch, and time may qualify as skillful means of achieving dominance because, as part of what E. T. Hall (1959, 1966) described as the “hidden dimension” or “silent language,” they tend to operate outside conscious awareness, thereby gaining benefits by virtue of their subtlety. The ambiguity and polysemy associated with such behaviors may also accrue the benefit of lack of accountability. A person accused of trying to “lord it over another” can disclaim any intention to do so and attribute inappropriate proximity or an unwanted touch to simple exuberance or liking. On the other hand, because proximity and touch also evoke strong emotional arousal, they may risk negative consequences if they are interpreted as disregard for another’s physical and psychological autonomy or a grab for another’s valuable territory and time. The dual capacity to provoke biologically grounded reactions and to convey symbolic messages makes proxemic, haptic and chronemic behaviors particularly potent means for establishing dominance and power.

Finally, several aspects of *physical appearance* and *artifacts* create dominance and impressions of power. Mature (rather than babyish) faces, almond or triangular-shaped eyes, mesomorphic body types, greater height, good looks, short hairstyles (for women), facial hair for men, conservative dress, formal attire, and uniforms have all been associated with more power or status. The physical attributes of physiognomy, body type, height, and hair may have a biologically rooted connection to impressions of size and age that are themselves linked to evolutionary survival benefits. Other features, such as clothing and status symbols, are socially dictated and will therefore vary by time and place. In general, however, scarcity, value, or usage by a high-prestige group will confer status on clothing, hairstyles, jewelry, and other personal possessions. Such cues may serve as status reminders (i.e., pointers to one’s status) rather than as intrinsic status cues. Whether displays of status symbols lend further patina to a skillful performance has not been investigated empirically, but it

seems reasonable to assume that subtlety through presentation of status reminders is to be preferred over more blatant bids for status.

Summing up these cues to power, status, and dominance, they appear to rely on at least eight principles for achieving their success: (a) threat, (b) relaxation, (c) dynamism, (d) elevation, (e) initiation and precedence (i.e., "being first"), (f) expectancy violations, (g) privileged access, and (h) possession of valued resources (Burgoon, 1994). To these can be added another—(i) task performance cues—which entails cuing others to one's likelihood of making relevant and beneficial contributions to a group task (Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). The kinds of cues that serve this purpose, beyond reputed expertise and verbal information, are those markers of status—such as proxemic, physical appearance, and artifactual cues—that imply an individual has special knowledge or experience, possibly due to age, occupation, education, or legitimate authority, and serve to establish a power and prestige order (Berger, Conner, & Fisek, 1974; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980). These cues give members of task groups what are known as expectation advantages; they are expected to make more valuable contributions to the group and are given more opportunities to do so.

**Attraction Cues.** Perhaps nowhere is there a closer stereotypic association than between attractiveness and social skill. Perceived attractiveness enlists the benefits of the halo effect (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) and activates the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype. There is a strong tendency to view good-looking men and women as having higher social competence and potency—and to some extent, higher intellectual competence. The only negative association seems to be that more physically attractive individuals are viewed as more vain and less modest, in keeping with a "what is beautiful is self-centered" stereotype (Eagly et al., 1991). But the relationship is not just stereotypical. There appears to be a strong reciprocal relationship between attractiveness and skill such that attractive individuals possess better social skills than less attractive people (Chaiken, 1979, 1986; Feingold, 1992). It has been argued that attractive individuals not only capitalize on their physical attributes but also are given more social opportunities, manipulate the social environment to their advantage, and receive more positive reinforcement (e.g., Singer, 1964), which may partially account for their ability to convey confidence, friendliness, dynamism, poise, and other favorable attributes through their communicative behavior.

According to McCroskey and McCain's (1974) conceptualization of attraction, people can be judged along three dimensions of attractiveness: physical, social, and task. Physical attractiveness refers to standard notions of physical beauty, judgments that are deeply rooted in perceptions of nonverbal features. Social attractiveness refers to how friendly, gregarious, warm, and sociable individuals are judged to be; for some, this dimension is synonymous with social skill. Task attractiveness refers to how appealing individuals are regarded as coworkers or task partners. Unquestionably, different types of attractiveness are wanted under different circumstances, and success on one front is not assumed to guarantee success on another. But, more often than not, physical attractiveness evokes favorable impressions (Zebrowitz, 1997). Moreover, it is possible to gain some carryover effects from one aspect of attraction to another. For example, the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype is triggered by both facial beauty and vocal attractiveness, and attractive voices elicit perceptions of physical beauty as well as vice versa (Zuckerman, Hodgins, & Miyake, 1990).

Of the relevant nonverbal cues, those associated with *physical appearance* are the most obvious features such as facial attractiveness, a babyish face for women and

more mature visage for men, and a mesomorphic body type are less subject to personal manipulation to achieve an impression of attractiveness. Others, such as good grooming and fashionable attire, are obvious means by which skilled communicators may promote an attractive image. Moreover, physically attractive individuals may capitalize on their appearance to emphasize and even exaggerate their positive qualities. In an ingenious study, physically attractive individuals gave more figure-enhancing reports of their measurements when they thought no one would be checking up on their reports (Singer & Lamb, 1966).

Among the most powerful kinesic means of engendering attraction are eye contact and smiling. Both are encoded and decoded as a sign of attraction (Burgoon et al., 1984; Kleinke, Bustos, Meeker, & Staneski, 1973; Rubin, 1970).

Less obvious means of conveying attractiveness are a number of paralinguistic (vocalic) features. A “warm” voice, a relatively fast tempo, and use of short silent pauses generate positive attraction and perceived persuasiveness; a slower tempo and the presence of frequent silent pauses, filled pauses, and speech hesitations have a negative impact on listeners’ attraction toward speakers (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990; Miller, Maruyama, Beaber, & Valone, 1976; Pope & Siegman, 1966; Siegman, 1987; Woodall & Burgoon, 1983). A rapid tempo, a pleasant vocal tone, more fluency, and pitch variety are also perceived as more persuasive and effective in eliciting compliance, another possible indication that these contribute to skillful performance. But, the efficacy of this vocal pattern may be limited to targets with good decoding skills, inasmuch as a more neutral voice is more effective for targets with poor decoding skills (Buller & Aune, 1988; Buller & Burgoon, 1986; Buller, LePoire, Aune, & Eloy, 1992; Hall, 1980). This suggests that too much expressivity may sometimes be counterproductive.

## **Relationship-Based Appeals**

In many interactions, nonverbal behaviors simultaneously reflect a motivation to create a sense of intimacy and common ground as well as to exert control and influence over the receiver (Patterson, 1983). Research evidence shows that the same behaviors that often signal such intimacy-related perceptions as affection, familiarity, similarity, and trust between a source and receiver also enhance the effectiveness of persuasive appeals. Viewed as a relational communication issue, such behaviors function to create the impression of a close interpersonal relationship on which the sender can draw. Viewed from the perspective of persuasive strategies, such behaviors function to promote the receiver’s sense of identification with the sender. In either case, the resultant sense of connection, of mutuality and similarity, between sender and target increases the likelihood that the target will model the sender’s behavior, seek the sender’s approval, converge toward the sender’s attitudes, and comply with the sender’s requests.

At the most elemental level are indicators of approach or avoidance, which are typically signaled through *proxemics* and *haptics*. Given that friends and intimate partners use less personal space in their interactions than strangers do (Aiello, 1987; Burgoon & Jones, 1976; Hayduk, 1983) and that people generally interact at closer distances with others who are perceived to be attractive, friendly, and positively reinforcing (Byrne, Ervin, & Lamberth, 1970; Gifford, 1982), it follows that close proximity and touch may be used to convey such messages as liking, affiliation, and love toward receivers (Burgoon, 1991; Heslin & Alper, 1983). It stands to reason, then, that closer personal space and touch tend to be associated with

increased persuasiveness. Research evidence bears this out. Compliance rates are generally inversely related to the distance between the source and target of the request (Segrin, 1993) (although some exceptions will be noted below). Numerous field studies have likewise confirmed that light touch by a sender increased behavioral compliance relative to senders who did not touch a receiver while making a request (e.g., Brockner, Pressman, Cabitt, & Moran, 1982; Goldman, Kiyohara, & Pfannensteil, 1985; Kleinke, 1977; Kurklen & Kassinove, 1991; Patterson, Powell, & Lenihan, 1986; Willis & Hamm, 1980). This effectiveness may be attributed to the positive feelings fostered toward the toucher and the implicit sense of relationship that is suggested by "making contact." Nurses, librarians, waitresses, and greeters, among others, have elicited more favorable evaluations of themselves by use of brief, nonintimate touches (Aguilera, 1967; Burgoon, 1991; Burgoon, Walther, & Baesler, 1992; Fischer, Rytting, & Helsin, 1976; Hornik, 1992).

*Physical appearance* also plays a pivotal role. Similarity of attire tends to facilitate persuasion (Hensley, 1981), presumably because it fosters identification. All social groups—from street gangs to work groups to entire cultures—rely on clothing, insignias, ownership of certain brand name products, and the like to symbolize their in-group status. In other cases, high-status clothing, uniforms, attractive facial features, and conventional appearance have been shown to increase persuasiveness (Bickman, 1971, 1974; Brownlow & Zebrowitz, 1990; Pallak, 1983; Pallak, Murroni, & Koch, 1983).

**Expectancy Signaling and Expectancy Violations.** An underlying theme common to both the literatures on competent communication and on successful impression management and influence has been that success lies in determining what is the normative or expected pattern and conforming to that pattern, on the assumption that what is normative or expected is the most appropriate and desired communication pattern. This view has not only been promulgated by Goffman (1959) in his *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, as noted earlier, but also in other writings about the risks of nonconformity and in much of the popularized self-help literature such as Molloy's (1975, 1977) *Dress for Success* volumes that led the way to syndicated newspaper columns on the same topic.

However, two decades of research empirically investigating this issue support an alternative conclusion, that the more skillful strategy for promoting a favorable impression or persuading another may at times lie in violating expectations. Experiments testing expectancy violations theory have confirmed, for example, that both close and far distances and fleeting touches can qualify as positive violations if committed by a high-reward communicator, resulting in enhanced credibility and persuasiveness. Conversely, the same behaviors may qualify as negative violations when committed by a low-reward communicator and have more adverse consequences than conforming to a normative—intermediate—conversational distance. Other behaviors that may operate as positive violations include high degrees of gaze (although interpretations may differ depending on whether a male or female displays the behavior), high conversational involvement and high but not extreme immediacy, and postural relaxation; cues that may have detrimental results include gaze aversion, nonimmediacy, unconventional attire, poor grooming, and certain kinds of touch used with opposite-sex partners (see, e.g., Burgoon, 1978, 1991, 1993; Burgoon et al., 1996; Burgoon & Hale, 1988, for summaries). These findings challenge the intuitively appealing notion that the road to success lies in conformity; they challenge the assumption that what is designated as socially appropriate is necessarily

the most efficacious in achieving one's goals. Considered from the vantage point of self-interest, the empirical findings and expectancy violations theory itself argue in behalf of sometimes violating, rather than meeting, expectations.

**Deception.** The consummate case of skillful self-presentation and influence is deception. The ability to modulate one's performance so as to create false beliefs in the receiver, to control and mask spontaneous expressions that might betray one's true feelings, and to monitor and adjust one's performances in response to any indications of skepticism or suspicion by receivers are the hallmarks of successful deception. In describing the development of self-presentational skill, DePaulo (1991) lists deception skill as one of the markers that a person's abilities are maturing.

Various studies have demonstrated empirically that socially skilled individuals are more successful at appearing believable and creating an honest-appearing demeanor (see, e.g., Burgoon, Buller, Guerrero, & Feldman, 1994; Riggio & Friedman, 1983; Riggio, Tucker, & Widaman, 1987; Zuckerman, Larrance, Spiegel, & Klorman, 1981). For example, people who have higher public self-consciousness or emotional and social control are better able to put forth a credible demeanor and to reduce hand gestures that might signal nervousness when deceiving (Riggio, Tucker, & Throckmorton, 1987; Vrij, 1993; Vrij, Akehurst, & Morris, 1997; Vrij, Edward, & Bull, 1999). In addition, people who are more manipulative or better at controlling their verbal and nonverbal communication are more likely to persist in their lies in the face of interrogation and to be slower to confess (Vrij, 1993). Some, albeit more limited, research has also established a correlation between decoding skills and accuracy in detecting deception (see Buller & Burgoon, 1994; DePaulo, 1991, for reviews).

On the encoding side, nonverbal skills play a significant role in deceptive success. Several investigations have established that successful deceivers are better able to create a normal-appearing communication style, one that does not send up any "red flags" by violating expectations. Senders are perceived as more believable to the extent that they are more involved, display more positive affect, are more fluent, and have fewer hesitations, although some hesitations may actually be interpreted as a sign of sincerity (Burgoon, Buller, & Guerrero, 1995; Riggio et al., 1987; see also Zuckerman & Driver, 1985). In particular, senders who score high on the expressivity and social control dimensions of social skill are more adept at increasing involvement when shifting from truth to deception and overall, more adept at approximating a normal conversational style, and better able to maintain longer turns at talk (Burgoon, Buller, White, Afifi, & Buslig, 1999). It appears, then, largely the same nonverbal cues that contribute to positive impressions of interest, rapport, warmth, and dominance also contribute to successful deception.

On the decoding side, the presence of nonfluencies in particular makes deceivers more detectable, so receivers who are attuned to vocalic information are more likely to be successful detectors. In fact, male superiority in detecting deception has been attributed to their greater attention to vocalic and brief, often uncontrolled cues that are inadvertently "leaked" by deceivers. In other respects, the link between decoding skills and accuracy in deception detection may be tenuous. At least, there is little empirical evidence supporting a strong connection.

It is important to note that relational and behavioral familiarity have mixed effects on one's ability to detect deception. In the case of the former, numerous early studies (e.g., Comadena, 1982; Kalbfleisch, 1985; McBurney & Comadena, 1992; Miller et al., 1981; Miller, deTurck, & Kalbfleisch, 1983) found that intimates, friends, and acquaintances are more accurate than strangers at judging truth from deception.

Presumably, this is due to increased knowledge about the background and habits, as well as firsthand experience with individual interaction styles (i.e., behavioral familiarity). However, subsequent research has established that individuals are inclined to judge relational partners' communication as more truthful than that of strangers (Buller, 1987; Buller, Burgoon, Buslig, & Roiger, 1996; Buller, Strzyzewski, & Comstock, 1991; Burgoon, Buller, Ebisu, & Rockwell, 1994; McCornack & Parks, 1986; Stiff, Kim, & Ramesh, 1992). In other words, it appears as though relationships may invoke expectations of trust and mutual aid, creating positivity or truth biases on the part of receivers (Buller & Burgoon, 1996; Buller & Hunsaker, 1995; Burgoon & Newton, 1991). As Buller and Burgoon (1996) asserted, these biases may function as an information-processing heuristic, causing message recipients to selectively attend to information in a manner that confirms their initial positive impressions.

Similarly, exposure to or training about valid (diagnostic) deception indicators may produce some gains in accuracy at detecting deception (see, e.g., deTurck, Harslak, Bodhorn, & Texter, 1990). When familiarity takes the form of expertise (i.e., training combined with experience), however, it can become counterproductive. Specifically, research indicates that, like laypeople, law-enforcement officers, judges, and other experts are often no more accurate than chance and may even be less accurate than nonexperts because they become unduly suspicious and shift to a lie bias (Burgoon, Buller, Ebisu, et al., 1994; Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991). For example, in their study of forensic testimony, Kassin and Fong (1999) discovered that trained experts were less accurate than naïve control subjects at detecting deception—although they were more confident and articulated more reasons for their judgments. In sum, there appears to be a sort of "glass ceiling" at which training and experience become detrimental to skill at detecting deception.

## CONCLUSION

As is the case with most research in the field of interpersonal communication, most social skill research focuses on the verbal component of message behavior. (For evidence of this, note the predominance of chapters in this publication that are devoted to this topic.) However, nonverbal communication skills are crucial to being a skilled social being, as the empirical evidence regarding the primacy of nonverbal cues demonstrates. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive review and synthesis of research concerning the often deemphasized (and frequently overlooked) nonverbal elements of social interaction skills.

As previously noted, nonverbal communication skills are most typically conceptualized as encoding and decoding abilities as they relate to a variety of communicative functions, including (but not limited to) creating desired identities and impressions, expressing one's own affective states, defining interpersonal relationships, staging and managing communication episodes, and influencing others. Although a variety of theories and an impressive accumulation of empirical evidence have identified a wide array of nonverbal behaviors that are implicated in successful achievement of these various communication functions, what constitutes skill in these areas must be judged in the context of the goals to be achieved and the perspective from which they are judged—message creator, message recipient, or third-party observers.

Research indicates that individuals who exhibit nonverbal skills in these arenas tend to have more academic and occupational success, larger and more effective social networks (and, consequently, less loneliness, shyness, depression, and mental illness), more satisfying marriages, and decreased levels of stress, anxiety, and hypertension (for reviews of this literature, see Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Dillard &

Spitzberg, 1984; Goleman, 1998; Noller, 1992; Philipott et al., 1992; Riggio, 1986, 1992; Riggio et al., 1990; Rosenthal et al., 1979; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1988). It is important to note, however, that verbal and nonverbal communication (and the skills they engender) do not typically occur in isolation from one another. Consequently, it is imperative that we begin to merge these two lines of research by examining the interplay of verbal and nonverbal skills toward the actualization of desired ends. Moreover, it is important to recognize that there are times when the use of "unskilled" communication may actually function in a skillful manner; accordingly, research needs to focus on the strategic use of "unskilled" communication to achieve desired ends. Hopefully, by devoting more research to exploring the nonverbal components of skilled social interaction, and by merging this research with extant knowledge of verbal communication as it relates to the achievement of desired outcomes, our collective understanding of communication and social interaction skills will become more refined, consequently helping us to help others to enhance their psychological and social well-being through the process of communication.

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CHAPTER

# 6

## APPLYING THE SKILLS CONCEPT TO DISCOURSE AND CONVERSATION: THE REMEDIATION OF PERFORMANCE DEFECTS IN TALK-IN-INTERACTION

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At a recent meeting a colleague and I had with the dean of a medical school, we discussed the school's "standardized patient" method for giving medical students experience in communicating with patients of particular types—patients with terminal illness, with AIDS, with diabetes, and so forth. In this method, actors are rigorously trained to play the role of the patient after being briefed on the medical issues and symptoms, given specific guidelines and instructions about how to act, and then rehearsed. Medical school faculty use the standardized patient method to help students learn "communication [interactional] skills" that they will need to work effectively with patients.

My colleague and I came away uncertain about what could be learned from such practice interactions. We would not be surprised to find that these practice interactions do facilitate remediation (learning to avoid performance defects to which one is prone), depending on the quality of feedback the student receives. But the potential for positive learning (learning to do something new) was less apparent to us, in that our own and others' work on language and social interaction show that interactions are sufficiently varied and contingent that what carries over from one to the next is an open question. If positive learning is possible at all, we think that achieving it requires what I call *cultivation*, the goal of which is to build onto "native" interactional practices a conceptual mastery of the unique demands and issues they face in interactions within this activity domain by means of giving medical students a greater variety and complexity of experiences and multiple conceptual-analytic

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This essay has benefitted from comments by the editors and from substantial and spirited discussion with Scott Jacobs of the University of Arizona, as well as Sally Jackson, and students of their department whom I met with in Fall 2000 in the course Communication 696, "Special Topics in Rhetorical Theory," especially Mike Peters and Jennifer Cawright.

preparation and debriefing sessions. But that works against the practical need for standardization, transmittable protocols, and efficiency in such teaching situations, and it involves something quite different from inculcating skills (operational procedures, methods, and techniques).

That dilemma—the reality of contingency and variability in interactions versus the practical need to improve interactional performance and foster standard, valued, practices that makes the skills concept attractive—renders the skills concept problematic for studies of language and social interaction (LSI, which is also the acronym for the relevant divisions of the International and National Communication Associations and the journal *Research on Language and Social Interaction*).<sup>1</sup> My intention is to elaborate on what the problem is and propose a way in which applied research in LSI can productively concern itself with the skills concept in the interests of helping people enhance the quality of their performance in social interaction. This involves attention in the first half of this chapter to conceptual issues; then, in the second half, an analysis of empirical cases in point.

My approach is a conservative one, an attempt to stake out a middle ground between exaggerated claims that some have made for the power and scope of the skills concept on one hand and LSI's complete avoidance of the skills concept on the other. I claim that there is an important place for the skills concept in applied work in LSI but that skills are not the sole or primary basis for the quality of interactional performance in an activity domain—or for a pedagogical approach to enhancing the quality of performance. Although I touch on the principal alternative—where performance is based on competence rather than skill, so that enhancing performance entails stimulating reflectiveness rather than inculcating methods and techniques—I have not elaborated on that alternative in order to sustain this volume's focus on the skills concept.

## PRELIMINARIES

As my preface indicates, skill is not a topic in the research and theory on social interaction on which I draw. Moreover, it would be controversial among my colleagues in LSI to apply the skills concept to the basic phenomena we study under the heading “talk-in-interaction”—the deployment of particulars of linguistic and bodily expression in social interaction to achieve ethnographic meaningfulness and interactional coherence and coordination (cf. Sanders, 1999; Sanders, Fitch, & Pomerantz, 2000). Besides sound conceptual reasons for this disregard, there is the practical one that the skills concept is relevant to applied research that focuses on maximizing the quality of the way individuals perform within specific activity domains, whereas the dominant focus of LSI is basic research involving symbolic processes and social–discursive practices, many of which cut across activity domains.

But the situation in LSI is getting more complicated. More and more LSI work has an applied aspect and bears directly or indirectly on assessing and improving the quality of performance in interactions in specific activity domains (e.g., medical interviews). As a result, active reflection on the skills concept in LSI is called for. Because this is new territory, not a reprise of established ideas and research accomplishments, I

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<sup>1</sup>My phrasing implies that there is a unitary, agreed-on skills concept, whereas there are at least three distinct skills concepts as discussed in this chapter. There is a common thread across the three, however—that skilled persons can produce desired results reliably that unskilled persons cannot—and this presumption of chronic individual differences in the ability to perform is principally what makes the skills concept, in any of its versions, troublesome for LSI.

need to revisit and problematize what might have seemed settled matters regarding the skills concept and also consider how it applies to phenomena of interest in LSI.

Problematizing the skills concept is called for mostly because it is no longer a unitary one, as I have noted, and this has not been adequately considered or remedied. Sometimes the term “skill” is used in its original sense based on research on motor skills: a *method or technique for utilizing resources to reliably produce a specific, desired result* (cf. Argyle & Kendon, 1967). Sometimes the term “skill” is used in the sense it has in research that gravitates around the constructs of cognitive complexity and message design logic (Burleson, 1987; Burleson & Waltman, 1988; O’Keefe, 1988, 1991; O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1987): the *cognitive basis for proficiency at producing complex messages* that are instrumental to attaining two or more goals at once, adapted to the immediate situation. And sometimes the term “skill” is equated with *any and all of the knowledge and methods for being consistently effective* within a class of social or communication behavior (Hargie, 1997).

Besides the common thread among these noted above, that skilled persons can produce desired results reliably that unskilled persons cannot, there is a critical difference, although it is obscured by using the same term for all three concepts. It is only in terms of the first (skill as method or technique) that one can regard skill as a teachable–learnable basis for improving performance through what I refer to as *training*. Training helps persons produce specific desired results (or avoid producing undesired ones) with increased reliability. Partly for that reason, I end up considering the value of only this first sense of “skill” for work in LSI. In terms of the second concept (skill as the cognitive basis for proficiency at producing instrumentally complex messages), if proficiency is teachable–learnable, then, as explained below, it is through an entirely different learning process than the first, *cultivation*. Cultivation may help persons apply their base competence to the development of proficiency at producing a wider range of results, or producing certain results more efficiently, in a particular activity domain by devising means of greater complexity. But it is debatable whether skill in that second sense is teachable or learnable: Differences in the underlying basis for greater or lesser proficiency, e.g., cognitive complexity, may be fixed and unbridgeable. As to the third sense of the skills concept (skill as all of the knowledge and methods for being consistently effective), it is so broad and abstract, as I discuss later, that it prevents identifying any specific basis for performance quality that might be teachable or learnable.

## THE SKILLS CONCEPT IN LSI

### Basic Research

For the purposes of basic research, there are three main conceptual reasons LSI has not been fertile ground for the skills concept: that talk-in-interaction is viewed as being co-constructed; that persons must have a shared, and thus equivalent, ability to produce and comprehend talk-in-interaction;<sup>2</sup> and that the means and ends in interaction are open-ended.

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<sup>2</sup>The equivalence requirement applies to “normal” adults (with unimpaired language processing, information processing, and problem-solving capabilities), the population on which LSI’s research predominantly focuses. When interacting persons do not have equivalent capabilities (e.g., very young children with normal adults, impaired adults with normal adults) special, compensatory, discursive practices are employed by the normal adult (see Goodwin, 1995).

**Talk-in-Interaction Is Co-Constructed.** The focus of the skills concept is how individuals can act on objects and environments to more reliably bring about desired results, whereas LSI tends to avoid attributing agency to individuals but rather conceptualizes what transpires and results in interactions as being co-constructed, or jointly produced (cf. Jacoby & Ochs, 1995). This entails that the quality of individuals' performance—the form and content of the symbolic objects they produce and how reliably they bring about desired results—depends not only on their own capabilities, motives, and goals, but also on the capabilities, motives, and goals (the quality of performance) of the other(s) with whom they interact.

**The Basis for Producing and Comprehending Symbolic Objects Must Be Shared.** If we say that skilled persons can reliably produce desired results that unskilled persons cannot, then the question is whether persons differ in their ability to produce and comprehend talk-in-interaction. But if persons did differ in that way, then it would be unpredictable (and improbable) in any instance whether the producer and the consumer of a symbolic object interpreted it the same way. If they did not have the same interpretation, or could not be counted on to do so, interaction would be impossible. The phenomena that LSI investigates would not occur. Hence, because persons do interact and therefore produce objects that are meaningful to others in the intended way, persons must have an equivalent mastery of expressive resources, discursive practices, conventional task and social activities, and communally shared premises about persons' rights and obligations in different situations and relationships.

**The Open-Endedness of Means and Ends.** Performance in talk-in-interaction involves making utterances (and other symbolic objects) that combine to form a discourse whole. This is roughly analogous to combining language elements (phonemes, letters, words) to form sentences. In both cases, persons draw components from an indefinitely large set (utterances vs. words) to form an indefinitely large number of sequentially ordered wholes (discourse wholes vs. sentences), in which the unfolding sequence progressively delimits what can be added coherently to it. In the case of language, linguists have shown that this can only be accomplished on the basis of a computational procedure that maps a set of base elements onto an infinite set of ordered strings, not by applying a fixed set of methods and techniques (Chomsky, 1957, 1959). Although interactional sequences do not seem ordered on similar principles, or as tightly ordered, as sentences (Sanders, 1987), producing them seems likely to require applying some kind of computational procedure rather than methods and techniques (cf. Greene, 1984, 1995; Sanders, 1987, 1997; O'Keefe & Lambert, 1995).

It may seem inconsistent with this gloss that much research in LSI is about specific methods and techniques that persons use to make specific functional contributions in interaction, methods and techniques that one can imagine are not mastered by everyone or performed equally well. However, these methods and techniques apply to producing highly localized results that comprise interaction fragments. These fragments may be specific actions (e.g., Hopper, 1992, and Schegloff, 1979, on beginning phone calls; Pomerantz, 1980, 1988, on soliciting information; Heritage & Roth, 1995, on questioning; Maynard, 1997, on delivering good and bad news), or they may be self-contained ritual practices (e.g., Fitch, 1990/1991, on leave-taking in Colombia; Hall, 1993, on gossiping in the Dominican Republic; Katriel, 1986, on *Dugri* speaking in Israel). These methods and techniques are conventions and are not presumed to exhaust the possible means of producing talk-in-interaction. Their primary importance in LSI is not their effectiveness, which is a separate question,

but what they reveal about the underlying expressive resources, discursive practices, and communal routines that interacting persons have mastered, although there may be some practical usefulness, and intrinsic interest, in identifying them.

More to the point, talk-in-interaction is not just a matter of producing a series of interaction fragments (unless we are willing to regard interactions as unordered collections of actions and ritual practices, something that I believe most in LSI would reject, although we have not sufficiently addressed the matter; but see Beach, 1995; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Sanders, 1987, 1991, 1997; Sigman, 1987; Tracy, 1998). The very notion of interaction requires that LSI's basic phenomenon is *interactively produced* sequences of symbolic objects that cohere to reliably form larger discourse wholes (a conversation, a quarrel, a narrative, an interview). This means that even to utilize any particular interactional technique requires more than "knowledge" of the technique per se.

This latter point can be illustrated by the following extract from the U.S. television talk show *Donahue* (Sanders, 1987). The guests were two gay rights activists, Dan Bradley and Virginia Apuzzo, and two religious conservatives, Cal Thomas and Jerry Falwell. In this extract, Ms. Apuzzo responds to a challenge from Mr. Thomas about her standard for assessing the "rightness" of personal conduct by citing "the [U.S.] Constitution" (turn 15). Her citation of the U.S. Constitution as having moral authority appears to take Mr. Thomas by surprise (turn 16), whose response (or lack of substantive response) gives Ms. Apuzzo an opening (makes it relevant) to press and elaborate her point. But before she can do so, Mr. Falwell (turn 17) introduces "the Bible" as a counter, changing what Ms. Apuzzo can relevantly say in response (especially by ending his turn by directing a question to her), so that if she went on to talk about the Constitution and not religious teaching, she would seem guilty of a notable omission or evasion.

- 11 Bradley: We've been hurt because of the fear-
- 12 Thomas: Adulterers
- 13 Bradley: -the discrimination that people like you and my good friend Reverend Falwell preach from the pulpit.
- 14 Thomas: What I'm trying to get at without letting you slip away from this, I'm asking you if there is any standard in America for right and wrong and based on what?
- 15 Apuzzo: The Constitution.
- 16 Thomas: The Constitution?
- 17 Falwell: What about the Judeo-Christian ethic? You mentioned you had a Baptist upbringing. Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God?

Suppose that we found from observing other interactions that what Mr. Falwell did to close the opening Mr. Thomas created for Ms. Apuzzo is a general interactional technique; let us dub it the technique of *deflective substitution*. From LSI's perspective, this is not the end of characterizing what Mr. Falwell did, it is the beginning. We still have to address the more basic issue that to apply that technique requires the speaker to devise what specific utterance he or she would have to make to function as that technique, as deflective substitution. This is a somewhat open-ended matter that varies from interaction to interaction. It depends on what is said by the other, what one's partner (if any) also said, one's own knowledge of the matter at hand and that of the other participants, as well as what occasions the utterance (to what it is responsive) in that position in the interactional sequence. Hence, given any

particular interactional technique (i.e., a function one wants an utterance to serve) and an open-ended set of possible ways to serve that function across discourse environments, one would have to reason or compute which utterance(s) would acquire the pragmatic properties to serve that function in that specific sequential place in that discourse environment. One can arrive at the same conclusion by considering the functions of a single expression: Zimmerman (1993), for example, showed that the functions served by uttering so deceptively simple a token as *yeah* are numerous and perhaps not close-ended, depending on its sequential positioning, the activity taking place, the relationship between speaker and hearer, and so forth.

## Applied Research

The necessary sharedness of the basis for producing symbolic objects that combine to form discourse wholes, as well as the open-endedness of means and ends in interaction, both run against the view that talk-in-interaction per se depends on skills, as I elaborate later. But neither of those rules out the value of the skills concept for applied work in LSI. In applied work in LSI, the concern is to develop methods and techniques for enhancing the performance of individuals within specific activity domains with respect to producing a specific, delimited, set of desired interactional results. The following is an example of this, as well as an example of the way basic and applied considerations are fused in much of this work.

Ratliff and Morris (1995) identified a practice in teaching sessions between supervisors and marriage and family therapists that they refer to as *telling how to say it*. They presented as their initial, most complete, example the following extract from a session between a supervisor, S, who is giving feedback to a trainee, A, about A's performance in a taped therapy session. S wants A to adopt a particular technique—"incorporating yourself into the therapy" by telling the patient "what you feel"—and is trying to impart what that requires A to say "at least once" in a session. (Coincidentally, this instance also illustrates precisely the kind of effort to improve interactional performance that is of interest here, and I return to it in those terms in a separate discussion.)

In lines 9 and 10, A tries to perform what S is prescribing but evidently gets it wrong. S then provides more conceptualization and examples, and in line 16, A professes understanding by formulating, rather than performing, S's prescription: "Okay (.) Comment (.) affective comment."

- 1 S: And, and th- that obviously has an impact on you.
- 2 A: Right.
- 3 S: hhhhh So you feel yourself (.) res reacting in some way
- 4 to her (0.5) related to those issues?
- 5 A: Uhhuh
- 6 S: I'd like you to make at least one process kind of comment-
- 7 in the session (2.0) I'm feeling confused about this, I'm
- 8 feeling (.) ((clap)) >like whatever<
- 9 A: I'm feeling >kinda like I'm< hearing two things? or (.) >is
- 10 that< (.) to:o
- 11 S: ^No. I don't want you to tell her what you think I want you
- 12 to tell her how- what you feel.
- 13 A: [Okay
- 14 S: [This makes me feel (.) anxious (.) this makes me feel

- 15     confused (.) this make- some a:fffecting.  
 16 A: Okay (.) Comment (.) affective comment  
 17 S: Because, what th- what that's for is uh (1.5) I I want you:  
 18     to do mo:re of (.) incorporating yourself into the therapy  
 19 A: Umkay.

Before considering an applied perspective on this interaction, note the co-construction of what transpired. S went about imparting to A what to say in a way that depended on A's cooperative participation and feedback, and A in turn could not have gotten needed clarifications without S's readiness to elaborate and recast what was being prescribed. As a result: (a) the quality of each of their performances, in terms of the interactional result they produced, was as much a product of what the other said as it was their own capabilities and goal(s), so that (b) if either had participated less responsively and agreeably, there is an upper limit on what the other could have done, unilaterally, to produce the result of A's comprehending S's directive.

Nonetheless, considerations do arise here about individual performance. Insofar as one can identify what individuals are *contributing* to what transpires and to the outcome by the way they perform, then even if improvements in individual performance cannot ensure desired results in a co-constructed sequence, they can make desired results more likely, or undesired results less so.

Ratliff and Morris's datum applies to performance within two activity domains: directly to the performance of therapist-supervisors in doing teaching, and perhaps therapist-learners, and indirectly (in that this is what S and A talk *about*) to the performance of therapists in doing therapy. But even though what S recommends A do in therapy sessions is of potential interest, LSI's primary interest in this particular datum would only be in what it directly exhibits, S's performance in doing teaching (and reciprocally perhaps A's performance in receiving teaching). LSI is scrupulous about relying on direct observation and analysis of the details of actual performance in naturally occurring interactions because what is distinctive about LSI's approach is that it problematizes the performance, the achievement, of social action. Hence, LSI's primary applied concern is not so much *what* to do—what actions to undertake—to produce a result (e.g., “incorporate yourself into the therapy”), while placing *how* to do that as a background concern that can be treated as a given. Rather, LSI's primary applied and basic research interest is how what is done constitutes specific actions and practices (including what difference the symbolic objects' sequential positioning makes), regardless of what the person intended, taking that to be the basis for what persons end up doing that produces an interactional result.

In addition to Ratliff and Morris's (1995) attention to how supervisors accomplish *telling how to say it*, LSI would also take into account, among other things, the following, matters that might have been sources of interactional difficulty:

1. The ethnographic-pragmatic detail that in issuing unredressed directives, without any inducements to comply (“I'd like you to...”; “^No. I don't want you to...” “I want you: to do mo:re of...”), S's performance rests on premises that A would have to share (and in this instance evidently does) about their interactional goal, about S's authority, and about A's obligations, responsibility, and competence.
2. That from a conversation analytic perspective, S would be teaching A well (not with “good” advice necessarily but coherently, so as to reliably enable A to learn

the lesson) insofar as S is drawing on understandings about talk-in-interaction that A can be counted on to share, such that (a) it is possible and sufficient for S to specify what A should do with reference to a particular *type* of comment (instead of a set of specific comments to make); (b) the referent of a “process kind of comment” is clear; (c) it is possible to specify the *type* of comment A should make with reference to the goal it will function to attain (“incorporating yourself into the therapy”); (d) it is a referentially clear and usable corrective evaluation of A’s initial attempt for S to distinguish between disclosing what one thinks versus what one feels; (e) the details of S’s phrasing, inflection, sequential positioning, timing, and so forth, function to make it hearable to A that S was providing examples of comments of the desired type, not a list of specific comments to make nor expressions of S’s own affective state just then.

If S’s performance seemed defective from LSI’s perspective, it would be in regard to any one or more of the particular elements in (1) and (2). Given any such specific defect, it is conceivable that methods and techniques (i.e., skills) could be devised for remediating it, thereby enhancing S’s performance of interactively “telling how to say it.” It is not as clear, however, that any set of skills could be devised to make S capable of interactively “telling how to say it” if that were not something S could already do (with or without specific deficiencies).

The questions to be pursued in the main part of this chapter are as follows: (a) On what criteria would an assessment be based that the performance of one or the other of the participants in such interactions could or should be enhanced? (b) What means can be devised that would help persons enhance their interactional performance in specific activity domains if it were judged to not be optimal?

The place to begin is to identify the different concepts to which the term “skill” applies and relate those to the way LSI conceptualizes and examines its subject matter. Once that is done, I go on in the main portion of this essay to show that, because talk-in-interaction is not in itself a skilled behavior (in the original sense of *skill* as method or technique), the skills concept in LSI can only bear on improving performance in terms of remediating recurrent performance defects (e.g., as in the case of an interviewer whose phrasing or intonation antagonizes respondents, who can learn how to avoid doing that), rather than positive learning to “do interaction” better.

## SKILL, COMPETENCE, AND PROFICIENCY

The thrust of the following exposition is that the skills concept applies productively to some, but not all, species of behavior (where a species is a set of behaviors defined in relation to a set of desired results that they function to produce). There are species of behavior for which persons can produce desired results “naturally” because the skills are acquired in the course of bodily or mental development (e.g., coordinating movements of body—stance, arm, and hand—to punch someone vs. slap vs. caress them). Additional skills would need to be devised and inculcated to enhance the quality of performance to meet the standards of specific activity domains (e.g., boxing). In other species of behavior, persons cannot perform “naturally”; they need to learn skills to produce any desired result at all (e.g., flying an airplane), as well as additional skills to enhance performance beyond a minimally adequate level (e.g., to fly a combat aircraft or a commercial airliner).

But there is at least one species of behavior—speaking and understanding one’s native language—for which performance, moreover optimal performance, is not skill based, and as discussed later, there are possibly many more than that one, including

talk-in-interaction. The question, not yet resolved, is whether other (or all) species of social and communication behavior besides language are also open-ended in their means–ends relationships while also being systematic (e.g., parenting) and thus also not skill-based. Although the question of whether talk-in-interaction is such a species has not gotten much consideration in LSI, it is tacitly regarded as being one, in that observed performance is regarded as optimal (in the sense discussed later), and nobody has suggested that means or ends are close-ended, codifiable, or enumerable.

For any such species of behavior, inculcating skills would be unlikely to enhance performance except possibly in narrow, specialized, individualized ways as discussed in the second half of this essay. For such species of behavior, broad, generic enhancements of the quality of performance would require a different approach altogether: the stimulation of greater reflectiveness and self-awareness to shape and focus what persons are already competent to do. The latter would foster *proficiency* in an activity domain, that is, the utilization of means in more situationally adaptive, complicated, or economical ways. For example, waging arguments, a subspecies of talk-in-interaction that people are competent to engage in naturally, is cultivated in lawyers so that they become proficient at writing a brief or, a different proficiency, at engaging in oral arguments during hearings on motions. However, for such species of behavior, it could still be productive also to inculcate skills in specific activity domains, either to remediate recurrent performance defects or to learn to produce specific, additional, desired results (e.g., alliteration, in the case of language performance).

In grounding these claims, I will give considerable attention to linguists' work on the basis for speaking and understanding a language *per se* as a species of behavior that is not skill based, even though my primary concern is the value of the skills concept for LSI, not linguistics. I do this because, despite considerable theoretical volatility in linguistics, more active attention has been given there than in LSI to the characteristics of species of behavior that are not skill based, as well as to the practical issues of learning and teaching to enhance performance in such a species.

## Competence

The skills concept (in any of its versions) applies insofar as we find for some species of behavior that persons differ in recurrent, systematic ways in the quality of their performance, whereas the notion of competence applies insofar as we find that persons' abilities to perform are naturally acquired and equivalent. Although Chomsky's (1957, 1965) original theorizing about natural languages and their acquisition has been radically challenged and radically amended (Chomsky, 1982, 1995), two key propositions about competence have survived intact. First, there exists a finite computational procedure powerful enough to derive and parse all and only the well-formed sentences of one's language (within the limits of an individual's vocabulary): To acquire a language is to acquire this computational procedure, not a repertoire of behaviors or methods and techniques (excepting the physical, skilled behaviors of vocalizing phones and inscribing alphabetic characters or icons). Second, in acquiring one's native language, one therefore becomes competent to combine base units into, and parse and interpret, an indefinitely large corpus of sentences that are grammatical, a corpus that usually goes far beyond what one has directly experienced as hearer or speaker. Moreover, the evidence is that all (nonimpaired) learners who grow up in the same language community acquire the same computational procedure (i.e., the same language), regardless of how dissimilar their specific linguistic experiences are.

Chomsky (1965) termed mastery of that computational procedure *linguistic competence*. This is congruent with Hymes's (1974) broader concept of *communicative competence* as mastery of a "system of speaking," emphasis on "system": not a repertoire of discrete communal practices, but of practices interconnected and rationalized by an underlying way of reasoning about social means and ends (also see Philipsen, 1992, on speech codes). Accordingly, contrary to Hargie's (1997) conflation of the terms "competence" and "skill", it is imperative to sharply distinguish them and restore the original, technical meaning that Chomsky gave to "competence": A person will be said to have acquired competence if he or she has acquired a system of computation and reasoning by which an open-ended set of means can be utilized to reliably produce desired results; a person will be said to have acquired skill, in its original sense, if she or he has acquired a set of methods and techniques for utilizing a closed set of means to reliably produce desired results. These are not mutually exclusive; skills may draw on an underlying competence. A person has to have acquired language competence to reliably form sentences that are meaningful; a lawyer has to have acquired certain language skills to test and revise meaningful sentences to avoid ambiguity.

**Competence and Optimal Performance.** If competence in a species of behavior entails that persons can reliably produce well-formed instances (in the case of language, grammatical sentences<sup>3</sup>) then one has to consider base performance to be optimal. By optimal I mean that inculcating skills would not improve performance in regard to producing those desired results. Hence, to say that performance is optimal does not require it to be error free, just that errors will usually be incidental (because of local distractions, excessive complexity, emotional arousal, etc.), not systematic and recurrent, and therefore not remediable through inculcating skills. Nonetheless, although inculcating skills will not improve a person's base language performance (in producing and understanding grammatical sentences of his or her native dialect), it might have value for remediation if an individual does exhibit recurrent performance defects (e.g., overuse of the definite article *the* indicative of a definite reference when generic reference is intended) or to change details of language performance so as to produce additional results besides grammaticality or interpretability (e.g., altering specific pronunciations associated with a stigmatized dialect).

## Skill

**"Skill" As Method or Technique for Producing Desired Results.** Much of the work on communication skills and social skills has been influenced by foundational work on motor skills, at least in one critical way. Acquiring or cultivating motor skills enables persons to improve the quality of their natural performance in a physical activity domain (most notably among athletes, but also painters and sculptors, machinists, etc.). What is especially important about this foundation is that it has created a strong association between the skills concept and a concern with finding teachable–learnable ways to enhance the quality of performance. The successes of

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<sup>3</sup>By "grammatical" I do not mean a speech community's norms of correctness or acceptability (e.g., in some U.S. communities, the use of a double negative, such as "I don't want no trouble," is disparaged whereas in other communities it is a standard form). Instead, "grammatical" refers to a sentence's well-formedness in terms of its recognizability and interpretability *as* a sentence by native speakers. By that standard, sentences of English formed with a double negative would still be grammatical even in communities that disparage the form.

sports trainers in that regard are paradigmatic, especially as they have been progressively bolstered by better scientific understanding of how to intervene in the muscular, respiratory, and nutritional processes on which athletic performance in a particular sport depends.

Consistent with the foundation provided by work on motor skills, when the skills concept was broadened to include social and communication performance, it was with an interest in finding ways to enhance the quality of performance in particular activity domains (i.e., the reliability with which specific results are produced), over and above what persons would do without training, naturally. Hence, in promoting a broader application of the original concept, Argyle and Kendon (1967) represented skill in such a way that it was founded on a mechanistic connection between means and ends (something in which one could therefore intervene systematically to promote improved performance):

[A skill comprises] an organized, coordinated activity, in relation to an object or situation, that involves a chain of sensory, central and motor mechanisms. One of its main characteristics is that the performance, or stream of actions, is continuously under the control of the sensory input . . . (and) . . . the outcomes of actions are continuously matched against some criterion of achievement or degree of approach to a goal. (Argyle & Kendon, 1967, p. 56).

Note that this conceptualization ties skill to what amounts to a cybernetic (thus mechanistic) organization of behavior to bring about specific results (see also Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960). The criterion against which one measures one's present performance relative to the attainment of a goal (end state) and makes adjustments is based on the existence of, and acquired know-how about, fixed relationships between particular operations (methods and techniques) and the specific results they produce.

To elaborate, saying that someone is skilled at something in this original sense means first that he or she has *mastered certain operations or tools* that facilitate bringing about specific valued results. While both unskilled and skilled tennis players can hold and swing a racket and (with differing probabilities) hit the ball, a skilled tennis player has typically mastered techniques for gripping and swinging the racket so as to give the ball a certain speed, trajectory and spin, to reliably produce the result of placing where it lands and controlling the way it will bounce. Similarly, while both unskilled and skilled journalists can ask questions, a skilled journalist has typically mastered various interview techniques, such as ways of phrasing follow-up questions so that they reliably head off or make conspicuous any evasiveness that was present in the answer to the prior question. In addition, saying someone is skilled means that the person is *experienced* in the application of these techniques and methods (i.e., he or she has encountered the contingencies that (usually) arise in actual practice that bear on producing desired results) and now can anticipate and correct for them. The performance of unskilled persons in a given activity domain, compared with their skilled counterparts, would therefore be haphazard and inefficient, and sometimes dangerous.

In this first sense of "skill," in many activity domains a skilled person cannot produce all possible "good" results. This holds whenever the possible "good" results in an activity domain are sufficiently numerous to outstrip the repertoire of methods and techniques most persons can master (for example, in playing chess, in practicing medicine). But there are exceptions, usually involving motor skills, activity domains

in which the set of “good” results is small enough that it is possible for a skilled person to produce all of them, as in carpentry.

Moreover, being skilled in this sense does not ensure “excellence” but does ensure reliable, efficient, and error-free performance. In some activity domains, there may be additional influences on the quality of performance that supersede or supplement being skilled. Chess players, for example, distinguish the “chess genius,” whose gift is to be able to alter and adapt, and even innovate, methods and techniques, from players who are “only” skilled, who have learned a set of methods and techniques that make them reliably successful up to some upper limit in playing against a wide variety of opponents. In addition, there is the potential effect of the performer’s motivation. For example, two doctors may be equally skilled in the methods and techniques they have mastered, and equally experienced, but still differ in the quality of care they provide, for example, by not expending the same amount of effort because of differences in their motives—(one humanitarian, the other financial)—or emotional condition.

The question here is whether social and communication performance has a foundation comparable to physical performance, so that it is subject to being enhanced by acquiring new skills (i.e., methods and techniques) in that original, mechanistic sense. If it does, then it is reasonable to associate social and communication skills with the possibility of devising teachable–learnable means to reliably produce better, more desirable results. If, however, social and communication performance has a qualitatively different basis than physical performance, referring to that foundation as also being skills would not only be misleading but would promote an interest in devising teachable–learnable methods and techniques for enhancing performance when something entirely different would be needed.

This mechanistic sense of the skills concept is thus applicable in an activity domain if a set of teachable–learnable methods and techniques exist or can be devised that reliably enable or enhance the production of desired results, and the performance of unskilled persons in that domain is comparatively unreliable and inefficient. Furthermore, the skills concept is applicable only in activity domains in which it is relevant and desirable for persons to recurrently produce one or a few specific results or activity domains in which a few, specific unwanted results are recurrently produced. The skills concept in this original sense thus presupposes that (a) there is a knowable, testable relationship between specific behaviors and the results they produce such that (b) the quality of a person’s performance in a specific activity domain can be improved if he or she is provided with special know-how, that is, skills, for reliably producing desired results. An example is strategies devised for door-to-door salespeople or telemarketers to delay or prevent customers from terminating the interaction before the sales pitch is made.

***The Second Skills Concept: Proficiency.*** The second sense of the skills concept, what I have termed proficiency, is grounded in findings in laboratory studies of a strong, recurrent correlation between persons who reliably produce more complex (i.e., multifunctional) messages in response to situations that are problematic or delicate (e.g., in offering comfort, seeking compliance, etc.) and the scores those persons achieve on a measure of cognitive complexity (Burleson, 1994; O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1987). In Burleson and Caplan’s (1998) view, cognitive complexity indexes information processing capacity in a given area of life; people with complex cognitive systems in a given domain are better able to process information in a variety of ways. An individual’s level of cognitive complexity (relative to others) becomes reasonably

stable in childhood and appears to remain stable (baring significant interventions) across the adult years. If so, then in any given domain, there will tend to be an upper limit on how teachable–learnable greater proficiency is to the extent that the learner is not cognitively complex.

I assume for present purposes that the finding of a correlation between one's cognitive complexity scores and the complexity of one's messages generalizes to LSI's phenomenon, talk-in-interaction, even though it very well may turn out not to. That correlation arises from an experimental protocol in which respondents are asked to produce a single turn at speaking to achieve a prescribed goal in response to a definition of the situation, whereas LSI's phenomenon involves producing a series of turns at speaking, each in response to what preceded it in a co-constructed sequence of speaking turns in which goals are pursued incrementally and interactively (cf. Sanders & Fitch, 2001). This leaves it open not only if but how the performance of more cognitively complex persons in interactions would exhibit a greater functional complexity and efficiency within or across a series of turns at speaking, corresponding to greater complexity and efficiency of single messages produced in a controlled setting.

That issue aside, the evidence does not indicate that these differences in the complexity and efficiency of messages involve skills in the sense of specific methods and techniques used to produce specific results. Rather, it indicates that differences in the quality of persons' message producing behavior arise from differences in their competence, in the reasoning they use to identify situational demands, and in how they use expressive resources to meet those demands in a complete yet economical way: "to reason through each moment's action by a fresh reasoning-through of that moment's situation" (O'Keefe & Lambert, 1995, p. 67).

I have devised three alternative ways to relate this to the concerns here with the skills concept in LSI. The first accords with LSI's basic premises, the second does not, and the third puts the matter outside the scope of this chapter. The first way is that cognitively complex persons may have a greater ability to enhance their base competence to engage in talk-in-interaction within selected activity domains, if stimulated to do so, by analyzing and conceptualizing the means–ends relationships in a given activity domain. Persons of greater cognitive complexity would not be expected to produce messages in all circumstances that are qualitatively distinct from those of less complex persons but to have a greater general capability of becoming more proficient. If so, this could result in their being able to learn to use expressive resources in more complex, efficient ways in specific activity domains (e.g., courtroom litigators, therapists, diplomats). The second way of understanding the idea that people differ in their ability to produce complex, multifunctional messages is that persons of differing cognitive complexity may reason differently about talk-in-interaction, that is, differ in the extent and complexity of their mastery of the system of symbols and its combinatorial possibilities. This would be at odds with LSI's premise (corresponding with Chomsky's and Hymes's thinking) that for interaction to be possible at all, people have to master equivalently a single system for manipulating symbols to produce objects that combine to form coherent discourse wholes. Whether to take either the first or second of these possibilities seriously is an empirical question whose resolution calls for better data than we have.

Third, one can suppose that people have equivalent bases for producing talk-in-interaction, as LSI presumes, but that differences in the quality of performance arise because of differences in the complexity of the goals people adopt (e.g., whether to sermonize to a friend with financial troubles vs. be supportive while giving

constructive advice). But if people who are cognitively complex tend to form more complicated goals in interaction, and thus perform in a qualitatively different way, that falls outside the concerns of this chapter with performance differences that arise from differences in persons' ability to utilize means for reliably attaining those goals—specifically, symbolic objects with intended meanings and meaningfulness.

In sum, either of the first two ways of understanding the second sense of "skill"—proficiency—is that it must be rooted in persons' competence to utilize expressive resources to be responsive and anticipatory in producing symbolic objects. As a result, I go on to use the term "skill" only in the original sense (methods and techniques for reliably producing desired results) and associate "proficiency" with discussions of "competence."

**"Skill" As All of the Knowledge and Methods for Being Consistently Effective.** There has been a trend in definitions of "skill" to broaden the concept's power and scope. This trend is evident in Hargie's (1997) discussion. His goal apparently was to link the skills concept to the production of every possible "good" result in the domain of interpersonal exchange. In doing so, he does not give particular attention—either in his discussion or in the collection of others' essays he assembled—to what persons would have to master to be able to achieve that. In fact it is inconceivable that any finite set of methods and techniques could be sufficiently powerful to produce results so broadly drawn and open-ended as these:

A socially skilled individual will have acquired the ability to behave in an appropriate manner in any given situation, and to relate meaningfully with others.

...the definition adopted in this book is that social skill is *the process [sic] whereby the individual implements a set of goal-directed, interrelated, situationally appropriate social behaviours which are learned and controlled.* (p. 12)

Hargie then goes even further:

the definition proffered by Yoder et al. (1993, p. 54), that "Communication competence is the ability to choose among available communicative behaviors so that interpersonal goals may be successfully accomplished during an encounter with others" could equally be a definition of skill.

In essence, the terms 'skilled' and 'competent', when applied to the interpersonal domain, both indicate that the individual is equipped with the range of social skills required to perform effectively. (Hargie, 1997, p. 13)

There are several reasons why it is counterproductive to define the skills concept that broadly. First, it prevents us from capturing that, possibly in all domains of communication and social performance, it is only with reference to producing certain subsets of valued results in specific activity domains that skilled persons differ from unskilled persons. It is common and meaningful to talk about skilled negotiators, skilled teachers, skilled therapists, and so forth, but not skilled interactants.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Although one sometimes hears the locution "skilled conversationalist," the reference is usually to skill in some component aspect of conversation, rather than skill in conversation itself. For example, persons may be differentially able to sustain a conversation, make small talk, draw the other person out, or, as in the case of Boswell's Samuel Johnson, spontaneously craft consistently memorable or witty comments and rejoinders.

Second, by saying that the skills concept applies to producing so broad and indefinite a body of results, Hargie did not and could not direct our attention to any specific learnable methods and techniques by which the quality of performance can be enhanced. As a result, his definitions trivialize the concept: The value of the skills concept is precisely that it does lead to a consideration of such methods and techniques (both innate skills that individuals develop on their own or inculcated skills).

Third, definitions as broad as Hargie's open the door to absurd conclusions. For example, Hargie's definition allows us to say that (contra years of work in theoretical linguistics and language acquisition) it is a matter of acquired skills that enables persons to reliably produce grammatical sentences of their native language ("A socially skilled individual will have acquired the ability to behave in an appropriate manner in any given situation, and to relate meaningfully with others" Hargie, 1997, p. 12). If so, then because all speakers of a language are equally able to produce grammatical sentences, and thus must be equally skilled, we render the skills concept hollow. And finally, this diverts us from attention to important variations in the quality of linguistic performance in the diverse activity domains in which language is produced, variations that are possibly a result of differences in skill. For example, only some persons can reliably produce sentences with such desirable qualities as economy, referential clarity, vivacity, and memorability.

## Training Versus Cultivation

I equate training with inculcating skills (methods and techniques) to enhance the quality of performance in a specific activity domain. If training is successful, persons can become more able to reliably produce desired results without necessarily developing any greater conceptual mastery of the given activity domain and the means–ends relationships on which the imparted skills are founded (cf. Bandura, 1986, on modeling). Any such underlying conceptual matters remain with those who devise the skills, based on their analysis of the activity domain and its constitutive means–ends relationships and who set or preserve evaluative criteria as to what constitutes a desired result and good performance.

When a species of behavior is not skill based, then enhancing performance in an activity domain can be done by inducing greater reflectiveness and self-awareness, a process I term *cultivation*. Cultivation is a matter of stimulating learners to analyze and conceptualize the means–ends relationships within an activity domain that would facilitate producing certain results, leaving it to learners to work out the specifics of what to do in any given instance to produce a particular result (cf. Kohlberg's [1985] methods and results of cultivating the development of moral reasoning). If performance improves as a result of stimulating greater reflectiveness, rather than the adoption of any particular methods and techniques, then that must be founded on an existing capability of performing in the activity domain at an enhanced level (i.e., competence), not the acquisition of new skills, information, and so forth.

In the example of the teaching session recorded by Ratliff and Morris (1995), S's approach to A's performance involves cultivation rather than training. The supervisor S wanted the learner A to do some particular thing to produce some particular result, and to that degree seems to be imparting a therapeutic skill. But S did not go about it by specifying what A should say. S wanted A to make a certain *type* of comment in therapy sessions, not any comment in particular, and thus A needed to be provided with an understanding of the goal or purpose of making a comment of that type. S attempted this by giving a name to the type of comment desired, giving examples,

and giving a rationale, rather than instructing A what to do (say) specifically. A had to already be interactionally competent to understand what S was prescribing and to operationalize it in specific instances. From LSI's perspective, however, S should also have broached the issue of when in a therapy session, sequentially, such comments should be made. Saying only that A should make such a comment "at least [once]" in a therapy session does not rule out that A might make it at a juncture that counterproductively shifts focus from patient to therapist or counts as a judgment of the patient, instead of forming a bond, unless S was taking for granted that A has the interactional competence to judge when (sequentially) to make the comment so that it will serve the intended purpose. Finally, Pomerantz, Ende, and Erickson (1995) showed (on the basis of observing preceptors' ways of teaching medical interns) that teaching interactions in that setting often take into account not only the goal of enhancing students' performance, but the difference in the interactional and social consequences of directing students (as when inculcating skills) versus interactively engaging and empowering them. The latter consideration may favor cultivation as a pedagogical method even when training would be feasible and efficient.

If we are not careful to preserve the line between training and cultivation (and along with it the line between skill, and competence and proficiency), so that anything that enhances the quality of performance comes to be regarded as training that inculcates a skill, then the skills concept and the training process become too amorphous and ad hoc for serious investigation or application. My focus here is on training and skills, not cultivation, in keeping with the focus of this volume, but for those interested in enhancing performance in species of social and communication behavior that seem founded on competence and proficiency rather than skill, the process of cultivation and its potential value requires attention as well.

## THE APPLICABILITY OF THE SKILLS CONCEPT IN LSI

Based on the conceptual foundation given above, consideration of the skills concept's applicability in LSI has to address the following: (a) that results are not produced by individual agency in talk-in-interaction but are jointly produced; (b) reasons to consider base performance in interactions as being optimal; and (c) performance specifics that can be enhanced by inculcating skills. But logically, prior to this latter consideration, there is an additional one: (3a) criteria for assessing the quality of performance in social interaction and for specifying how an "enhanced" performance will differ from base levels of performance.

### Co-Construction and Skill

In any activity domain that comprises joint, interdependent effort, what transpires and what the outcome is are necessarily co-constructed. What individual agents do is therefore consequential, but not controlling. Individual agents can behave so as to change the probabilities that certain results will be produced but cannot behave so as to reliably produce any particular one of those results. For example, a tennis player might be described as being skilled at serving so that the opponent cannot return the serve effectively. But this is an imprecise description: It glosses over the fact that the direct result produced by the tennis player's way of serving the ball is the motion and placement of the ball, not the way the other player returns the serve. The return of serve is an indirect and probabilistic result of the ball's motion and depends as much or more on the opposing player's skills. Accordingly, the quality of each player's

performance in reliably producing desired results, as well as what transpires in the game and the outcome, depends only partly on his or her own motivation, goals, concentration, capabilities (including pertinent skills), and so forth; it also depends on the other player(s)'s motivation, goals, concentration, and capabilities (including pertinent skills), on what each gives the other to respond to. Hence, inculcating skills to enhance a player's performance may not necessarily make a difference in what results his or her behaviors produce in specific games, regardless of changes in behavioral specifics. Rather, if performance is enhanced, it should make a difference statistically, for example, in the player's percentages of service breaks, balls hit out of bounds, successful passing shots, ratio of self's to other's points, game scores, and so forth.

The behavior of individual agents in social interaction is interdependent in exactly the same way. Hence, if there are skills one can inculcate to enhance performance in interaction, it might or might not make a difference in what results are produced in specific interactions, depending on what the other(s) contribute. But now two important differences between tennis and social interaction come to the fore. The first is that it is less apparent in social interaction than in tennis which specifics of performance can be enhanced by skills, and that is the topic of the central portion of this essay. The second is that there is no standardized basis for score keeping in social interaction against which to gauge statistical improvements in performance across interactions. Instead, one would have to concentrate on whether recurrent defects in a person's performance are statistically curtailed. This comports with the thesis I advance in the analysis of specific cases below that inculcating skills can remediate specific performance defects in interaction but not make optimal performance better.<sup>5</sup>

## Optimal Performance in Social Interaction: Actions<sup>6</sup>

It is a working presumption in LSI that observed performance in social interaction is optimal, that is, well formed.<sup>7</sup> This is not a matter that has been explicitly addressed by researchers, however, nor is there an accepted theoretical foundation for this position. I base this claim on what LSI counts as data. As has been noted, the focus of much research in LSI is on directly observed, naturally occurring methods and techniques for producing actions, or self-contained ritual practices. Methodologically, from both conversation analytic and ethnographic perspectives, what persons are observed to

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<sup>5</sup>For species of behavior that are skill based, it is the same process to "remediate defects" and to foster positive improvements in performance. But for species of behavior that are competence based, these are different matters. In the latter case, performance to bring about results is generally optimal, so that one can either remediate defects in producing those results or foster new practices to produce additional specialized results in a specific activity domain.

<sup>6</sup>This and other matters I address are of considerable importance in LSI, but they are matters on which much has been taken for granted and little actually said. If some of my colleagues disagree with me on this or other representations of their thinking, then clearly we need to talk these matters out, and we are probably in arrears for not yet having done so.

<sup>7</sup>The standard for "well formedness" in talk-in-interaction (let alone its generality) is not as clear as the standard for and generality of "well-formedness" in language (i.e., grammaticality) nor has the former gotten the kind of systematic analytic consideration that the latter has. Yet we can still say that a standard for well formedness in talk-in-interaction exists. Insofar as we—both analysts and participants in talk-in-interaction—routinely assess (some portions of) an interaction as not being *coherent*, as having components that are not interconnected meaningfully, we are applying a standard of well-formedness. There are a great many observations of persons in natural settings responding in mutually understood ways to the ill-formedness of instances of talk-in-interaction, including whole speech events, specifically, the occurrence of self and other repair (e.g., Jefferson, 1987; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; also see Keenan, 1973; Philipsen, 1975).

do in producing actions or ritual practices is presumed to be the “right” or competent way to do that. LSI’s central interest is in describing and rationalizing ordinary, native, ways, so that all observed actions and practices are potentially relevant data—as long as they conform to observed regularities in ways of doing that action or practice across persons and situations; and other participants in the interaction do not respond to that as odd or defective. This presumption of “well-formedness” in the actions and practices persons contribute to naturally occurring social interaction seems to be sound in that regularities abound, even cross-culturally (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1978; Moerman, 1988), and the occasional odd or defective occurrence does get marked as such by interactional participants. In fact, participants’ ways of responding to performance defects is itself a topic of description and analysis (see Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977, on repair, and Jefferson, 1987, on embedded corrections; also see Basso, 1979, and Pratt & Weider, 1993, on assessments of interactional performance by Native Americans).

## **Optimal Performance in Social Interaction: Responsiveness and Anticipatoriness**

In taking the specific actions and ritual practices that LSI analyzes as being well formed, LSI has to also presume that the larger sequences of which they are a part are also well formed. Actions and ritual practices are recognizable for what they are if the symbolic objects involved achieve a particular meaning and coherence in the interaction. This brings to bear the generally accepted proposition in LSI that the meaning and coherence of symbolic objects depends on their sequential positioning as well as their composition (cf., Grice, 1975; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Sanders, 1987; Schegloff, 1988, 1995). The meaning and coherence of a symbolic object depends on its sequential positioning in two broad ways. A symbolic object is meaningful and coherent insofar as it is responsive to what has preceded it and/or insofar as it is anticipatory of desired interactional results and not undesired ones (based on what it makes relevant subsequently). If so, then as what precedes or follows from a symbolic object varies, so should the symbolic object’s meaning and coherence.

Sanders (1987) provided experimental evidence that interpretation of an utterance varies systematically with variations in what precedes it. Each of three conversations was constructed between two male speakers about what A might give B’s sister, Sally, for her birthday, with each conversation ending with B’s question, “Would you consider something like perfume or jewelry for her? Something feminine?” Respondents read one of the three conversations and were asked to interpret B’s question. Interpretations varied in accord with what preceded the question. When the conversation was about Sally’s likes and dislikes, B’s asking the question was interpreted literally as asking whether A would consider giving that kind of gift. When the conversation was about B’s probing whether there was a personal relationship between A and Sally, B’s asking the question was interpreted as probing whether A had a romantic interest in Sally. When the conversation was about B’s disapproval of Sally and possible jealousy because of her athletic prowess, B’s question was interpreted as implicating that Sally was not feminine.

It has not been directly tested whether the interpretation of a symbolic object also depends on what does, or what could, follow from it, but observing naturally occurring interaction indicates that what participants say, or how they respond, does at times orient to the symbolic object(s) being responded to or produced in terms of what could relevantly follow, not what went before. Drew (1984) analyzed invitations made indirectly, generally by reporting that one is going to do something to which the

other is thus indirectly invited by having been told about it; Drew analyzes this way of making an invitation as anticipating and countering possible rejection by making it deniable that an invitation was actually made. Davidson (1984) analyzed micro-gaps and hesitancy following an invitation as being oriented to by the first speaker as implicative of a forthcoming refusal, in that the first speaker often responds to gaps and hesitancy by offering an inducement to accept the invitation. Sanders (1987) examined one interaction in particular in which one participant's self-disclosure of being insecure is responded to by the other as an impediment to the as-yet-unstarted task she was assigned of issuing and resolving a complaint. Clayman and Whalen (1988/1989) analyzed a televised interview of presidential candidate George Bush by news anchor Dan Rather, in which Bush departed from the standardized news interview protocol of waiting to take a turn until the interviewer has finished asking the question: Bush evidently anticipated what he could be asked if Rather's preface to the question went unchallenged, and so he interrupted to challenge the preface before the question was asked. Jefferson (1993) showed that current speakers sometimes respond to the incipiency of a change in speakership when the listener changes from responding with minimal acknowledgement tokens (e.g., *uh huh*) to more energized acknowledgment token (*Yeah* or *Yes*): Anticipatory of an attempted speaker change, current speakers sometimes speed up or speak louder to keep their turn by displaying an unwillingness to stop just then.

In sum, performance in social interactions depends on producing recognizable actions, and while that depends on the form and content of symbolic objects, it depends more fundamentally on the responsiveness and/or anticipatoriness of symbolic objects.

## Criteria for Assessing Performance in Social Interaction

Although it has not been a topic of research in LSI (except see, for example, Tracy, 1982, 1997; also see O'Keefe, 1988, 1991), I think that there would be agreement in LSI that individuals do differ in the quality of their performances, at least with reference to the relative prevalence or absence of recurrent defects. The question is, on what would such judgments be based? As is true of any assessment, we have to consider first which qualities of a performance to take into account and, second, against what standard those qualities are held in making an assessment. Apart from occasional passing remarks in published research, assessments of the quality of individuals' performances usually surface in LSI behind the scenes, especially during data-analysis work sessions. As a result, criteria for assessment have remained tacit.

There are terms in everyday talk that are indicative of the social reality of qualitative differences in performance, as when persons are described as "charming" or "abrasive," or as "easy" or "difficult," "interesting" or "dull," "sensitive" or "insensitive" to talk to. These can all be regarded as differences stemming from persons' responsiveness (whether they are responsive at all to what has previously been "uttered" and, if so, to what in particular they are responsive) and anticipatoriness (whether the symbolic objects they produce anticipate the interactional consequences, i.e., what in particular they make relevant or not-relevant "next"). It is in terms of its responsiveness and anticipatoriness that I assess interactional performance in the analysis of the instances that follow.

I now consider, then, the question of the standard against which the responsiveness and anticipatoriness of a performance is held. In LSI, the standard necessarily has to be a relative one, based on what results the participant(s) intended to produce. Given

that persons are presumed capable of optimal performance, performance defects can only be claimed when there is an inconsistency between the results the person sought to produce and the results that the person did produce. For example, in a 1996 discussion I had with two conversation analysts, Emanuel Schegloff and John Heritage, our attention was centered on an exchange within a phone conversation they had been analyzing at a daylong preconference. The conversation was between "Kelly's" sister, who had called to speak with Kelly about the sister's upcoming visit, and Kelly's husband, who answered. After some initial talk, first about the weather and then how the husband had been faring in the various sports he liked to play, the exchange in question ensued.

- 68 Sister: °Huh,° Listen, is Kelly aroun ()  
 69 Husband: No, she's not.  
 70 (0.4)  
 71 Sister: She's not? She's not home yet. °huh°]  
 72 Husband: No. She's at the gym.

Our discussion was about Schegloff's and Heritage's contention that the husband's response in line 69 was defective. Their claim was that when a caller asks if a specific person is available, a no-answer has a slot attached to it for an account of why that person is unavailable or how or when she might be contacted. But the husband gave a no-answer without filling that slot (line 69). Of course, the husband did provide an account in his next turn (line 72), but only after he was prompted to do so—after the sister displayed that she was waiting for more by not speaking for 0.4 seconds (line 70), and then in replying, just question-echoing the husband's "incomplete" answer and going on to start a candidate account of her own (line 71).

But granted that the husband's *reply* was defective—it was not fully responsive—it is another question whether the husband's *performance* was defective. The underlying issue that surfaced occasionally in our discussion was whether the husband's putative unresponsiveness (there and elsewhere in the conversation) was due to his not being a particularly capable interactant, as opposed to his having made an active (and competent) effort there (and elsewhere in the interaction) to minimize conversation with his sister-in-law without being rude or hostile. If he did this by minimizing his speaking turns so as to reduce what he gave his sister-in-law to respond to, then he was being anticipatory and, in accordance with that, knowingly unresponsive.

To base assessments of performance in interaction on what results the observed person intended to produce introduces the problem of how one can know what an observed person's intentions are. Let us say that one can rely on one or more of the following, with the more such indicators the better: the person's own statements of intent during the interaction; what results the person was instructed by some authority to produce (as in the workplace); what results the person would be obligated to produce by virtue of his or her role identity or relationship to the others; an intention that is consistently presupposed by the person's successive actions; or a combination of these.

Making assessments of performance in interaction relative to the participants' evident goals is consonant with the broader stance in LSI that what is analytically real in any instance is what the participants being observed orient to as real (what they talk about, what self or other corrections and repairs they make, what they are responsive to and anticipatory of, etc.). A good performance would be one that produces results that the person evidently wanted to produce—the actions, ritual

practices, discourse wholes—and be all the better if this is done economically. A defective performance would be one that either fails to produce wanted results or does so in an inefficient or internally inconsistent way. Of course, one could make an assessment of performance based on an extrinsic standard (that which the person is obligated or instructed to produce), but defects with reference to such extrinsic standards may or may not result from the person's capabilities in social interaction.

Take the case of a spouse who recurrently interacts in a way that is emotionally abusive. If it is the spouse's goal to be emotionally abusive, and he or she is responsive and anticipatory in interaction such that his or her actions *are* emotionally abusive, then from LSI's perspective the spouse's performance would not be defective. This does not mean that LSI would positively value the spouse's goal of being emotionally abusive, just that it would not be the spouse's goal that is being assessed, but his or her competence and proficiency (and skill?) in deploying interactional means. Similarly, if there were an extrinsic standard (e.g., the professional norm that therapists should avoid being judgmental with their patients) and a person's performance breaches that standard, it still would not necessarily be a defective performance from LSI's perspective. That would depend on whether the person intended to breach the standard in that way or wanted to uphold it but kept failing to. If the former is the case, the breach would stem from a lack of commitment to the extrinsic standard rather than from a defective use of interactional means—again, not something LSI would endorse, but the remedy would be discipline rather than instruction, and it would stem from other concerns than those of LSI. If it were a matter of intending to meet that standard but failing to, then that would indicate defects in the person's capabilities for interaction whose remedy would be of interest from LSI's perspective.

## DEFECTS AND THEIR REMEDIATION IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

For reasons developed above, if interactional performance can be enhanced through positive learning, it would mainly be through cultivation. I have no principled reason, however, to categorically deny that it would be feasible and productive in some cases to inculcate skills to achieve specialized "additional" interactional results in particular activity domains (in addition to being responsive and anticipatory so as to coproduce a coherent discourse whole), for example, standardized ways for doctors to elicit disclosures from patients regarding delicate matters. But besides the open-ended range of such special purposes that makes it difficult to pursue the question in any general way, I am unaware of data on which I could base a claim that positive learning of that kind was needed in a particular instance, let alone data to show that for the special purposes at hand, skills could be conceived that would potentially increase the reliability of producing the results of interest. This possibility thus remains open, pending empirical studies of, for example, the goals and outcomes of the "standardized patient" method.

Instead, the issue that I can address here is, given general types and sources of deficiency in social interaction, which of them, if any, are amenable to remediation by acquiring skills (specific methods and techniques). In keeping with the discussion above of criteria for assessing performance in social interaction, I examine defects in responsiveness, then in anticipatoriness. The analysis of the negative instances examined here indicates that acquiring new skills is a possible way to remediate defects in achieving anticipatoriness but not defects in achieving responsiveness.

## Responsiveness

**Responsiveness: Positive Assessment.** Before examining a defective instance, the criterion of responsiveness can be fleshed out by examining a positive case. The interaction examined here is between two 6-year-old boys, recorded as part of a study of children's "neo-rhetorical" participation in peer interactions (Sanders & Freeman, 1997). In the segment examined here, one boy solicits the other to help him and encounters some resistance. By adult standards (and compared with some of their peers), the solicitation and the resistance seem childish. The solicitation is direct and not adapted in any obvious way to the interests of the hearer; the resistance is indirect and not fashioned in a way that reduces the potential for being solicited further. But the criterion of responsiveness is not about effectiveness or sophistication: Both boys produce turns that achieve responsiveness by being relevant to the interactional meaning of what the other says and does.

This interaction was one of more than 40 interactions we recorded between same-sex pairs of children who were given a Lego building bricks set and asked to build one thing, working together. In this instance, "Lloyd" (6;3 years old) and "Reginald" (6;4 years), although they actively played together for the 15 minute observation and taping period, did notably less than any of the other 22 dyads of 5;0 to 7;0 year-olds to initiate and sustain a joint building project. Although Reginald was equally if not more responsible as Lloyd for their diversions from the building project, he did make two efforts to enlist Lloyd's collaboration in making something.

- 219 Reginald: C'mon, help me build the hou:::(.)se (0.2) (Neat)  
 220 (2.0)
- 221 Reginald: Remember what he said?=We have to (*turns gaze to camera*) °build° (0.2) together.  
 222 (1.2)
- 223 Lloyd: Well, he said we could jus- build a (.) pie:ce.  
 224 (4.2) (*L and R install pieces on green base*)
- 225 Reginald: Well you haven't he:lped me yet.  
 226 (0.8)
- 227 Reginald: So >start helpin' < and I'll give you (0.2) ten thou-  
 228 -hhh sand do::llars  
 229

First, Reginald's initial solicitation (lines 219–222) has two parts: a direct request ("C'mon, help me build the hou:::(.)se") and an inducement to comply ("Remember what he said?=We have to °build° (0.2) together."). Lloyd's response is not *no* or *yes*. It is a counterstatement about what they were told to do (line 224: "Well, he said we could jus- build a (.) pie:ce."). By starting with the shift marker *Well*, and countering Reginald's version of what they were told to do, Lloyd thereby denied indirectly what Reginald's request implicated—that Lloyd had not been acting in accordance with their instructions. Furthermore, although this statement is not directly relevant to the content of the request, it is relevant and opposed to the inducement and thus negatively responsive to the request. Lloyd's answer was thus responsive through its implicature and as an action: It implicated a denial of what Reginald's prior inducement implicated (that Lloyd had not been doing what he should), and it was an action of resistance to Reginald's prior action of solicitation.

Similarly, Reginald's follow-up was responsive to both the denial Lloyd's prior utterance implicated and the action of resistance it counted as, and at the same

time he countered Lloyd's resistance. Note that Reginald's response (line 226: "Well you haven't he:lped me yet.") is not directly about Lloyd's prior claim about what they had been told. Rather he responds to what Lloyd implicated (that he should not be considered delinquent) with an implicature of his own. He, too, begins with the shift-marker, *Well*, and asserts that Lloyd had not helped him "yet." Reginald thus implicates that even if, as Lloyd had previously implicated, Lloyd were only bound to take part in some portion of their building project, he was still obligated to do something and, in not "yet" having done anything, was derelict. Besides being responsive to the implicature of Lloyd's utterance, Reginald was responsive to the action of resistance by having produced a counteraction of renewed solicitation and upgraded inducement.

**Responsiveness: Negative Assessment.** Let us now consider an instance of what is arguably a defective performance to consider whether such defects are amenable to being remediated by the application of specific methods and techniques. Schegloff (1995) examined a segment of a phone call between Debbie, the caller, and her boyfriend's roommate, Nick. Schegloff's interest is in the distinction between what an utterance is about and what it is doing, its functionality. He draws attention to Debbie's asking four times in succession whether Nick had already gotten a waterbed as he had intended (lines 35, 37, 40, 43), even though Nick answers each time that yes, he had. Schegloff's interest is in the functionality of Debbie's repeated question. What is of interest here is that, as Schegloff put it, Nick didn't get it: He evidently misses the functionality of her questions, answering relevantly but not responsively. (One can also take the view that Debbie was overly rigid and unresponsive in trying so hard to follow through on her plan to deliver her news despite learning it no longer had value, but that is not the focus of Schegloff's analysis.)

- 34 Debbie: ·hhh Um:: u- guess what I've-(u-) wuz lookin' in the  
 35 → paper:-have you got your waterbed yet?  
 36 Nick: Uh huh, it's really nice °too, I set it up  
 37 Debbie: → Oh really? ^Already?  
 38 Nick: Mm hmm  
 39 (0.5)  
 40 Debbie: → Are you kidding?  
 41 Nick: No, well I ordered it last (week)/(spring)  
 42 (0.5)  
 43 Debbie: → Oh- no but you h- you've got it already?  
 44 Nick: Yeah h! hh= ((laughing))  
 45 Debbie: =hhh [hh hh]  
 46 Nick: ↗I just ↗said that  
 47 Debbie: O::hh: hugh, I couldn't be ↗lieve you c-  
 48 Nick: ↗Oh (°it's just). ↗ It'll sink in 'n two  
 49 day ↗s fr'm now (then) ((laugh))  
 50 Debbie: ↗((laugh)) ↗ Oh no cuz I just  
 51 got- I saw an ad in the paper for a real discount  
 52 waterbed s' I w'z gonna tell you 'bout it =

Schegloff's claim is that Debbie's initial question in lines 34 and 35 is not a request for information. It comes on the heels of a "preoffer" to divulge news ("u- guess what I've- (u-) wuz lookin' in the paper:") that she eventually does divulge (lines

50–52: that she has seen an ad for a “discount waterbed”). “So when Debbie asks ‘have you got your waterbed yet?’ she is not just asking for information; she awaits a go-ahead. . . . And when Nick responds affirmatively . . . he is blocking her from going on to tell the information she has seen in the newspaper” (Schegloff, 1995, p. 191). On that basis, Schegloff proposed that when Debbie goes on to ask three more times whether Nick actually has gotten the waterbed, it is to prompt him each time for clearance to tell her news, not because she has failed to understand that he already answered her. Schegloff then concludes that contrary to Nick’s having made fun of Debbie for her evident failure to get it (lines 48–49) that “it is *Nick* who has not gotten it.” Here, then, we have an assessment of Nick’s performance based on his failure to recognize (i.e., to respond relevantly and responsively to) the functionality of Debbie’s preoffer and question and the question’s reiterations.

**Means of Remediation.** Nick’s interaction with Debbie might have gone differently if he had come to it with different attitudes or aptitudes. There is some basis for thinking that he has a low opinion of Debbie’s competence—she fumbles the opening sequence of the phone call and he teases her—and for that reason it might not have occurred to him that she was competently asking repeatedly if he actually had gotten his waterbed. Had that occurred to him, he might have answered her with, *Yes, I’ve got it. Why?* But bringing about an adjustment in his attitude toward Debbie, or people more generally, cannot be achieved by acquiring new skills (methods and techniques).

If we view the defect in Nick’s performance as resulting from trouble processing situated language, so that he failed to understand Debbie’s initial utterance as a “preoffer” or the functionality of her repeated questions as requests for clearance to tell her news, then remediation by acquiring skills is also not feasible. Unless further observation localized his failures of understanding to one or a few specific forms or speech acts, devising methods and techniques he could learn to counter the potential for occasional failures to understand would be a complicated and almost certainly futile undertaking. Sanders (1987, 1997) made clear that to assign specific interpretations to utterances (and visible conduct) in interactions, one has to apply distinct interpretive procedures for the propositional content of utterances, the illocutionary force of utterances, and what utterances implicate and in addition interpretive procedures for calculating which among an utterance’s possible alternative meanings it is most warranted to focus on and respond to at that juncture of the interaction. This is not reducible to a finite, teachable–learnable set of methods and techniques.

If we characterize the defect in Nick’s performance just as a failure to pay sufficient attention to the particulars of what Debbie initially said in producing the preoffer—whether as a result of his attitude toward her, a processing difficulty, or something else—then we are again faced with a matter that is pervasive in and basic to interaction itself. Although not paying sufficiently close attention is something for which a remedial method or technique can be devised, it would be so intrusive that it would interfere with interaction itself. I have in mind something like an active-listening technique, in which persons would be taught to repeat back what they heard or understood the other to have just said and to get confirmation or correction before responding. This can be regarded as a skill but one that is risky to use. Because one cannot know in advance whether one is paying due attention or has missed something, that remedy would have to be applied at every turn, substantially impeding the progress of that person’s interactions, even if that technique were reserved for

types of interaction defined in advance (arguments with loved ones, interactions with persons one dislikes, etc).

## Anticipatoriness

Of interest here is the production of interactional turns that are relevant and responsive to the attainment of some goal. Interactional turns may have a bearing on the attainment of the current speaker's goal(s), or the goal(s) of the other(s) with whom the speaker is interacting. I examine two defective performances, one having to do with attaining the speaker's goal and the other having to do with attaining the hearer's goal(s). But first it will be helpful to clarify this criterion by examining a positive instance.

**Anticipatoriness: Positive Assessment.** The following interaction was recorded in Wiseman's (1975) documentary, Welfare. A case worker (CW) has found that staff in another unit of his agency acted mistakenly to terminate a client's enrollment, and he has gone to his supervisor for permission to bring the case to the unit responsible for the error to get them to reverse themselves and void it. Evidently, just before the beginning of the recorded segment, the supervisor (Sup) had not approved of taking the case to that other unit, apparently because (from what is said in the recorded segment) he thought that the matter at hand would or should be addressed in an appeal hearing (called "a fair hearing") to which the client was entitled. The case worker evidently considers that because there should not have been a termination in the first place, the action should be reversed rather than appealed. In the recorded segment, then, CW undertakes to "correct" and redirect Sup.

- 1 CW: No Tom, you're mis,understanding ↓me.]
- 2 Sup: [Yes ↓ I know
- 3 what your (idea) is=
- 4 CW: =She got ↓thi:s. ((showing document in file))
- 5 Sup: ↑Ri↓ght ↑ri↓ght.
- 6 CW: She called the num↑ber?
- 7 Sup: And she should,↑ve gotten a fair hearing.]
- 8 CW: ↓she GOT ↓ THIS
- 9 co:nference?
- 10 Sup: Yuh.
- 11 CW: The conference said her case would be closed,
- 12 so they're sending her this notice saying
- 13 [yes, your case is gonna be closed.]
- 14 Sup: [Yuh, but she didn't in fact] have a fair
- 15 hearing, it was a conference, right?=
- 16 CW: =Well-my question is ↓this,=she sa:ys that she
- 17 gave them the information they ↑wan↓ted.
- 18 Sup: But I mean ↓did sh-]
- 19 CW: ↓and if you look in the record,
- 20 Sup: Yeah! but I'm asking you did sh-=
- 21 CW: =you will see that she did.
- 22 Sup: Yuh! But I'm not-
- 23 CW: So I wonder why they're closing the ↑case.

24 Sup: O:h tha::, okay. (0.2) U::h this is u:h ((scanning  
25 a document in the file)) from uh- u::h, from u::h  
26 George Drew's office.  
27 (0.7)  
28 CW: Horowitz worked on the, ...

What is particularly noteworthy is that almost none of CW's responses are relevant or responsive to Sup's prior turns. They are continuations of his own prior turn. CW's unresponsiveness to Sup continues until just the point at which Sup seems to "get it" (line 24). (The one partial exception is at one point when Sup asks a direct question, at lines 14 and 15. CW orients to a question having been asked—not by answering it, but by responding with a shift-marker, and advancing, with contrastive stress, his own question as the one he will respond to.)

Consider, however, that if CW had produced turns that were relevant and responsive to Sup's prior utterances, they would have had to address a matter that CW seems to consider moot: the client's opportunity for a fair hearing. If CW had spoken relevantly and responsively to what Sup was saying or asking about a fair hearing, even if he had done so to dispute Sup's assumption that a fair hearing was pertinent, that would not have brought them much nearer to acting on CW's request to take the case to the office that had erred and may have led them even further away from acting on that request. Hence, progress toward attaining the goal of getting authorization to seek a reversal of the termination action depended in part on CW's producing turns that were not relevant and responsive to what Sup was saying. In that aspect of their design, as well as in forming his turns generally to be continuations and managing allocation of the floor to prevent Sup from having a complete turn, CW's turns achieved anticipatoriness (relevance and responsiveness) toward attaining his apparent goal.

***Anticipatoriness: Negative Assessment, Interaction 1.*** Where CW's turns were markedly anticipatory of attaining his goal, the customer's turns in the following service encounter<sup>8</sup> were not. The customer (C) had just paid most but not all of the balance due on his last bill, leaving him owing "TPC" (his phone company) \$28.95. He has now called TPC after receiving a notice that if he failed to make immediate payment of his outstanding balance, his telephone service would be terminated. He speaks with two customer service representatives (CSR1 and CSR2). He asks the first whether she thinks TPC will really terminate service if he only owes that small amount, especially after he has just paid the larger part of the balance due. She does not think it likely, but after he presses her, she puts him on hold while she checks. CSR2 comes on the line at that point. After an extended, somewhat confused review of what he actually owes TPC, CSR2 asks, "Are you gonna pay that today? Cuz today's your disconnection date." From there the customer and representative laboriously work out that he will pay that week on Friday, and to which branch office he will bring payment. As this arrangement is being completed, C interrupts CSR2's closing summary to launch a complaint about the unfairness of his being subject to having his phone disconnected for owing so small an amount (lines 147, 149):

<sup>8</sup>I am indebted to Christine Iacobucci, Ithaca College, for providing me with the transcript and audiotape of this conversation. She collected it in conjunction with a study being carried out in "TPC's" research laboratory on ways in which customer-service calls could be automated.

- 141 CSR2: Okay I'll go ahead and (note) your records for Friday the:n.  
 142 (0.5)  
 143 CSR2: O↑kay?  
 144 C: Okay.  
 145 (1.2)  
 146 CSR2: ('N/then) we'll (be expecting [you to)-  
 147 C: → |>I can't see (it).<  
 148 CSR2: Pardon?=br/>
 149 C: → =I j'st- (1.5) It didn't seem fai::r they would- (0.7) they  
 150 would >turn if off< for twenty eight dollars,

It is clear from the way the subsequent conversation proceeds that the customer launches his complaint without anticipating its bearing on the attainment of his goal. (Although no particular goal is stated across the span of this conversation, nor consistently oriented to by the customer, a persistent goal-relevant theme that he voices is that he wants to avoid having his phone disconnected). Antagonizing CSR2 could result in her withdrawal of the arrangement she has made with him to defer his payment beyond his “disconnection date,” and in fact the ensuing conversation verges on that unwanted outcome.

It is true that C tries to bring closure to this sequence, but both times this seems occasioned by a loss of will to persist, not anticipation that attainment of his goal is being jeopardized. The first time he tries to close, he starts to say something more, then “gives up” by saying “O↑kay::” (lines 161–163) instead of Okay or O↓kay. The second time he tries to close, he says “Right” but does not respond to CSR2’s overlapping prompt for him to (again) concede the point (lines 187–188).

- 154 CSR2: =bills have to be paid monthly. It's not a (rolving charge)  
 155 account.  
 156 (1.2)  
 157 C: °Yeah,°  
 158 (0.5)  
 159 C: °I know:. (0.2) >I know:. <°  
 160 (0.7)  
 161 C: It w'z- (0.5) hu(h) ·hhh  
 162 (0.7)  
 163 C: → O↑kay::.  
 164 CSR2: → Twenty eight dollars, times (.) a million accounts >is a lot  
 165 of money.<  
 .  
 .  
 .  
 183 CSR2. Well I understand that but we have to look at it- ·hhh in  
 184 a major:ity of payments.  
 185 (3.0)  
 186 C: → R right.  
 187 CSR2: |Okay?  
 188 (0.7)  
 189 CSR2: → >See I'm not really even supposed to give you these  
 190 arrangements< cuz your disconnection day is t'day:..

By launching his complaint, the customer potentially put himself in an adversarial relationship with CSR2, yet she is the person who has (as she tells it) bent the rules to make it feasible for him to pay a few days late and still avoid having his phone disconnected. Yet when she first voices this directly (lines 189–190: “See I’m not *really* even supposed to give you these *arrangements*”) after the customer’s second effort to close the complaint sequence, the customer does not respond by sustaining his effort to close the sequence. Instead, he renews his complaint and escalates it to an attack on the rapacity of big corporations. If launching the complaint in the first place failed to achieve anticipatoriness, escalating it at this juncture fails even more so.

- 253 C: ... too many big corporatio [ns. (No big )-]  
254 CSR2: → [Si::r; I don't ha:ve ta  
255 give you these arrangements.  
256 (1.5)  
257 C: ↑O↑kay!  
258 CSR2: O↑kay?  
259 (1.5)  
260 C: >So what're you gonna do then?<  
261 CSR2: >I'm gonna note your account, you're gonna pay it Friday<  
262 bu:t- (0.2) I don't ha:ve to give you the arrangements, I'm  
263 explaining to you, ·hh

In interrupting C's complaint to reiterate that it is her option whether to give him the arrangement to pay they had worked out, so that (implicitly) she could just as easily withdraw it, CSR2 had rephrased her prior version. Previously she had said, "I'm not really even supposed to give you these arrangements," but now she says (lines 254–255) "Si::r:, I don't ha:ve ta give you these arrangements." C seems to orient to this as a threat, in that he stops his complaint in midsentence as she begins speaking, and then there is a silence. In answering with the token Okay, he again fails to achieve anticipatoriness: At minimum that token has no bearing one way or the other on the attainment of his goal and so for that reason alone does not achieve anticipatoriness. But the way he vocally inflects that token ("↑O↑kay!") potentially has a negative bearing on the attainment of his goal. It is hearable as either defiance (comparable to saying *Oh yeah?*) or possibly as acquiescence to a fait accompli (as if to say *Okay then, so be it*). CSR2's response indicates that she has understood the customer in some such way. She asks for confirmation, but with an exaggerated upward inflection that connotes surprise (line 258: "O↑kay?"). Instead of confirming his willingness for her to withdraw the arrangement, the customer asks what she intends to do. In doing so, he at least achieves responsiveness (especially in having responded to her implicated readiness to void the arrangement) but again not anticipatoriness. His question does not have any bearing one way or the other on the relevance of attaining his goal.

**Means of Remediation, Interaction 1.** The question here is not why the customer felt so aggrieved about the unfairness of TPC's threat to disconnect his phone service that he launched a complaint about it and jeopardized an arrangement to avoid disconnection. Although he might not have failed to achieve anticipatoriness if he were less aggrieved, it would be a matter of psychotherapy or perhaps fundamental socioeconomic reform to prevent those feelings. Rather, the question is whether, if a person's subjective state could interfere with his achieving anticipatoriness, specific

methods and techniques might be provided to him or her to compensate. In this case, this seems feasible. The customer introduced a new topic that externalized his subjective concerns, without evidently stopping to consider what could be gained (or lost) in the interaction by doing so. Perhaps he could have been helped to stop and consider the potential consequences if he had had a checklist he could (mentally) consult about what could relevantly and responsively ensue in the interaction by introducing the topic. It would be feasible from studying research in LSI to devise such a checklist, and learning to make use of it before introducing new topics would represent a skill that could reduce or avoid the defects in this customer's performance.

**Anticipatoriness: Negative Assessment, Interaction 2.** Tracy (1997) analyzed the interactions of emergency call-takers with an interest in improving call-taker "training" to enhance their interactional performance. A recurring trouble that Tracy identified is a mismatch between callers' expectations of an immediate emergency response and the call-takers' official obligation to obtain a variety of information from the caller before emergency personnel are dispatched. As a result, callers sometimes become agitated, or even, as in the instance below, hang up without finishing the interview and being assured of a response. Tracy's analysis of these calls does not yield any specification of recurrent sources of trouble in call-takers' performances, and she did not end with proposals for any specific methods and techniques (skills) that would help call-takers carry out their interviews with fewer troubles. Instead, she proposed that call-takers be given opportunities to develop "reflective practices" so that they can "spot inaccurate [caller] expectations at work in the moment" and address them (pp. 338–339).

However, instead of adopting the call-takers' or agencies' perspective that caller expectations are often wrong, one can also consider that, from the callers' perspective, call-takers may not produce interactional turns that make attainment of the caller's goal relevant and responsive. Of course, it does not necessarily constitute a defective performance by the call-taker if the call-taker fails to achieve anticipatoriness in terms of the caller's attainment of his or her goal. As Tracy pointed out, some caller's goals are not ones that can or should be attained through the deployment of emergency services. But when a caller's goals can and should be attained through the deployment of emergency services, and the call-taker fails to achieve anticipatoriness with respect to those goals, then we can regard the performance as defective.

I examine one of those interactions because it exhibits a recurrent failure by the call-taker to achieve anticipatoriness regarding the *caller's* goal(s). The call was made by an emotionally distressed woman who reports that her 2-year-old son has "gone out" from the house and she does not know where he is. After some time answering questions, before the interview is concluded and without any assurance that emergency personnel will be dispatched, the caller hangs up. Tracy pointed out that she hung up at the point at which, after initial questioning about names and residence, the call-taker phrases her next questions in a way that projects a series of questions still to come. Tracy also notes that because of the woman's emotional distress and sense of urgency, she might have abandoned the call anyway no matter what the call-taker had said, probably to go out to look for the child herself. If we examine the call-taker's performance, however, there is reason to think that she worsened the caller's sense of urgency and promoted a loss of confidence that emergency services would be timely or sufficiently informed to be effective (i.e., the call-taker failed to achieve anticipatoriness in regards to the caller's goals). Without knowing whether avoiding this defect would have been enough to prevent the caller from hanging up, specific methods and

techniques can be devised that would have reduced or eliminated those aspects of the call-taker's performance that, at minimum, increased the likelihood of the caller's hanging up.

Specifically, Tracy does not give due attention to the call-taker's recurrent failure to understand or attend closely to what the caller had said, although she does remark on the first of several of these. The call-taker misheard the caller's name, which Tracy surmised might have been because the caller was crying and not speaking clearly.

- 17 CT: What's your first name?
- 18 C: Annie ((crying))
- 19 CT: Sandy?
- 20 C: Annie.

Although some of the other troubles discussed below may also have been the result of mishearings because of the caller's unclear speech, others were not. Besides the mishearings, the call-taker exhibited failures to pay due attention. This was the basis for her next error. She evidently failed to note, or else forgot, the child's exact age, which the caller had used in her opening turn as her main referent or descriptor of the child:

- 2 C: Hi uhm (.) I don't hhh, I have a two year old that's
- 3 gone out of my house I can't find him ((high pitched
- 4 quavering voice, "crying"))
- .
- .
- .
- 26 CT: And he's a three year old?
- 27 C: He's two ((continued high pitch and quaver))

This is not a minor slip. The child's young age is what makes his disappearance an emergency, as is evident from the mother's use of his age to both describe and refer to him in her opening statement of the reason for calling. Generally the younger the child, the greater the perils he or she faces, and the developmental difference between a two-year-old and a three-year-old are notable. There is no direct evidence about whether the caller attached any significance to the call-taker's imprecision in recalling her child's age, but she could have; that imprecision could be attributed to the call-taker's failure to comprehend the urgency of the situation or her unreliability as a conduit for getting accurate and useful information to emergency personnel.

The call-taker next mishears the child's name, is corrected, and then mishears its spelling and is corrected:

- 28 CT: two year old (*pause; keyboard sounds*) What's his
- 29 name?
- 30 C: Hugh (*continued high pitch and quaver*)
- 31 CT: Hugo?
- 32 C: .hhh no just Hugh hhh hh (*high pitch and quavering*)
- 33 CT: Hugh?
- 34 C: Yeh (*cough*) H-U-E

- 35 CT: Huh? H-U-G-H?  
 36 C: H-U-E: hhheh  
 37 CT: say it again, H-U-E?  
 38 C: Uh huh

What comes almost immediately after this series of mishearings and corrections is the call-taker's initiation of a next series of questions, at which point the caller hangs up. But the call-taker at that juncture has not only projected an indefinitely prolonged series of new questions, as Tracy (1997) noted, there are other defects in her performance at that juncture. Again, we do not know whether the caller attached any significance to these, but they immediately preceded her hanging up. First, the call-taker ignores or fails to comprehend the caller's effort to ask a question (line 43 in the following extract). Second, the call-taker asks a relevant question (about what the child is wearing), but before the caller can answer, replaces it with another question that is no more important (about the child's race). Finally, her question about the child's race is whether he is "a black, white, or Hispanic": The narrowness of this range of candidate races exhibits the call-taker's parochialism, which coincides with the parochialism of her evident failure to realize that the spelling of the child's name suggests none of the above, but an Asian heritage, perhaps Vietnamese.

- 43 C: Wh::y kin () (*sobbing*)  
 44 CT: Okay sweetie, calm down, baby you need to calm  
 45 down. Please for me okay cuz I need to ask you  
 46 some questions. What's he wearing, and is he, first  
 47 of all is he a black, white, or Hispanic? (*pause*)  
 48 Annie? (*pause*) Ann^ie? Ann^ie?

CT's recurring display of incomprehension and inattentiveness are at odds with what we can reasonably assume was C's principal goal(s): (a) to obtain an immediate emergency response (b) from correctly informed emergency personnel to help find her child. It is not just that the questioning in this case was taking time, delaying a response, but that it was taking extra time because of CT's repeated mishearings and C's corrections. Moreover, that CT often seems uncomprehending, inattentive, and parochial, is also at odds with C's goal of obtaining assistance from correctly informed emergency personnel (where poorly informed or misinformed personnel will either misdirect their effort on the scene or be delayed from action on the scene by having to reinterview the caller).

**Means of Remediation, Interaction 2.** What should be emphasized here is that CT's failure to achieve anticipatoriness was not just a consequence of her troubles getting needed information quickly and correctly. It was more a consequence of her failure to exhibit any recognition of the interference that those troubles were producing with the attainment of C's goal, and, beyond that, her failure to initiate any measure that would compensate for or surmount the delay and potential errors that the interview was producing. The one measure CT took that showed a recognition of and effort to end those troubles was to repeatedly ask C to be calm (line 5, immediately after the initial report that her child was missing: "okay. calm down"; lines 8 and 9: "wait, wai:t sweetie. Wai:t. Calm down, calm down"; line 13: "Okay you need to calm down for just a minute"; line 21: "Okay Annie, please calm down, oka::y? I need you to be calm for just a moment"; lines 44 and 45: "Okay sweetie,

calm down, baby you need to calm down. Please for me okay"). This not only put the onus for the troubles in this interview on the mother, but perhaps more seriously, these admonitions were not expressed with any recognition that the caller had good reason to be upset and that it might be difficult for her to calm down. This is underscored by her first-naming the caller and using such address terms as "sweetie" and "baby," thus positioning the caller as a "child" whose emotions are unreasonable. Hence, if the caller noted any of this and made the attributions they warrant, the call-taker's pleas to the caller to calm down are one more way in which she gives the appearance of being uncomprehending. If so, those pleas, too, failed to achieve anticipatoriness.

As in the prior instances of defective performance, a different person might well have performed better, someone with different aptitudes, attitudes, and knowledge, who could have been less parochial and more empathic. But the question here is whether there is a way for CT to remedy the defects in her performance without undergoing a psychic makeover, but rather by adopting specific methods and techniques in interviewing callers. The following methods and techniques would help CT achieve anticipatoriness regarding C's goals, although without knowing more about that specific caller's understandings and attributions that led her to hang up, it has to be speculative whether she would still have done so had CT applied these methods and techniques.

As Tracy (1997) noted, C had no way to know how long it would take before emergency personnel would be dispatched, but the analysis here suggests she had increasingly greater reason to doubt that, whatever its duration, emergency personnel would get correct or useful information on which to act when they arrived, if they got there at all. Addressing those concerns explicitly by word and deed would have achieved anticipatoriness, particularly with reference to C's likely sense of urgency (conceivably she could have imagined as she was on the phone that her child was nearing a busy intersection or being taken away by a stranger). In this case, candidate skills (methods and techniques) involve adding elements to CT's performance that were missing and avoiding inclusion of some elements that were deployed.

The first remedy involves an adjustment in procedure that may or may not require a policy change by her agency. If the call-taker insists on or is required to conclude an interview before giving the matter to a dispatcher, delay at a time of possible emergency is inevitable. Without abandoning the goal of completing an interview, revised guidelines (methods and techniques) such as the following could be applied for call-takers to make a determination that emergency personnel should be dispatched while the interview is still in progress. Guidelines for making such a procedural adjustment might be the following: (a) if the matter at hand involves an imminent peril to life or property that an immediate response by emergency personnel might avert and (b) if the caller's emotional state interferes with being able to give clear or complete information efficiently, for example, within 1 minute, then (c) as soon as the most essential information for the dispatcher is obtained (what happened, where, name and location of caller or contact person), the information should be given to the dispatcher while the interview continues. Although this procedural adjustment would increase the chances of being taken in by hoaxes that might be detected if the interview were concluded first, on some matters there is more potential for harm in trying to detect a hoax than in responding to one. Given such guidelines, the call-taker could achieve anticipatoriness with some such formula as, *Okay, just let me get the basic information about where to send the [police/fire truck/ambulance] and then you can give me the rest of the information they'll need while they're on the way.*

Second, there are specific omissions from CT's responses in the instance above that indicated a lack of comprehension or empathy, the inclusion of which can readily be prescribed in training. Call-takers in response to emotionally distressed persons could be given tools to intermittently provide forecasts and displays of understanding, for example such formulas as *I just need to know two more things so we can dispatch /X/*, and *I realize how hard this is for you, but you're telling me what I need to know*. If the call-taker makes mistakes (i.e., is corrected) some minimal number of times, the impression that might give of failures of comprehension or attention could be offset by acknowledging it and proposing a remedy (e.g., *You're so upset I'm having trouble understanding you, so if I ask you to repeat something, that's why, okay?*).

Third, in addition to performance defects by omission, there were defects in CT's performance by commission. At minimum, call-takers can be told to (a) avoid telling the caller to calm down, (b) avoid using overly familiar or patronizing address terms (to adults), and (c) avoid providing candidate answers, especially on such delicate matters as race and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so forth.

## Issues of Generalization

The analysis of two interactional performances in which responsiveness and anticipatoriness were achieved, and three in which they were not, is obviously not enough to generalize the claim that defects in responsiveness cannot be remediated by the application of particular methods and techniques but that defects in anticipatoriness can be, nor is it enough to make clear whether skills devised to remediate performance defects will have to be individual-specific or whether there are recurrent performance defects across persons that can be remediated by learning the same skills.

Second, it is conceivable that analysts will differ about what if anything can be done to remediate specific performance defects. It seems that Tracy (1997) and I have arrived at different conclusions about how to remediate performance defects in taking emergency calls, and about the usefulness of devising specific methods and techniques for this purpose. Whether greater uniformity among analysts can be developed as research moves forward is a key question. Science might foster some consensus and some generalizations about what constitutes an optimal performance, but when it comes to what the reasons for and remedies of a defective performance are, neither pedagogues nor consultants to date have found a way to make this anything but a matter of "art" in which—like any other arena of communication and social performance—the quality of pedagogues' and consultants' performances varies from person to person and perhaps even case to case.

## CONCLUSION

The focus of basic research in LSI has mainly been to identify the discursive practices that persons deploy in interactions, and how those are constituted, to coordinate what they say and do; to constitute from their separate contributions a joint activity that has an identifiable result; and to constitute themselves as participants in and members of a community, family, organization, profession, and so forth. This is not, as I have defined it, a matter of applying acquired skills, and so the skills concept has not taken hold in LSI. But the more LSI applies its work and its methodologies to subspecies and genres of interaction in specific activity domains, with a practical interest in maximizing the quality of performances, the more relevant the skills concept

becomes. Whether the start I have made down that path is sustained or replaced, it is a start we need to make in LSI, and the issues that have emerged are ones it will be fruitful for us to address.

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CHAPTER

7

## MESSAGE PRODUCTION SKILL IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

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### MESSAGE PRODUCTION SKILL IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

The staggering variety of social contexts within which individuals produce verbal and nonverbal messages makes the task of identifying and elaborating message production skills a daunting one. Not only do social interactions unfold in situations that range from the highly routine to those that are unique, the variety of instrumental and communication goals pursued in these interactions is equally large or larger. As these social encounters play out, participants may experience them as positive or negative, or as some admixture of these affects. In addition to these possibilities, studies of social situation perception have revealed several other dimensions such as formal-informal, cooperative-competitive, and superior-subordinate that social perceivers use to characterize social interaction contexts (seeForgas, 1979; Miller, Cody, & McLaughlin, 1994; Wish, Deutsch, & Kaplan, 1976).

To reduce this conceptual complexity, a framework for viewing social interaction is advanced here. This perspective features the role that goals and plans play in organizing the messages exchanged within social interactions. There are alternative conceptual lenses through which message production skills could be viewed (e.g., social learning theories). However, because the notion of skill necessarily implies the ability to reach goals, conceiving of social interaction as a goal-directed and plan-guided activity is a particularly fruitful vantage point from which view message production skills. Social actors who reach their goals are more likely to be viewed as “skilled performers,” although goal attainment is but one factor that fuels such evaluations.

Once this goal-plan-based scaffolding is erected and the criteria for skilled message production adumbrated, the remainder of the chapter deals with skills particular to message production in social interaction contexts. After examining speech production as a general skill that enables complex social interaction, the message production skill rubrics of goal-plan detection, establishing common ground, the production of audience-adapted messages, and the generation of effective message plans are

considered in turn. Each of these skill rubrics is critical in enabling message producers to realize their intentions during their social interactions with others; a deficiency within any one of them is likely to undermine message production and social interaction effectiveness. When possible, this discussion is anchored in extant research; as will become evident, however, several crucial message production skills can be identified that have yet to be studied in detail. These lacunae present potentially interesting and important research opportunities.

## SOCIAL INTERACTION AS A GOAL-DIRECTED AND PLAN-GUIDED PROCESS

The goal-seeking nature of human action and social interaction has led both to the development of cognitive structures that represent knowledge about goals and plans as well as patterns of action, communication, and social interaction that are organized around goals and plans. In addition to explicating this view of social interaction, this section delineates features of social situations that influence message production and criteria for assessing message production skills.

### Goals, Plans, and Action

That individual human action and social interaction are organized around goal striving that is plan-guided is a postulate that receives ample support from several quarters. Bogdan (1994) argued that humans gather, process, and store data from their environments to locate and guide themselves toward goals. He explained that guidance toward goals is necessary because organisms “are material systems or complexities that are genetically programmed to maintain and replicate themselves in goal-directed ways” (p. 1). Bogdan (1994) further observed the following:

The ability to pursue specific ends by specific means enables an organism not only to specialize and focus its efforts but also to terminate them at some opportune point, thus saving energy and wear when the results are good or to continue its efforts or try something else when they are not. The more efficient an organism’s ability to identify and get beneficial results and the more accurate the information gained from the results, the better off the organism and its ability to spread its genetic heritage will be. (p. 20)

Using this “means–ends” (plan–goal) schema to pursue goals confers a distinct evolutionary advantage. Within Bogdan’s (1994) purview, “having and satisfying goals is the strategy of life” (p. 20). With respect to the evolutionary significance of planning, some have argued that the human capacities of higher intelligence, language, and technology evolved together as planning adaptations (Parker & Milbrath, 1993).

Others have observed that individuals use language to reach goals (Austin, 1962; Clark, 1994; Wittgenstein, 1953). Wittgenstein (1953) asserted that “language is an instrument” (para. 569), and Clark (1994) put it this way: “People engage in discourse not merely to use language, but to accomplish things. They want to buy shoes or get a lost address or arrange a dinner party or trade gossip or teach a child improper fractions. Language is simply a tool for achieving these aims (p. 1018).” And, as Hauser (1996) observed, “The design features of a communication system are the result of a complex interaction between the constraints of the system and the demands of the job required” (p. 1).

The idea that language is a tool for achieving goals has led students of the origins of language to search for relationships between tool use and the development of language and cognition in prehistoric cultures (Hewes, 1993). These links remain

highly speculative, and a great deal of controversy surrounds the questions of how, when, and where language emerged (Davidson & Noble, 1993). Nevertheless, most would agree that language has evolved into a potentially powerful tool for attaining goals, but Wittgenstein (1953) and others (Levinson, 1992; Sanders, 1997) have cautioned that in many instances, language is used in the context of broader goal-directed activities. Wittgenstein (1953) called these activities *language games*, and Levinson (1992) dubbed them *activity types*. In the pursuit of everyday goals, language use may sometimes assume a subsidiary role. Some activity types such as rituals and routine service encounters require little if any verbal interaction for their successful consummation. By contrast, other activity types place heavy message production demands on those who participate in them (teaching and selling). Unfortunately, theories of language use generally have ignored variations in activity types (Levinson, 1992; Sanders, 1997).

Just as language use is usually not a goal unto itself, individuals do not engage each other in social interaction for the purpose of enacting turn-taking routines, displaying facial expressions, or showing behavioral adaptation or coordination. Behavioral coordination of social interaction is not merely an interesting curio; rather, it may be instrumental in achieving such goals as attachment and rapport (Cappella, 1998). Although verbal and nonverbal messages exchanged during social encounters and the mechanisms that coordinate these exchanges may indeed be critical for goal achievement, they generally do not constitute the *raison d'être* for social interaction. Like language, social interaction is an instrument.

Bogdan (1997) argued that the ability to interpret the intentions and actions of others evolved from the necessity of understanding others' goals to attain one's own. If others' goals potentially interfere with the satisfaction of one's own, it is vital to know others' intentions. The ability to make inferences concerning their goals and plans is at the heart of this interpretative process. Within the more limited domain of language use, Green (1996) asserted, "Understanding a speaker's intention in saying what she said the way she said it amounts to inferring the speaker's plan, in all of its hierarchical glory, although there is room for considerable latitude regarding the details" (p. 13). Because plans are hierarchical cognitive representations of goal-directed action sequences (Berger, 1995, 1997), goal and plan inferences play a significant role in the interpretation of both discourse and texts. Narrative comprehension depends on story consumers' ability to make necessary goal and plan inferences about story characters' actions (Black & Bower, 1979, 1980; Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979; Bruce & Newman, 1978; Carberry, 1990; Hammond, 1989; Mandl, 1984; Schank & Abelson, 1977, 1995). Similar inferential processes subserve the comprehension of discourse and actions.

## Cognitive Representations of Goals and Plans

Goals and plans are hierarchically organized knowledge structures that vary in their levels of abstractness (Berger, 1995, 1997; Dillard, 1990, 1997). Highly abstract goals or actions are located at the tops of these hierarchies, whereas more concrete representations of goals and actions are nested below them. In the case of goal hierarchies, for example, an abstract goal like personal happiness might subsume such concrete goals as making \$1,000,000 or purchasing a luxury car. Attaining concrete goals enables the achievement of more abstract goals. Similarly, conceptual representations of actions necessary to attain goals are organized hierarchically. An individual might have abstract plans for attaining the desired state of personal happiness and a set of concrete plans for realizing each of the subgoals in the goal hierarchy.

Knowledge structures such as goals and plans are induced from repeated interactions with the environment (Fiske & Taylor, 1991); thus, they represent adaptations to environmental demands. These internal representations of goals and plans enable individuals to identify goals important to survival and well-being and to use plan knowledge to guide their actions toward the achievement of these goals, two fundamental tasks Bogdan (1994) identified as necessary for continuing evolutionary advantage. Successful plans that are used repeatedly are stored in long-term memory (Hammond, 1989). When a previously attained goal arises, a plan to achieve that goal is automatically retrieved, thus making it unnecessary for people to plan anew for each goal they encounter.

One might object to a goal–plan approach to social interaction because individuals usually do not consciously plan their everyday interactions. A fallacy lurking behind this line of reasoning is the idea that for action to be goal-directed and plan-guided, individuals must be conscious of the goals they are pursuing and the plans they are using to reach their goals. Given the limits of conscious attention (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), social actors can focus on only limited regions of goal and plan hierarchies at any given time. However, granting this limitation in no way eliminates the possibility that these knowledge structures guide action, even when social actors are not consciously aware of them. While driving home from work, people may not be consciously aware of their goal (getting home) and the plans guiding them to their goal. Similarly, individuals pursuing an ingratiation goal in a conversation may do so without consciously thinking about their plans for reaching it.

A second objection to this plan-based view of social interaction is that because the give-and-take of social interaction takes place rapidly and sometimes changes direction abruptly, seemingly static structures like goal and plan hierarchies are too inflexible to accommodate such spontaneous and rapidly unfolding events. This objection may reflect skeptical myopia. Because plans can be formulated at various levels of abstraction, unpredicted events that may force plan modifications can be taken into account by devising abstract plans that can be altered as unanticipated contingencies arise (Bratman, 1987, 1990). More generally, as environmental uncertainty increases, it is more optimal to cast plans at higher levels of abstraction and fill in the details as actions are carried out (Berger, 1997). This strategy allows social actors greater flexibility. When environmental uncertainty is low, it may be more effective to employ concrete plans, which may potentiate greater efficiency in attaining desired goals (Bogdan, 1994; Waldron, 1997).

That individuals think about the goals they are pursuing and the plans they are using to attain them while they interact with others has been demonstrated repeatedly (Waldron, 1990, 1997; Waldron & Applegate, 1994). Individuals may plan interactively by basing their goals and plans on inferences they make about their co-interactants' goals and plans (Bruce & Newman, 1978; Waldron, 1997). This notion suggests that as individuals interact, they formulate plans that mesh in ways that promote goal attainment. Of course, during adversarial interactions, participants' mutual goal may be to thwart the other's goal (Bruce & Newman, 1978; Carbonell, 1981). In either case, individuals' plans interact and are revised in response to events that transpire during the conversation (Waldron, 1997). The fact that online planning takes place during conversations and individuals' plans interact should quell concerns that plans are too static to explain social interaction patterns (O'Keefe & Lambert, 1995).

Opportunistic planning provides additional flexibility to those involved in social interaction. The notion of opportunistic planning emerged from studies of planning and problem solving that required individuals to devise plans for accomplishing

concrete goals. When given the problem of finding the most efficient way of completing a series of errands in a hypothetical town, planners frequently showed evidence of opportunistic planning (Hayes-Roth & Hayes-Roth, 1979). As people followed their planned routes through the town, they spontaneously noticed how the efficiency of their original plan could be improved by altering their intended route. Similarly, young children given the opportunity to reconsider plans they had already developed for completing a series of classroom clean-up chores generally revised their plans such that they became more efficient (Pea & Hawkins, 1987).

Circumstances may force those seeking to achieve their goals during social encounters to abandon their efforts temporarily. Individuals may sense that they lack the requisite resources for attaining their goals, or they may encounter significant resistance from others. Later, circumstances may change and become more favorable for achieving the previously suspended goals. The ability to recognize these opportunities as they occur is important in promoting both efficiency and personal satisfaction. Knowing when to pursue a pending goal is an important cognitive skill. When people plan for goals to be pursued later, they are more sensitive to future opportunities to achieve these goals (Patalano & Seifert, 1997). Hence, plan-guided action neither binds social actors to slavish devotion to their plans nor blinds them to opportunities for making their plans more efficient.

Earlier, it was noted that goals and plans are things about which social perceivers make inferences to attain their own goals. Those inclined to reject the goal–plan approach to social interaction advanced here are put in the difficult position of arguing that intentions and perceptions of intentions are inconsequential to the conduct of social interaction. By contrast, the goal–plan perspective suggests that interacting goals and plans and the inferences social actors make concerning them not only give meaning to social encounters, they also help to determine what social actors will say and do (Berger, 1997; Bruce & Newman, 1978; Carbonell, 1981; Waldron, 1997).

## Goals and Plans in Action

To establish that knowledge structures like goals and plans have psychological reality is to win only half of the battle in demonstrating their relevance to social interaction. The other problem is to show that the structure of social action reflects these cognitive structures. Is there evidence that human action is organized into goal and plan hierarchies? One would expect some similarity in the organization of cognition and action because (a) knowledge structures such as plans are induced from interactions with the environment (Bogdan, 1994, Fiske & Taylor, 1991) and (b) actions are guided by these knowledge structures.

Barker (1963) provided a partial answer to the question of how human action is organized. In Barker's (1963) ecologically oriented view, the stream of human action can be analyzed in two ways. First, "natural units" of behavior can be used. In the case of children attending school, for example, relevant natural behavior units might be studying arithmetic and being at recess. A second way to parse ongoing behavior is to impose arbitrary units like time on the stream of behavior. These arbitrary units Barker termed *tesserae*. Barker (1963) argued that the imposition of tesserae on the behavior stream creates distortions in the organization of natural behavior units. Consequently, he advocated the use of nonreactive research methods (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966) and analytic schemes that do not impose tesserae on action sequences.

Detailed observations of children engaging in everyday activities revealed that behavior units sometimes exhibit two important properties (Barker, 1963). First, some behavioral units are organized around the pursuit of a goal or a set of goals. Second, molar behavioral units frequently manifest hierarchical organization in which smaller behavioral units are essential for the production of larger, more abstract units. In describing this property of the behavior stream, Barker (1963) asserted, "These facts point to a fundamental structural feature of the behavior stream: behavior units occur in enclosing-enclosed structures; small units form the components of larger units" (p. 11).

Studies of how naïve observers segment or unitize ongoing sequences of behavior have adduced evidence to support the notion that perceptions of behavioral units are also organized hierarchically (Newtonson, 1973, 1976). In these studies, observers viewed silent videotapes of solo individuals performing a series of mundane actions. Observers were asked to press a button when one meaningful action in the sequence began and to press the button again when the meaningful action ended. Subjects were not told what constituted a "meaningful action." Some subjects divided the action sequence into just a few units (gross unitizers), whereas others divided the same action sequence into many units (fine unitizers). Thus, the units identified by the gross unitizers were more abstract and inclusive, whereas the fine unitizers subdivided these larger units into more molecular actions. Newtonson (1973, 1976) concluded that goal-directed action sequences are hierarchically organized, smaller units of behavior are combined to produce larger units.

Detailed analyses of goal-directed action sequences represented both visually and in written form have revealed that they too are hierarchically organized (Lichtenstein & Brewer, 1980). In these studies, videotapes of individuals performing simple tasks such as writing a letter or setting up a movie projector, as well as written descriptions of individuals performing the same two tasks, exhibited a hierarchical structure. These structures consisted of hierarchical arrangements of actions that enabled each other. Individuals who viewed videotapes of these action sequences or read written descriptions of them displayed better memory for more abstract actions than for specific actions that enabled the higher level actions. This finding is consistent with those found in story memory research (Mandler, 1984). In the case of narratives, higher level actions are better recalled than the more specific actions that enable them, and actions related to the plot line are better recalled than those that are not. Similarly, actions that are part of the story's causal structure are better recalled than details that are not part of it (Trabasso, Secco, & van den Broek, 1984; van den Broek, 1994). With respect to the narrative production, beginning at age 5, individuals organize the content and structure of stories according to a hierarchical set of goals and a sustained plan of action. Younger children do not use this conceptual framework (Trabasso & Nickels, 1992).

Research germane to action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985) has shown that individuals think about goal-directed action sequences at varying levels of abstraction. For a given individual, the highly abstract characterization "baseball game" might summarize nine innings of complex plays. For another individual, the same nine-inning "baseball game" might be described as a series of specific plays that resulted in runs and important defensive plays. Individuals can control the level at which they identify action, and there are significant behavioral consequences of identifying actions at different levels of abstraction (Vallacher, Wegner, & Somoza, 1989).

Because goal-directed action sequences tend to be organized hierarchically, we are able to use shorthand verbal labels to characterize lengthy and complex interaction

sequences. How else could multiple interaction episodes played out over time be summarized by such parsimonious locutions as “she was trying to get him to talk,” “they were negotiating,” “they were getting acquainted,” “they were trying to save their marriage,” or “she was trying to persuade him”? We ultimately understand complex interaction sequences that sometimes consist of multiple episodes distributed over considerable time and space by making inferences about the goals and plans others appear to be following. Consistent with this view, those concerned with how individuals arrive at definitions of social situations have argued that inferences concerning goals and plans are vital to the achievement of such understanding (Miller et al., 1994).

One way to understand the relationships between cognitive structures and processes and social interaction is to determine how cognitive representations of goals and plans find their way into the social interaction stream. Given Barker's (1963), Newson's (1973, 1976), and Lichtenstein and Brewer's (1980) work, finding residues of these cognitive structures in ongoing behavior may not be as daunting a task as it might seem. For, as we have seen, the stream of action itself exhibits a hierarchical structure that resembles a plan in the pursuit of a goal (Barker, 1963). In addition, there is evidence that cognitive conversational plans can be observed as they are acted out during conversational exchanges (Hjelmquist, 1991; Hjelmquist & Gidlund, 1984; Jordan, 1993). Waldron (1990) found that when individuals recalled what they had been thinking about during conversations, 44% of the 2,273 thoughts they reported focused on goals and plans. Thus, thoughts about goals and plans arise spontaneously during conversations and act to structure ongoing action.

Action and cognition about action are organized into hierarchies of goals and plans. Individuals understand the actions of others in terms of their inferences about others' goals and plans. These inferences, in turn, help to shape one's own goals and plans. By extension, it is reasonable to postulate that social interaction and cognitions about social interaction are organized around goals and plans.

## Message Production Skill in Context

As observed previously, goals are pursued within a wide variety of social interaction contexts that vary along a number of dimensions. These differences among situations demand different types of message production skills. This plethora of dimensions cannot be addressed here; however, the most significant dimensions among these are discussed so that the reader will remain sensitized to the issue of skills in social contexts.

**Situational Routines.** People may come to social encounters to fulfill individual goals that require information or actions from others (e.g., obtaining emotional support for one's self by talking to a friend or obtaining goods and services in commercial transactions). Other social encounters may be organized around shared goals (e.g., individuals cooperating to solve a problem). Whether the interaction is focused on individual or shared goals, certain goals may be pursued repeatedly under similar circumstances and with similar social actors.

Much of everyday living involves the automatic activation of well-rehearsed plans for achieving various goals (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000). The goals of obtaining food, money, clothing, insurance, and other goods and services can all be attained by using highly routine plans. Grocery stores, restaurants, banks, shopping malls, department stores, and the like are set up so that these goals can be easily achieved. Although the

high level of routinization of action in school, work and commercial contexts is easily discerned, even personal relationships with close friends and family members can become routine. The routine nature of everyday life has led some to postulate that individuals develop cognitive representations of these routine action sequences so that they can call on them to understand present situations and to guide their actions in them (Berger, 1995, 1997; Greene, 1984a, 1997; Hammond, 1989; Kellermann, 1991, 1995; Kellermann, Broetzmann, Lim, & Kitao, 1989; Kellermann & Lim, 1990; Schank, 1982; Schank & Abelson, 1977).

Although much of life is highly routinized, occasions arise when goals may be pursued in nonroutine social contexts. Individuals may be called on to perform tasks involving highly unfamiliar goals, for example, informing someone that he or she is terminally ill. Even routine plans used to pursue goals in highly familiar contexts may encounter unanticipated problems. Automatic teller machine (ATM) users who find their favorite ATM inoperative on Sunday morning may have to improvise new plans to obtain cash. Similarly, individuals involved in close relationships, in which they have developed routine plans for reaching recurring goals, may find these routines interrupted, and these disruptions may have negative consequences for their relationships (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988; Ruscher & Hammer, 1994).

The degree to which social encounters are routine has significant implications for message production skills. Generating a plan to achieve a recurring goal and enacting that plan repeatedly is equivalent to acquiring a skill. Teaching a child, usually by observation, how to order food in a restaurant is imparting a skill to the child. The child is provided with a plan for achieving the goal of obtaining food in the restaurant, one that might be used for the rest of the child's life. Situations falling at the nonroutine end of this routine–nonroutine continuum may require different message production skills. Normally, routine situations that become "undone," as in the case of the broken ATM, require alterations of existing plans (Alterman, 1988). When a person is attempting to attain a highly unfamiliar goal, as in the terminal illness example, the messenger may have to generate a new message plan. It is highly unlikely that an individual in this situation would begin to plan completely from scratch, however (Berger, 1995, 1997).

Message plans for reaching unique goals are probably based on prior message plans that bear some resemblance to the goals of the present situation. Thus, the goal of informing someone that he or she is terminally ill may bear some similarity to prior social episodes in which bad news was delivered to someone. Perceiving similarities between the goals of the current situation and prior situations and the plans used in prior situations requires skilled performance. Furthermore, retrieving relevant prior message plans and making them available for integration into a new message plan involves memory and problem-solving skills that are germane to message production skills.

**Communication Load.** Not only do social episodes vary with respect to their routinization level, they also differ with respect to the amount of communication required for accomplishing the goals pursued in them. Some everyday goals such as obtaining food in the average grocery store can be successfully accomplished with little if any verbal interaction with those working in the store, and even the nonverbal communication load may be very low. Such situations might involve knowing when to write a check or to insert a credit card into a machine. The same is true with a host of retail transactions in which goods and services are obtained. Technology is

gradually replacing people in these work roles because they are highly routine and require little interaction, although it is possible for communication load to increase in what are normally low-demand contexts. In the case of retail shopping, considerable social interaction may become necessary when customers are dissatisfied with merchandise, and businesses may have to employ skilled message producers to deal with customer complaints.

At the other end of the communication load continuum are social episodes involving goals that typically require a great deal of social interaction for their attainment. Those involved in developing social relationships and group problem solving generally require high levels of social interaction. Although it is true that people increasingly use communication mediated by computers, television (teleconferencing), and the Internet (e-mail) in the commercial realm to conduct problem-solving interactions, the fact remains that individuals using these media exchange messages to reach desired goals. Optimal use of these technologies may require users to learn skills particular to the medium (Walther, 1994, 1996); even within these mediated contexts, however, individuals must use plans to pursue their goals.

Situations involving low communication load levels may not require skilled message producers. For instance, in the case of grocery shopping, the required customer actions might involve picking needed items from the shelves, placing them in a shopping cart, and then checking out. Typically such contexts make relatively few communication demands on those seeking to achieve their goals within them. By contrast, success in high communication load contexts may demand that the individuals participating in them have well developed message production skills at their disposal.

**Urgency.** Finally, communication situations can vary with respect to the degree to which the goals pursued in them require immediate action. Some goals demand rapid responses for their attainment, as when a parent sees a child in the path of an oncoming vehicle. Other highly urgent situations requiring social interaction may involve the prevention of violent acts, responses to accidents, and rapidly unfolding commercial transactions like stock trading. Other goals may not require immediate responses for their attainment. Abstract goals like personal happiness are usually not urgent, although the personal happiness goal could become urgent for those suffering from deep and enduring depression.

By definition, urgent situations do not allow those involved the luxury of extended deliberation and planning, but those who face emergency situations frequently may use well-rehearsed plans to attain desired goals. Emergency medical personnel have access to plans that can be used to reach the goals of stabilizing injured accident victims and transporting them to hospitals for further treatment. Thus, one way to cope with urgent goals is to have well-rehearsed, "canned" plans ready for use. A significant problem arises, however, when the urgent situation is unique.

The combination of situational uniqueness and urgency places planners in a difficult predicament, one that may precipitate considerable stress and anxiety. Stress and anxiety can have deleterious effects on cognitive processes, including those associated with planning and problem solving (Easterbrook, 1959; McLeod, 1996). These effects are evident within the domain of emergency communication. It is not uncommon for 911 call-takers to encounter difficulties in obtaining critical information from highly anxious and sometimes hysterical callers, but it is rare for trained and experienced 911 call-takers to express anger at callers, even when callers are rude and obnoxious to them (S. J. Tracy & K. Tracy, 1998; K. Tracy & S. J. Tracy, 1998).

Anxious thoughts concerning failure to reach desired goals and the plight of others in the situation might interfere with the retrieval, integration, and generation of plans and thus undermine communicative performance. When individuals with high levels of public speaking anxiety prepare speeches, they have been shown to demonstrate (a) less concern for audience adaptation, (b) more difficulty finding information, (c) less concern about tools available to aid in preparing their speeches, and (d) more self-doubts about their speaking skills than did their low-anxiety counterparts. The actual performances of the high public speaking anxiety individuals were of significantly lower quality than were those of the lows (Daly, Vangelisti, & Weber, 1995). These results demonstrate that stress tends to undermine crucial message-planning skills.

The degree to which goals pursued in everyday life are routine, demanding of communication for their accomplishment, and urgent exerts considerable impact on message planning and message production skills. Some goals are pursued in contexts that are highly routine, demand little in the way of social interaction, and are relatively low in urgency. In such situations, message production skills outside of those required to learn and participate in the routine are probably not important. By contrast, the pursuit of nonroutine goals in urgent situations that require considerable social interaction place significant demands on people's message production skills.

## Criteria for Assessing Message Production Skill

The notion of skill itself implies the existence of a set of criteria for determining the degree to which performance is skilled. What does it mean to say that an individual is a skilled message producer? Another way to approach this question is to try to specify the criteria used to underwrite judgments about message production skill. Although there are many criteria germane to assessments of message production skill, this larger set has been reduced to the following three: goal attainment, efficiency, and social appropriateness.

**Goal Attainment.** It was observed earlier that those who reach desired goals are likely to be judged by others to be more skilled than those who fail to reach goals. This is clearly an oversimplification, however. For one thing, individuals may have perfectly adequate plans for reaching goals but fail to do so because of unanticipated events that intrude to subvert their plan (Berger, 1997). Here, one might observe that good planners anticipate such contingencies and build them into their plans. In an ideal world, this would be the case; in the real world there is always some measure of uncertainty in situations in which plans are deployed to achieve goals. Perhaps part of the answer is to base skill judgments on repeated attempts to achieve goals. Under this view, skilled message producers are those who consistently reach their goals but occasionally fail to do so because of uncontrollable contingencies.

On the other side of the coin, individuals may attain goals not because of their superior plans but because of good luck. Obviously, if good fortune were known to be at work in a situation, goal achievement would not be highly diagnostic of skill. U.S. presidents and other politicians are notorious for taking credit for positive outcomes like economic prosperity that they purport are the result of their superior policies (plans). In fact, these positive outcomes may be fueled by factors that have nothing to do with their policies. Presumably, if it were demonstrated that the positive outcome had little or nothing to do with the politicians' policies, estimates of politicians' public policy skills would diminish considerably.

Another question concerning goal attainment is how difficult it is to achieve the goal. Some goals may be relatively easily achieved, and others are more difficult. Attaining a difficult goal implies that those achieving the goal possess higher skill levels, whereas achieving easily attainable goals should indicate lower skill levels. The intrusion of events that block goal achievement, luck, and the relative difficulty of goals are factors that modulate assessments of skill, even when goals are attained.

**Efficiency.** In most social situations, there are alternative plans that might be used to attain the same goal or goals (Berger, 1995, 1997). Even though each of the alternatives might produce the desired end state if carried out, the amount of time and effort required to execute the plan might vary considerably among the alternatives. The time parameter would be an important consideration if the goals were highly urgent. Clearly, some plans for attaining goals are more efficient than others. Individuals who use complex and indirect plans to achieve the goal of requesting a favor from a friend may later discover that a simple, less time-consuming, direct request would have produced exactly the same positive result.

To the naïve spectator, skilled performance has the appearance of being “effortless,” whereas unskilled performance seems to be “hard work.” Skilled performance tends to be executed more rapidly than unskilled performance. These two tendencies are clearly observable in individuals learning to communicate in a foreign language. Novices speak slowly and with many fits and starts, and novices understand native speakers better when they speak simply and slowly. Goals may indeed be achieved, but in a relatively fitful and inefficient manner. Considerable research, carried out under the aegis of action assembly theory (Greene, 1984a, 1997), supports the notion that planning and practice are associated with both greater response speed and reduced effort (Greene, 1984b, 1995; Greene & Geddes, 1993; Greene & Lindsey, 1989; Greene, Lindsey, & Hawn, 1990; Lindsey, Greene, Parker, & Sassi, 1995).

Efficiency is also important in a broader sense. The degree to which various goals can be reached efficiently in everyday life means that skilled individuals are able to achieve more goals per unit of time because the time to reach each goal is reduced. Skilled performers may be able to dispatch mundane goals more quickly and, as a result, have more time to pursue goals that are of greater interest to them. Rather than viewing efficiency as a form of drudgery, increased efficiency may serve a liberating function that enables people to spend their time doing more of the things they would rather do. Those who are highly efficient may thus feel more accomplished and, as a consequence, enjoy higher levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction.

**Social Appropriateness.** A final criterion for assessing message production skill is the extent to which messages satisfy social appropriateness norms. Parties to social interaction have expectations concerning the levels of politeness they and others should display (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Interacting individuals have an implicit social contract to maintain each other’s face and line (Goffman, 1959, 1969). Politeness norms dictate that when face is threatened—as, for example, when people commit a faux pas—interaction partners help them avoid any embarrassment that may follow (see Metts and Grohskopf, this volume). And when individuals fail to be convincing in performing their social roles, that is, fail to carry out their line, others present will help them fulfill their roles (Goffman, 1959).

As straightforward as the social appropriateness criterion first might appear, it is somewhat problematic when its relationship to the efficiency criterion is considered (Berger & Kellermann, 1983, 1989; Kellermann & Berger, 1984). In some circumstances, the most efficient way to achieve goals during social interactions may not be the most socially appropriate; for example, making a very strong and direct request to an overly talkative individual to "shut up!" Conversely, highly polite messages may be relatively inefficient, and when they fail, politeness may diminish. Several studies have revealed that those seeking compliance from others are increasingly more likely to use highly coercive messages with each successive failed compliance-gaining attempt (Berger & Jordan, 1991, 1992; deTurck, 1985, 1987; Goodstadt & Kipnis, 1970; Hirokawa, Mickey, & Miura, 1991; Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983; Kipnis & Consentino, 1969).

In the arena of everyday interaction, some individuals achieve their goals in a relatively efficient manner but do so in ways that offend their co-interactants. Such individuals might show this efficient but socially inappropriate pattern repeatedly, and they may be successful because they have considerable power over those with whom they interact. In one sense, these individuals are skilled message producers because they consistently achieve their goals quickly and with little expenditure of effort. The question is whether, in the long run, this pattern will continue to be effective. Highly efficient and socially appropriate individuals probably have a long-term effectiveness advantage over their highly efficient but less socially appropriate counterparts, thus high levels of both efficiency and social appropriateness are associated with the highest skill levels.

## MESSAGE PRODUCTION SKILLS

Because the message production process is itself complex and multileveled, the notion of message production skill is multifaceted. This section first examines speech production as a general skill. Skills related to goal–plan detection, establishing common ground, audience adaptation, and message planning are then examined in turn.

### Speech Production As a Skill

For those seeking to understand how people encode conceptual representations of messages into a lexical and syntactic form that is subsequently phonetically encoded, the production of fluent and meaningful speech is itself a highly skilled performance (Lashley, 1951; MacKay, 1987). Typically, normal speakers produce two to three words per second (MacKay & Osgood, 1959), and this is accomplished with minimal error (Bock & Levelt, 1994; Levelt, 1989; MacKay, 1987). This high skill level is maintained even when individuals accelerate their speech rate to seven words per second (Deese, 1984). Given that people know tens of thousands of words (Oldfield, 1963), the fact that lexical selection errors are extremely rare in normal speech, with estimates ranging from 0.25 (Deese, 1984), through 0.41 (Garnham, Shillcock, Brown, Mill, & Cutler, 1982) up to 2.3 (Shallice & Butterworth, 1977) per 1,000 words uttered, is truly amazing. Slips of the tongue are so rare in everyday speech that methods have been developed to elicit them in the laboratory (Baars, Motley, & MacKay, 1975; Motley, Baars, & Camden, 1983).

Speech production models have been based in part on analyses of speech errors and speech pathologies (Dell, 1986, 1988, 1990; Dell, Schwartz, Martin, Saffran, & Gagnon, 1997; Garrett, 1982, 1992; MacKay, 1987). Similarly, analyses of action slips

have been used to generate models of action production (Norman, 1981; Reason, 1990). Spontaneous speech errors do not occur randomly. When another word is uttered instead of the intended word, the uttered word is usually from the same general class of lexical items as the intended word (Fromkin, 1971; MacKay, 1987). Thus, when a speaker says "Please shut the door. Ah, I mean the window," it is nouns that have been exchanged. Verbs sometimes exhibit similar substitutions. Error patterns like these are used to make inferences about the structures and processes underlying speech production.

There is general agreement that the production of fluent speech involves encoding conceptual-level propositions, sometimes referred to as "the message," into abstract grammatical representations that are subsequently coded phonetically. These phonological representations are then used to guide motor routines responsible for producing speech sounds (Bock & Levelt, 1994; Bowers, Vigliocco, Stadthagen-Gonzalez, & Vinson, 1999; Levelt, 1989; MacKay, 1987). The idea that these representational levels are organized in a planlike way is reflected in some models (e.g., Levelt, 1989; Zammuner, 1981). There is controversy over whether this same architecture is used for both production and comprehension (Bock, 1995). Increasingly, online methods of studying speech production are being used to sort out the details of these processes (e.g., Bock, 1986, 1987; Bock & Levelt, 1994; Bock & Loebell, 1990; Bock, Loebell, & Morey, 1992; Ferreira, 1996; Levelt, 1989; Meyer, 1991).

Written codes and code systems that employ hand gestures (American Sign Language) are alternatives to phonetic encoding. There is interest in the role that spontaneous gestures accompanying speech play in representing conceptual messages. Some have suggested that certain kinds of gestures, beyond illustrators used for deictic reference (Ekman & Friesen, 1972), may be used to express semantic concepts (Goldin-Meadow, 1997; Kendon, 1983; Levy & McNeill, 1992; McNeill, 1985, 1992), promote discourse cohesion (McNeill & Levy, 1993), and signal developmental changes in linguistic abilities (Goldin-Meadow, 1997). Others have questioned the degree to which gestures communicate semantic concepts independently of speech (Chawla & Krauss, 1994; Krauss, Dushay, Chen, & Rauscher, 1995; Krauss, Morrel-Samuels, & Colasante, 1991).

As skilled as most people are as speakers, speech fluency per se does not guarantee success in social interaction. Individuals who suffer from Williams syndrome (WMS), a rare neurobiological disorder, are capable of producing speech that is grammatically well formed, even though they score below average on a variety of cognitive ability tests, including tests of reading, writing, and general intelligence (Lenhoff, Wang, Greenberg, & Bellugi, 1997). Yet those with WMS have rich vocabularies, and they tend to be more highly expressive and loquacious than their normal counterparts. Many WMS people "display a strong impulse towards social contact and affective expression, although their social behavior is not always appropriate" (Bellugi, Lichtenberger, Mills, Galaburda, & Korenberg, 1999, p. 192).

The characteristics associated with WMS suggest that the ability to produce fluent, grammatically correct, and highly expressive speech does not ensure success in social situations; however, high verbal fluency levels may potentiate higher estimates of speakers' credibility and competence (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990; Miller & Hewgill, 1964). Probably because people with WMS are verbally fluent and unusually expressive, those who engage them socially tend to overestimate their cognitive skill levels (Bellugi, et al., 1999). Nonetheless, what is said, how it is said, the conditions under which it is said, and to whom it is said are probably far more likely than

the mere fluency with which it is said to determine whether goals will be achieved. As noted previously, however, the difficulty with trying to address the factors just enumerated is the large amount of variation associated with each one of them. One approach to this problem is to grant that most people are capable of producing fluent and meaningful speech, nonverbal behaviors, and goal-directed actions and to ask what message production skills beyond these are needed to be successful.

## Goal-Plan Detection

To formulate messages designed to reach goals during the course of social interactions, it is necessary to take into account the goals and plans of those with whom one is communicating. The necessity of knowing others' goals and plans is obvious in the case of competitive or adversarial interactions, in which individuals may be explicitly seeking to thwart each other's plans (Bruce & Newman, 1978; Carbonell, 1981). Even in conflict-free encounters, however, the goals and plans of co-interactants may interfere with each other (Bogdan, 1997). In a conversation between a sales clerk and a customer, the sales clerk might treat the person like an "average customer" seeking to make a purchase. By contrast, the customer's goal might be to obtain a date with the sales clerk. Although it may be to the customer's advantage to maintain this state of affairs for some time, the customer will want to know whether the sales clerk's goal has shifted to be more in line with hers. Because goals and plans transmute during single encounters, goal-plan detection is an ongoing process.

Committing oneself to a general course of action and a particular set of messages in the absence of a reasonable idea about the goals others are pursuing and the plans they are following is probably a recipe for communicative disaster. Nonetheless, apparently there are conversational fullbacks who tend to employ an expressive message design logic in their interactions (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & Delia, 1982; O'Keefe & Shepard, 1987; Saeki & O'Keefe, 1994). These individuals set goals for themselves, put their conversational heads down, and bore straight ahead, regardless of others' responses. Their primary goal is to express what they think and feel, irrespective of the consequences that might flow from such expression, not unlike the communication style exhibited by some guests on American television talk shows such as *Ricki Lake* and *Sally Jessy Raphael*. This expressive communication style is somewhat similar to that of low self-monitors, who tend to "say it the way they feel it," regardless of others' feelings (Snyder, 1974, 1987). Although there surely are circumstances in which an expressive style is functional (e.g., highly urgent emergency situations), within many interaction contexts such a style will probably be relatively inefficient and very likely socially inappropriate.

High self-monitors (Snyder, 1974, 1897), those who have higher levels of social perspective-taking skills (Applegate, 1990), and cognitively complex individuals who employ more sophisticated message design logics (O'Keefe, 1988), especially in complex communication situations, are probably more skilled than others at detecting goals and plans during interactions. They are probably better able to track changes in others' goals and plans. Because the simultaneous pursuit of multiple goals and plans increases interaction complexity, the ability to detect and track multiple and shifting goals and plans is vital to effective message production. Unfortunately, the available literature is mute with respect to how individual differences such as self-monitoring, cognitive complexity, and social perspective taking might be altered through training.

As individuals interact, they may detect conflicts between their own goals and plans and those of their interaction partners. There are a number of alternative ways

of dealing with such conflicts. One possibility is to cease interaction as soon as possible, as when a son or daughter senses that a fatigued parent is not in the "right mood" to grant a request for money. A second possibility is to continue the interaction to see whether opportunities to pursue other desired goals arise. This strategy is especially useful when access to individuals is limited. During any given encounter, a superior may be able to grant a subordinate some requests but not others. Cutting such an encounter short might unnecessarily delay the attainment of some goals. A final alternative might be to continue the encounter but to lay the groundwork for a future interaction during which the desired goal can be pursued. In the case of the exhausted parent, the child might compliment the parent on how hard she works and sacrifices herself for the family's welfare, hoping that this will prompt a favorable response to a future money request.

Despite the potential strategic advantages of minimizing or avoiding verbal interaction in some situations in which goals or plans conflict, within American culture such communication phenomena as reticence are defined as both problems and pathologies (Daly & McCroskey, 1984). Much less attention has been devoted to the potential problems and pathologies associated with excessive talking (Bostrom & Harrington, 1999; McCroskey & Richmond, 1995). The onset of vocalization is associated with abrupt and sometimes large increases in blood pressure and heart rate (Lynch, 1985), although social support, speech preparation, and self-disclosure act to moderate these increases (Tardy & Allen, 1998; Tardy, Thompson, & Allen, 1989). Individuals who typically speak rapidly and with high levels of intensity are more likely to suffer from hypertension. Despite the demonstrated physical costs of loquacity, great emphasis is placed on curing reticence. This bias is understandable in a culture in which mass audiences are attracted to talk shows and in which university students may find themselves in classes where some portion of their course grade hinges on their level of "class participation."

The cultural valuing of talk notwithstanding, a fundamental message production skill involves knowing when to generate and deploy spoken messages and when to remain silent. For example, in the context of an escalating and intense romantic encounter, words may only serve to get in the way of feelings and actions, and talk may become cheap and a mere distraction. Thus, the notion that language and speech are powerful tools for attaining goals has distinct limits, even within a "talk" culture. Loquacious individuals, some of whom may be driven by the principle that if one speaks long and loudly enough, by chance alone one is bound to say something important, insightful, or decisive, are less likely to attain their goals in an efficient and socially appropriate manner in many situations. Moreover, when individuals commit themselves to deploying messages during their interactions with others, timing is an important consideration. Individuals who are neither overly reticent nor obnoxiously loquacious may lack skill in timing messages to achieve their intended goals. As many stand-up comedians have observed, "timing is everything." In exchanging a series of messages during an interaction, recognizing that the time is ripe to achieve important subgoals, on the way to a desired superordinate goal, is a critical skill.

The skills involved in detecting others' goals and plans are related to but go well beyond those involved in listening (see Wolvin, this volume) and person perception (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987). Although those who are better listeners and those who are better at making accurate inferences about others' personalities and emotional states may be better detectors of others' goals and plans during conversations, tracking others' intentions as interactions unfold would seem to be a very different skill. Furthermore, this goal-plan detection skill might be divisible into at least two

subtypes. First, because highly routinized interactions are organized around widely shared and stable sets of goals and plans, the goals and plans of those carrying out roles in such interactions should be easily detected. Consider the absurd nature of such queries as, "Why are you standing there?" or "What do you want?" when uttered by a grocery store clerk standing behind a checkout counter to a customer standing on the other side of the counter with a cart full of groceries. These utterances sound odd in situations such as this because both parties typically know what each other's goals are without saying a word. In such contexts, language and social interaction are not necessary to "co-construct" a "shared reality."

Because of their uniqueness, less routine interactions might afford perceivers considerably less obvious routes for attaining their goals. Therefore, in terms of the required goal–plan detection skills, the differences between routine and nonroutine interactions are substantial. Nonroutine interactions are more like problem-solving exercises, whereas routine interactions are more akin to pattern recognition tasks. A given individual might be good at one but not the other, suggesting that the skills required for goal–plan recognition might be quite different in the two cases.

It is hardly debatable that recognition and tracking of intentions during conversations are crucial for making decisions about one's own actions and message production; however, we know little about how individuals recognize and keep track of each other's goals and plans during conversations. Goals are inherent in the stream of human action, thus making it possible for observers to track changes in them through time (Barker, 1963; Lichtenstein & Brewer, 1980). Although an observational approach to studying goal–plan dynamics cannot address goal–plan detection issues, when augmented by cued-recall procedures (Cegala & Waldron, 1992; Waldron, 1990, 1997; Waldron & Applegate, 1994; Waldron, Caughlin, & Jackson, 1995; Waldron & Cegala, 1992), it might be possible to make reasonable inferences about goal–plan detection. This could be accomplished by comparing observed changes in the goal–plan structure of interactions with individuals' recall of them.

## Establishing Common Ground

A notion related to that of goal–plan detection is common ground. According to Clark (1994), when individuals engage in joint activities in which they must coordinate their actions, they make assumptions about each other. The totality of the presuppositions individuals have concerning shared beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge constitutes their common ground (Clark, 1994; Clark & Carlson, 1982; Clark & Marshall, 1981; Lewis, 1969; Schiffer, 1972; Stalnaker, 1978). Common ground consists of two parts. Communal common ground pertains to knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions held in communities to which the interacting parties belong. Personal common ground stems from inferences based on personal experiences with each other (Clark, 1994, 1996; Clark & Marshall, 1981). Common ground accretes with each succeeding conversational exchange, and each conversational exchange is interpreted with respect to the common ground that has accumulated to that point (Clark, 1994).

Quests to achieve common ground can be observed during initial interactions between strangers. Strangers begin conversations by asking and answering a series of questions aimed at revealing biographical and demographic information such as place of birth, where one grew up, current residence, education, occupation, and marital status (Berger, 1973; Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck, & Schulman, 1976;

Berger & Kellermann, 1983). Reciprocal question asking and answering dominate the first two minutes of the interaction but drop off considerably after that point (Berger & Kellermann, 1983). Demographic information may be used both proactively to make inferences about unrevealed attitudes and opinions and retroactively to explain differences that become apparent later in the conversation (Berger, 1975). For example, finding that someone is a neurosurgeon is likely to prompt certain inferences about personal attributes not yet revealed in the conversation. Already revealed background differences may serve as the basis for causal attributions for preference differences that surface later in the conversation.

The degree to which conversing individuals share mutual knowledge is readily apparent to observers. When judges guessed whether tape-recorded segments of conversations involved acquaintances or friends, the most common reason the judges gave for distinguishing between the two types of conversations was that friends manifested more mutual knowledge (Planalp & Benson, 1992). Mutual knowledge involved background information, habits, and dispositions. Friends knew about each other's activities and plans, and they referred to other people and events without having to explain them. Analyses of conversation content showed mutual knowledge to be a powerful predictor of whether the conversations involved acquaintances or friends (Planalp, 1993). These findings suggest that as relationships become closer, mutual knowledge accumulates in ways that even naive observers can discern.

Common ground is critical to communication efficiency; as common ground accretes, communication efficiency increases. These effects have been demonstrated in studies in which an individual (director) is given the task of describing a set of abstract figures to a partner (matcher). Both the director and the matcher have the same set of figures, but they are arrayed differently. Directors and matchers can communicate with each other but they cannot see each other's configurations. The task requires the matcher to arrange the figures in the same configuration as the one described by the director. Over successive trials, directors use fewer words, and dyads take less time and fewer speaking turns to achieve correct solutions. During the early trials, directors tend to make indirect references to the figures in the array. Later, the frequency of direct references tends to increase. These findings have been replicated in several studies (e.g., Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986; Isaacs & Clark, 1987; Krauss & Weinheimer, 1964, 1966; Schober & Clark, 1989; Wilkes-Gibbs & Clark, 1992). Friends instructed to perform the matching task such that an observer would not be able to reproduce the figures showed lower communication efficiency than was shown in a nonconcealment condition (Clark & Schaefer, 1987).

Another way to demonstrate the relationship between the development of common ground and communication efficiency is to see how directors communicate with matchers who have observed previous interactions between directors and other matchers. Observers can have differential access to information depending on their physical positioning relative to directors and matchers. Directors might perceive observers with greater access to information to have more common ground with them when the observer is subsequently placed in the matcher role. When former observers are placed in the role of matcher, the director should communicate with them differently, depending on the degree to which they had information about the task.

Support for this reasoning was obtained in a study in which some observers (side participants) sat immediately next to directors as they described figures to matchers (Wilkes-Gibbs & Clark, 1992). The side participants did not interact with directors or matchers. Other observers (omniscient bystanders) were located in another room where they watched and heard directors and matchers perform the figure-matching

task over a video system. A third group of observers (simple bystanders) sat in the same room as the director and the matcher, but they could not see the figures of either party and were out of the director's view. Finally, a fourth group (naïve partners) were taken to another room where they worked on a completely different task while the director and matcher interacted. After the director and matcher completed six trials of the matching task, the observers and naïve partners were placed in the matcher role and completed six trials.

Not surprisingly, when time and number of words per trial for the sixth and final trial of the first matchers were compared with those of the first trial for the former observer matchers, overall efficiency dropped significantly during the first trial of the former observers. These decreases in efficiency were not uniform across the four observer conditions, however. The number of words used by directors during the first trial increased only 67% when the matchers were former side participants. By contrast, increases of 100%, 275%, and 360% were observed for former omniscient bystanders, naïve partners, and simple bystanders, respectively. Because time per trial was highly correlated with number of words uttered by the director ( $r = .98$ ), a similar pattern of differences was observed for this communication efficiency parameter. This pattern of efficiency differences among the four conditions was attributed to differences in the degree to which common ground developed between directors and former observers, depending on observers' access to information when in the observer role.

Critical to establishing common ground and efficient message production is the ability to estimate the degree to which conversational partners share a common fund of knowledge relevant to interaction goals. Individuals engaging in even casual conversations about books, music, movies, and the like must somehow establish the extent to which they are familiar or unfamiliar with various message referents. For instance, the speaker who launches into a lengthy monologue about the relative talents of Harold Land, Sonny Rollins, and Zoot Sims, without first establishing whether other conversational participants are familiar with jazz saxophone players of the 1950s and 1960s, may be met with puzzled looks or exclamations that no one knows what the speaker is talking about. The question is how well individuals estimate each other's relevant knowledge and how these estimates influence message production.

Within relatively limited knowledge domains, individuals are fairly adept at making accurate estimates of their conversational partners' knowledge (Fussell & Krauss, 1992; Krauss & Fussell, 1992); however, these studies showed that estimates of others' knowledge were biased toward the knowledge of those making the estimates. Individuals arrived at estimates of others' knowledge by reasoning from their own memory, inferring from a small group of individuals, and by making inferences from others' likely behaviors. Speakers used their prior beliefs about a conversational partner's knowledge in producing messages, even when additional information became available during the conversation (Fussell & Krauss, 1992). These prior beliefs exerted less than expected levels of influence on messages individuals produced during their interactions, however.

Even as common ground accumulates during interaction and the efficiency with which individuals are able to converse increases, events may transpire to undermine common ground and divert conversational focus away from primary interaction goals. When speakers fail to be understood, they are put in the position of having to diagnose the source of the understanding failure and reformulate messages in ways that are understandable (Ringle & Bruce, 1980). The process of diagnosis may temporarily redefine the goals of conversational participants, as they try to determine the

nature of the problem and how to repair it. However, even if the problem is made explicit, speakers may or may not reformulate their messages in ways that overcome the difficulty (Berger, 1997; Berger, Knowlton, & Abrahams, 1996). Speakers may use problem-solving heuristics to overcome understanding failures, for example, speaking louder, that have nothing at all to do with the source of the failure (Berger & diBattista, 1993).

When the shared impressions of conversational participants are disrupted by negative revelations, participants attempt to revise their impressions through conversation (Ruscher & Hammer, 1994). Here again, such revelations force participants to abandon their primary goals and pursue the goal of revising their impressions. During the process of revising impressions, individuals tend to focus on information that is congruent rather than incongruent with the negative attribute that has been revealed, that is, they show a proclivity for a confirmatory bias in their joint hypothesis testing efforts. Apparently, biases that plague individual decision makers (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) may also affect judgments and decisions made during social interactions.

Much of the common ground research emphasizes the discovery and accumulation of mutual knowledge over time; however, it provides few details about how people acquire this knowledge. Those skilled at developing common ground must use information-gathering strategies that are at once effective but not too intrusive. Excessive questioning about specific personal facts could turn an informal conversation into an interrogation and thus prompt defensiveness, whereas asking general, open-ended questions that encourage the other person to disclose personal information may elicit the same information at considerably less social cost. Information about others can also be obtained from third parties and through unobtrusive observation of target persons (Berger, 1979). Those skilled at establishing common ground not only have these direct and indirect information acquisition strategies available to them, they know when to deploy them. Establishing common ground also requires that individuals disclose information about themselves to others. Those skilled at establishing common ground understand what information about themselves others will find useful.

Even though people share a large fund of mutual knowledge, it may not be sufficient for the production of effective messages. The ability to retrieve relevant knowledge when it is required is also critical. Being able to recall someone's food and music preferences may be of little help at a conversational juncture that calls for one to greet the person by name. Or, remembering a particularly effective argument only after a negotiation is finished may do little to promote negotiating success. People frequently express frustration at being unable to remember people's names and show postconversation remorse about remarks they wish they had made but did not, as in, "If only I had said...." Inability to store or retrieve relevant information may impede the flow of interaction; more seriously, it may result in face loss or failure to reach primary interaction goals. How people deal with memory failures at critical conversational junctures is a problem that deserves research attention.

## Audience-Adapted Messages

Common ground research has focused on the degree to which message producers vary features of their messages in response to their knowledge about different audience characteristics. Knowledge about the intended audience for a message should influence the content and structure of messages. These variations in structure and content should affect, in turn, the ability of audiences to understand messages. Messages

intended for a specific audience should be more comprehensible to members of that audience than messages fashioned for a target audience with different attributes. Messages aimed at young children should contain less complex vocabulary and simpler syntax than those designed for older audiences, and when younger audiences are exposed to messages designed for older audiences, they should experience comprehension difficulties.

To investigate these processes, Fussell and Krauss (1989a) presented individuals with an array of eight abstract figures. After viewing the figures, they were taken away, and participants were asked to write a description of each figure. Those in the social group were instructed to write their descriptions such that another person who read them would be able to identify the symbols accurately. Another group (nonsocial) was instructed to write their descriptions so that they themselves could successfully identify the figures. Three to six weeks after writing their descriptions, participants were given sets of descriptions consisting of some of their own descriptions, some of the social descriptions written by other participants, and some of the nonsocial descriptions created by others. They were asked to read each description and then select the figure described from a large array of figures that included those used previously.

Overall, descriptions written for others (social) were significantly longer than those written for the self (nonsocial), and the nonsocial descriptions manifested greater word variety than the social descriptions. Social descriptions tended to be more literal, whereas nonsocial messages were more figurative. In the identification phase of the study, participants were most accurate (86%) at picking out the described symbol when they read one of their own descriptions. When they read others' descriptions, social descriptions produced higher accuracy (60%) than did those written under nonsocial conditions (49%). In a similar study, participants were again most accurate at selecting the correct figure when they read their own descriptions (Fussell & Krauss, 1989b). In addition, descriptions written by friends produced higher levels of accuracy than did those written by strangers. These results suggest that message producers are not only sensitive to differences in audience characteristics, but also that sensitivity to these differences is reflected in the form and content of their messages.

Other work suggests significant individual differences in the degree to which people devise messages that take into account their interlocutors' goals and face needs (Applegate, 1990; O'Keefe, 1988; Waldron & Applegate, 1994). Individuals with high levels of construct differentiation are more likely to fashion messages that exhibit a rhetorical message design logic (O'Keefe & Shepherd, 1987). This logic emphasizes flexibility, symbolic sophistication and depth of interpretation, and those employing this logic seek to arrive at social consensus. Achieving depth of interpretation and flexibility depends on the ability to understand others' goals and plans. In addition, the sophisticated message producer must address the face needs of others and understand the line they are pursuing in the social encounter (Brown & Levinson, 1977, 1987; Goffman, 1959). Based on these understandings, message producers must then employ their symbolic sophistication to devise messages containing features that take these attributes into account. As the number of goals to be addressed during an interaction increases, the attributes associated with the rhetorical message design logic become essential for effectiveness (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & Shepherd, 1987).

Successful audience adaptation presupposes that goal–plan detection and the accretion of common ground have been or are being successfully carried out. Given mutual knowledge, including that associated with goals and plans, message producers

who are adept at adapting to their audiences should possess additional skills. First, an extensive working vocabulary and familiarity with complex syntax enable people to adapt their messages to a wider range of audiences. Second, skilled message producers are able to match these verbal resources with their interpretations of their own and others' goals and plans when formulating messages. It is not enough to have a copious vocabulary; skilled message producers must choose how, when, and to whom to deploy it. Third, skilled message producers must be able to integrate verbal and nonverbal communication channels to realize their goals and plans. Because circumstances change even during relatively abbreviated social encounters, skilled message producers must be able to modulate their messages to adapt to these dynamics. These adaptations are not only crucial in face-to-face communication situations; they are of critical importance in public communication contexts in which audience response may require message adaptations.

Unfortunately, relatively little is known about how individuals go about analyzing audiences in either public communication situations or in less formal social interaction contexts. People have naïve theories about what kinds of messages will "work" with audiences that have distinct characteristics. Those employed in the advertising, marketing, public relations, and entertainment industries predicate message designs on their naïve theories of mass audiences. Public speaking textbooks generally devote considerable discussion to audience analysis and adaptation. These presentations generally emphasize the importance of gathering information about audiences, but they provide little concrete advice that would enable message producers to link audience attributes with specific attributes of their messages. This task is left to the ingenuity and creativity of the message producer. Although it may not be possible to identify highly specific links between audience attributes (e.g., older people) and message attributes (e.g., specific appeals or arguments; Thompson, 1967), it would seem to be worth some effort to determine how people think about audiences across a wide spectrum of communication contexts. When coupled with studies examining message production in these contexts, we might gain some idea of how individuals integrate information about mass audiences, groups, and individuals with other knowledge to produce messages with certain characteristics (see Wyer & Adavai, this volume).

## Message Plan Effectiveness

Whether plans for attaining goals during social interactions are formulated in advance or while the interaction unfolds, they vary with respect to their quality. Individuals could establish large areas of common ground only to find that in pursuing a specific goal, they employed a plan that failed, that succeeded but did so inefficiently, or that succeeded and resulted in face loss. As previously noted, there appear to be substantial individual differences in the degree to which individuals adapt their messages to the goals and face needs of others (Applegate, 1990). These findings imply similar variation in the degree to which individuals are able to access effective plans for reaching goals, whether plans are formulated in advance of the interaction or as the interaction progresses (Waldron, 1997). Such individual differences could arise from a variety of sources, including (a) general knowledge about the conduct of social interaction, (b) prior knowledge specific to the domain of the interaction, and (c) inferences about others' goals and plans made during the interaction. The ability to integrate these to formulate a plan is also variable. In the case of retrieving canned plans, individuals could differ with respect to the degree to which old plans

actually fit the demands of the present situation or the degree to which they are able to access and instantiate prior plans from memory.

Opportunities to plan before engaging in problem-solving tasks can enhance efficiency and effectiveness when the tasks are carried out (Battman, 1989). Although tasks employed in this research did not involve social interaction, this finding suggests that when individuals pursue their goals in nonroutine situations that have high communication load levels, planning in advance of the interaction may be advantageous. This notion is also supported by several studies germane to action assembly theory (e.g., Greene, 1984b, 1995; Greene & Lindsey, 1989; Greene, Lindsey, & Hawn, 1990; Lindsey et al., 1995). These studies generally show that advanced planning is associated with higher verbal fluency levels, especially when communicative tasks are complex. Being able to reconsider and revise plans also improves task efficiency (Pea & Hawkins, 1987). Pea and Hawkins also revealed that when given the opportunity to revise previous plans, planners tended to leave high-level, abstract plan elements intact and to alter more concrete plan elements. The opportunity to rethink plans increases their efficiency and effectiveness when they are finally implemented in action.

Rather than allow individuals to plan in an open-ended manner before they engage in a task, it is possible to provide people with ready-made plans before they interact to see whether these plans improve their interaction performance. This was done in a study in which some dyads were given information about alternative negotiation tactics before engaging in a joint negotiation task (Weingart, Hyder, & Prietula, 1996). Other negotiators did not receive the tactical information. The tactical information included two examples each of integrative, distributive, and equivocal negotiation tactics. Weingart et al.'s investigation revealed that dyads provided with tactical knowledge engaged in significantly more integrative bargaining behaviors and achieved higher joint outcomes than dyads not provided with the tactical information. Bargaining behaviors mediated between knowledge of bargaining tactics and joint outcomes. These results are rendered impressive by the fact that only 33% of the information described the more optimal integrative tactics, whereas the remainder described the less optimal distributive and equivocal tactics. Although experimental conditions receiving different combinations of bargaining information would have further clarified this study's results, the findings raise the possibility that individuals provided with plans that vary in their optimality will choose to implement those that are more optimal. Apparently, providing minimal plan guidance to individuals has a positive impact on the outcomes of complex interactions.

Other studies have directly examined relationships between plan quality and social outcomes. College men whose date-request plans were judged to be more effective reported significantly lower levels of felt loneliness than did their counterparts who devised less effective date-request plans (Berger & Bell, 1988; Berger & diBattista, 1992; Jordan, 1993). No relationship was found between date-request plan effectiveness and loneliness among women. This sex difference is probably due to the fact that within the population studied, men tended to ask women for dates more often than women asked men. Thus, the date-request acumen of women was not germane to their social success. By contrast, among both men and women, those who wrote more effective plans for ingratiating themselves to a new roommate reported significantly lower levels of felt loneliness. Given that most college men and women face the task of getting along with new roommates, this finding makes considerable sense.

In an effort to determine judges' criteria for differentiating between more and less effective plans, Berger and Bell (1988) found that plans judged to be effective were

longer and more complex than those judged to be less effective. Date-request plans containing actions aimed at seeking similarities between oneself and the prospective date were judged to be more effective. Roommate ingratiation plans containing such units as setting rules for living together, engaging in a social activity, and presenting a positive image were judged to be potentially more effective. Although these correlational studies cannot address questions of causality, perhaps the plans of socially lonely people put others off. Reduced social contact with others, in turn, may prevent socially lonely people from developing more effective plans. Whether teaching lonely individuals to devise effective social interaction plans could break this spiral is a question worth pursuing.

Other research has revealed significant links between message plan attributes and effectiveness in achieving important personal goals. A study of mostly indigent clients enrolled in a welfare-to-work program found that those who obtained full-time employment and remained on their jobs devised significantly more complex and specific job interview plans than did those who were unsuccessful in gaining employment or those who found jobs but lost them (Waldron & Lavitt, 2000). Moreover, the interview plans of the successful clients were more likely to include contingencies that anticipated important interviewer questions. Among several communication competence measures administered to the clients, job interview plan specificity was the most potent predictor of employment success.

None of the plan effectiveness research considered to this point has examined plans that are developed online, as interactions unfold; however, one might suppose that individuals who provided date-request and roommate ingratiation plans in the studies just reviewed might indeed attempt to employ them in a social encounter. After all, individuals do not enter each new conversation *tabula rasa*. They employ prior knowledge to produce messages in social interactions, even though they have access to new information during the interaction (Fussell & Krauss, 1992). Thus, the notion of a conversational amnesiac relying solely on current inputs from discourse to guide action and message production is implausible. Retrospective reports about just-completed conversations contain ample evidence that individuals think about goals and plans as they converse with others (Waldron, 1990, 1997; Waldron & Applegate, 1994; Waldron et al., 1995). The question is whether planning activity during conversations leads to more skilled performance.

Evidence suggests that planning during conversations can increase the degree to which individuals perform effectively. After conversing about an issue over which they disagreed, subjects individually reviewed a videotape of their conversation and indicated what actions they were planning to take and what actions they decided against taking (Waldron & Applegate, 1994). These responses were used to construct measures of plan complexity, plan sophistication, plan specificity, and editing. The degree to which each individual used competent verbal disagreement tactics during the conversation was coded from the videotapes. Individuals also completed a cognitive complexity measure that tapped the degree to which they perceive others in relatively complex ways.

This study revealed that those who developed more complex, sophisticated, and specific plans, and those who showed more evidence of editing, deployed significantly more competent verbal disagreement tactics than did those who scored lower on these measures. The measure of cognitive complexity was not significantly related to competence in the use of verbal disagreement tactics, although those who demonstrated higher levels of cognitive complexity tended to devise more complex and sophisticated plans and to engage in more editing. One potential explanation

for the difference in the ability of the plan and cognitive complexity measures to predict competence in the use of verbal disagreement tactics is the fact that the plan measures deal in the realm of actions. By contrast, cognitive complexity concerns the degree to which individuals typically perceive other people in relatively simple or complex ways. Cognitive complexity is a few steps removed from the actions and discourse deployed during conversations.

Another study has demonstrated that planning during conversation enhances performance (Waldron et al., 1995). In this study, individuals were given the task of eliciting as much AIDS-related information as possible from their conversational partners. At the conclusion of the discussion, participants individually reviewed the videotape of their conversation. The conversational plans identified using this procedure were coded for their level of abstraction ranging from implementation-level plans (highly concrete) to undifferentiated plans (highly abstract). The videotapes of the discussions were also scored for the degree to which the information seekers obtained specific AIDS-related information. Individuals whose plans were more concrete and complex elicited more specific AIDS-related information from their partners than did those whose plans were more abstract and simple or those who did not plan.

As the above studies suggest, not all plans devised during conversations necessarily result in more effective performance. Apparently, individuals whose plans are more concrete and complex are more effective in achieving interaction goals. In another study, individuals who reported using more direct plans for obtaining information from conversational partners were judged to be less socially appropriate than those information seekers who reported using less direct information seeking plans. However, people who used less direct information-seeking plans sometimes failed to obtain the information they were seeking (Waldron, 1990). Another study revealed that when conversational success was defined as a combination of efficiency (information seeking success) and perceived social appropriateness, planning was a strong determinant of positive outcomes (Cegala & Waldron, 1992). These findings highlight the delicate balance between efficiency and social appropriateness discussed earlier.

Encouraging interlocutors to devote some time during the interaction to online planning that is both complex and concrete may improve their interaction outcomes. Specific techniques for promoting both online planning in general and specific types of online planning need to be investigated. Consistent with the previously described bargaining plans study (Weingart et al., 1996), relatively simple preinteraction inductions might promote specific types of online planning. There is, however, a potential danger associated with online planning. As the amount of attention devoted to online planning increases, attention to incoming information from conversational partners may be reduced. Reduced information intake might interfere with such tasks as goal-plan detection. Consequently, it may be that online planning is best engaged in during conversational lulls or when conversational partners are simply reiterating points. Encouraging more online planning must include concern for the balance between attention to information inputs and online planning activities.

Wilson (2000) suggested that parents who abuse their children may not be highly adept at altering compliance-gaining plans when their children fail to comply with their requests. This lack of flexibility, combined with reduced online planning during compliance-gaining episodes, might lead abusive parents to use violent means to gain compliance. Inability to generate alternative compliance-gaining plans may set abusive parents on a violent trajectory as a means of last resort. These socially important questions germane to online planning need to be examined in future research.

Finally, examining conversational planning from an individual's perspective may be misleading (Waldron, 1997). Individuals' goals and plans interact (Bruce & Newman, 1978), and conversational participants may engage in a considerable amount of "second guessing" (Hewes, 1995; Hewes & Graham, 1989), especially in the context of adversarial interactions and interactions in which the interpersonal stakes are relatively high. The fact that individuals are capable of engaging in interactive planning raises interesting issues about the fundamental nature of human communication (Berger, 1997). It remains to be seen whether such interactive planning can be studied systematically and whether its role in the skilled production of messages can be ascertained.

## CONCLUSION

When the successful pursuit of everyday goals requires significant amounts of social interaction, message production skills become critical, whether individual or joint goals are being pursued. The skills associated with detecting and tracking goals, establishing common ground, and retrieving and formulating effective message plans that are adapted to others' goals are vital to achieving goals in an efficient and socially appropriate manner. Being alert for opportunities to maximize the efficiency of plans by revising them and for opportunities to pursue pending goals that were formerly suspended are also critical to social interaction success. Although timing is probably not "everything," knowing when the time is ripe for pursuing particular goals is extremely important. A fatigued and distracted conversational partner might not be receptive to any request, no matter how strong its arguments and no matter how well it is presented.

Although most of the research reviewed in this chapter has been conducted in laboratory settings using undergraduate student participants, its broader social implications are highly significant. Economists have adduced evidence that cognitive skills are consistent predictors of employment and job success. In particular, although functional literacy and education are correlated, when education is held constant, men in the prime working ages with full-time jobs have significantly higher functional literacy levels than those not in the labor force, and employed women have higher functional literacy levels than unemployed women (Pryor & Schaffer, 1999). Controlling for functional literacy significantly attenuates statistical associations between race and employment, and increases in functional literacy are associated with increases in wages, even when the effect of education is held constant.

The measure of functional literacy used in this investigation was one employed in the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). The NALS required respondents to understand and use information including that contained in editorials, news stories, poems, and fiction. Respondents were required to read and summarize texts containing these kinds of information; thus, the NALS was not simply a test of reading ability, it was also a test of comprehension and, to a limited extent, message production skills. The NALS revealed that average functional literacy levels in the United States are relatively low, and when similar tests have been administered in other countries, the United States ranks almost at the bottom in terms of average performance. Because the communication load in many well-paying jobs is relatively high, people with highly developed message production skills will be more likely to be selected to fill them. How to raise the levels of these skills in American population remains a significant challenge.

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CHAPTER

8

## MESSAGE RECEPTION SKILLS IN SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

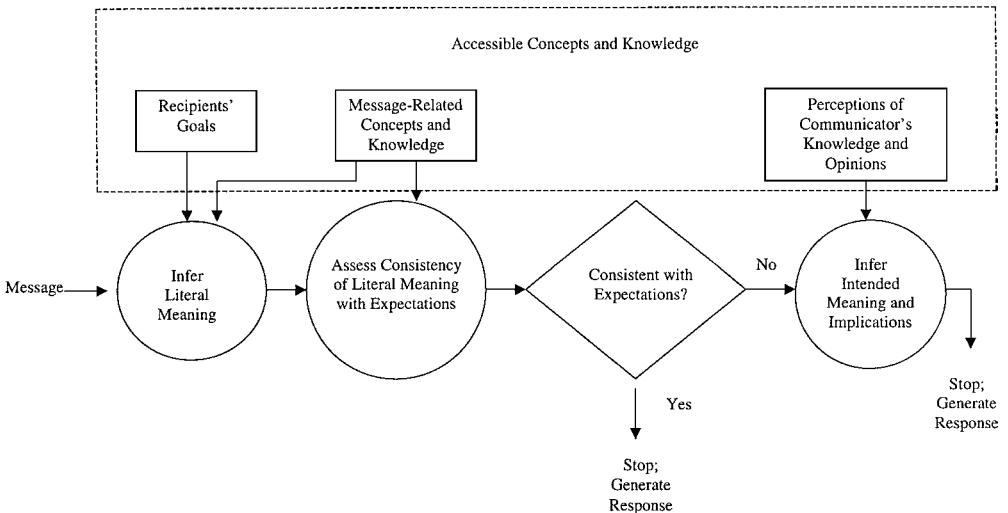
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This chapter reviews the factors that influence people's ability to comprehend and evaluate the messages they receive. Upon first consideration, these factors may seem self-evident. For example, recipients' ability to comprehend a message undoubtedly increases with the amount of knowledge they have already acquired about the topic at hand. However, possession of this knowledge is hardly a guarantee that recipients will interpret a message in the manner the communicator intends, or that they will evaluate the validity of the communicator's assertion accurately. Message reception may in fact be inherently limited for two general reasons.

First, people who receive a message usually do not bring all of the potentially relevant concepts and knowledge they have acquired to bear on its interpretation (Higgins, 1996; Taylor & Fiske, 1978). Rather, they apply only a subset of this knowledge that happens to be easily accessible in memory at the time. Moreover, they are often unaware of the factors that lead them to apply one subset of knowledge rather than another (Bargh, 1994, 1997) Therefore, biases can occur in recipients' interpretation of information and their evaluation of its implications. And even when recipients recognize that their interpretation of a message might be biased, they are frequently unable to assess the magnitude of this bias accurately, and so their efforts to compensate for the bias are inaccurate.

Second, the literal meaning of a message is not always the meaning that the communicator intends to convey. Often, a message may be ironic, or may be intended to convey an attitude rather than a statement of fact. The identification of a message's intended meaning, however, often requires not only knowledge of the topic at hand but also inferences about the communicator's knowledge and his or her reasons for transmitting the message in question. An understanding of the communicator's objectives, in turn, may often require inferences about what the communicator assumes concerning recipients' own attitudes and opinions about the topic. Even when recipients have the motivation to make these inferences, the information necessary to do so is often not available.



**FIG. 8.1. Two-stage model of message comprehension. Circles denote the sequence of processes that are postulated to occur, and rectangles indicate the sources of information that come into play in the course of this processing.**

For these reasons, it is almost impossible to draw general conclusions about the conditions in which message reception abilities are likely to have an impact. As Krauss and Chiu (1998; see also Krauss & Fussell, 1996) emphasize, communication is an interactive process. Successful message reception therefore requires an understanding of the goals and intentions of the communicator as well as the literal implications of the message being transmitted. Furthermore, it depends on which subsets of message-relevant knowledge recipients bring to bear on the message. This, in turn, may depend on the purpose for which the recipient expects to use the information being conveyed, and his or her expectations concerning the type of communications that are likely to be transmitted in the particular situation at hand.

In conveying the issues of concern in this chapter, we assume a two-stage process of the sort described generally in Fig. 8.1. That is, a recipient first construes the literal meaning and implications of a message and evaluates its consistency with expectations for the content and type of messages that are likely to be transmitted in the situation at hand. (These expectations may be based on norms of communication of a sort to be discussed presently.) If the message's meaning and implications fall within the range of those the recipient expects, the recipient assumes that the message is intended to be taken literally and responds accordingly. If, however, these expectations are violated, the recipient attempts to construe the meaning that the communicator actually intends to convey and responds on the basis of this construal instead.

The two stages of processing identified in Fig. 8.1 are elaborated in a theory of comprehension proposed by Wyer and Radvansky (1999; see also Badzinsky & Gill, 1994). In the first section of this chapter, we discuss more generally the cognitive processes that operate at each stage and the factors that influence them. Then we review the following three common types of situations in which these processes come into play and discuss more specifically the factors that influence message reception in these situations:

1. Informal conversations in which two or more persons exchange information either face-to-face, on the telephone, or through electronic mail
2. Interview situations and opinion surveys in which respondents must interpret the questions they are asked in ways that permit them to provide answers that the questioner will understand and appreciate
3. Situations in which messages are received by a general audience that has not requested the information being transmitted and does not have to respond to it

Although the two stages of processing shown in Fig. 8.1 come into play in all three types of situations, existing research has given differential emphasis to these stages. Research on the exchange of information in conversations, for example, has largely concerned the second stage of processing (i.e., people's perceptions of the intended meaning of the statements they hear). Investigations of the cognitive processes underlying responses to interviews and opinion surveys, which have focused on people's attempts to respond in a way that will be informative to the questioner, also emphasize the second stage of processing. In contrast, studies of message reception in the third type of situation, which are exemplified by research on persuasion and impression formation, have largely (although not exclusively) been restricted to processes that occur at the first stage identified in Fig. 8.1.

## SOCIAL COMPREHENSION PROCESSES

In this chapter, we distinguish between two types of meaning. The *literal*, or denotative meaning of a message is determined by the set of semantic concepts and referent-specific knowledge that a communicator uses to construct a message and that the recipient uses to interpret it. In contrast, the *pragmatic* meaning of a message is the meaning that the communicator intends the message to convey. Other dimensions of meaning can be viewed in terms of this more general dichotomy. For example, the connotative or *evaluative* meaning of a communication concerns its implications for an evaluation of the referent along a good–bad dimension. It is often unclear whether a communicator's message will be interpreted as evaluative or merely descriptive. For example, the statement "John is psychopathic" might be interpreted as an accurate description of John's personality or, alternatively, as a desire by the communicator to disparage him.

Meaning can also be *symbolic* and be conveyed in terms of metaphors. For example, "America is a gigantic fast-food restaurant" is not literally true; however, it might be intended to convey the opinion that Americans are obsessed with cheap but poor-quality merchandise through the symbolic meaning of "fast-food restaurants." Similarly, advertisements and television commercials may associate products with colors that symbolize purity, cleanliness, or patriotism. Although we do not focus in detail on the symbolic meaning of messages in this chapter, several of the processes we discuss have implications for its transmission.

As these examples indicate, the meaning of a message does not reside solely in the communication itself. Rather, meaning is attributed to the message by the perceiver. A conceptualization of how the information exchanged in social situations is comprehended requires prior understanding of the factors that influence both the literal meaning that is assigned to a message and the pragmatic meaning that is attached to it. The distinction between these two types of meaning is well known (Clark, 1996; Green, 1989; Grice, 1975; Higgins, 1981; Krauss & Chiu, 1998;

Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Only a few attempts have been made to examine its broader implications for social communication, however (but see Higgins, 1981; McCann & Higgins, 1992; Schwarz, 1994; Wyer & Gruenfeld, 1995). In the pages to follow, we review the processes involved in construing each type of meaning.

## Determinants of Literal Meaning

A message is spontaneously interpreted in terms of concepts and knowledge that are easily accessible in memory and are applicable to the communication's referents (Wyer & Srull, 1989). These concepts and knowledge can be at different levels of abstractness. For example, the statement "Bill Clinton kissed Monica Lewinsky" might call to mind a specific instance of the behavior that one heard about on television. Alternatively, the behavior might be interpreted in terms of a more general event concept ("a man kissed a woman," "a president kissed his assistant") or an even more general trait concept ("romantic," "passionate," "lecherous," etc.). As these examples suggest, several alternative concepts can often be applied to the same message, the number of which is likely to increase with their level of abstractness. Moreover, the evaluative and descriptive implications of the concepts can differ considerably.

One's interpretation of information in terms of these concepts results in a representation that is stored in memory as part of one's knowledge about its referents. As we elaborate presently, the representation may later be retrieved and used as a basis for judgments, behavior, and communications to others. This may be done independently of the information from which the representation was originally constructed (Higgins, 1996; Wyer & Srull, 1989). Consequently, an understanding of the processes that enter into the initial interpretation that people place on information is of considerable importance. We first describe the factors that influence the modality and level of abstractness at which a message's literal meaning is encoded and stored in memory. We then consider the factors that determine which of several subsets of knowledge is likely to be used to interpret information when more than one subset is potentially applicable.

### **Effects of Information Modality and Format on the Mental Representation of Communications**

**Nonverbal Encoding of Verbal Information.** Social information is transmitted in a number of modalities (e.g., linguistic, visual, and acoustic). Although the information is often encoded into memory in terms that reflect the modality in which it is conveyed (Carlston, 1994; Wyer & Srull, 1989), it can be represented in other modalities as well. A general theory of social comprehension proposed by Wyer and Radvansky (1999) assumes that persons who receive verbal information describing one or more thematically related events spontaneously construct a mental simulation of these events (i.e., a *situation model*) in the course of comprehending it (see also Johnson-Laird, 1983, 1989; Kintsch, 1998; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998). This representation consists of a mental image as well as a meta-linguistic description. Several studies indirectly confirm this assumption. For example, people take less time to comprehend "Mary was reading a book on the couch. John came into the room" than to comprehend "Mary was reading a book on the couch. John went into the room" (Black, Turner, & Bower, 1979). This is presumably because in the first case, recipients can form a mental image of both events from the same visual perspective (that of someone in the room). In the second case, however, they must shift their visual perspective

(to that of someone outside the room) to comprehend John's action, and this shift takes time.

In another demonstration of the role of visual imagery in comprehending verbal information (Glenberg, Meyer, & Lindem, 1987), people read a story that began with either the phrase "John put on his sweatshirt and went jogging" or the phrase "John took off his sweatshirt and went jogging." In a later, recognition–memory task, they took less time to verify that "sweatshirt" had been mentioned in the first case than the second. In the first case, readers presumably formed a mental image of John wearing his sweatshirt that was retained in their representations of the subsequent events that were described, and so the feature was easier to find and verify. (For other evidence of spontaneous mental imagery, see Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Radvansky, Wyer, Curiel, & Lutz, 1997; Radvansky & Zacks, 1991.)

Visual descriptions of an object or event generally have more impact on judgments and behavior than their verbally coded counterparts. Gardner and Houston (1986), for example, found that the picture of a restaurant was remembered longer than the verbal descriptions that accompanied it and that its relative impact on evaluations of the restaurant increased correspondingly over time.

Moreover, verbal information is better retained in memory if it spontaneously elicits visual images than if it does not. In a study by Reyes, Thompson, and Bower (1980), participants read a summary of a court case involving a defendant who was accused of drunken driving. The defense testimony contained evidence that the defendant was able to jump out of the way of an automobile. In some conditions, the car was nondescript. In other conditions, however, it was described as a shiny red Volkswagen. Analogously, the prosecution testimony included a statement that the defendant had bumped into a table and spilled something on the floor or, alternatively, spilled guacamole dip on a white shag rug. These different descriptions had little impact on the verdicts that participants reported immediately after reading the evidence. After a day's delay, however, participants' verdicts typically favored the side whose evidence had elicited strong visual images.

Reyes et al.'s (1980) findings suggest that information is easier to comprehend if it elicits visual images of the events it describes and, therefore, is more likely to be retained in memory. A quite different series of studies by Bransford and his colleagues (Bransford, Barclay, & Franks, 1972; Bransford & Johnson, 1972) have similar implications. For example, Bransford et al. (1972) found that apparently anomalous sentences (e.g., "The haystack was important because the cloth would rip"; or "The notes were sour because the seam was split") were recalled poorly when presented in isolation; however, preceding the sentences by a single word ("parachute" and "bagpipes," respectively) led them to be remembered very well. These words activated bodies of knowledge that stimulated participants to imagine a situation in which the statements were meaningful. (Thus, presenting the word *parachute* before "The haystack was important because the cloth would rip" led recipients to imagine a parachutist landing in a haystack to avoid getting the chute caught in a tree.) In other studies (Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Bransford & Stein, 1984), paragraphs describing ostensibly anomalous sequences of events were made meaningful by assigning the passages a title that identified the situational context in which the events occurred, thereby activating a body of knowledge that permitted the relations among the events to be understood.

**Verbal Encoding of Visual Information: Interference Effects.** The preceding studies suggest that verbal messages often elicit mental images spontaneously in the

course of comprehending them. The reverse is not always true. That is, information that is conveyed visually may not be assigned linguistic codes unless there is some extrinsic reason to do so (Wyer & Radvansky, 1999). Moreover, once these codes are assigned, they may actually *interfere* with the later ability to remember the information. Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) found that persons were less able to identify the faces of individuals they had seen if they had previously been asked to describe the faces verbally than if they had not. Chiu, Krauss, and Lee (1999) obtained results with similar implications. These studies suggest that linguistically coded representations of visual information can interfere with memory for the information that gave rise to their construction.

Newly formed representations of an event can sometimes be coded visually rather than verbally, and these representations can produce interference as well. In a classic study by Loftus and Palmer (1974), participants were shown a picture of an automobile accident. Later, some participants were asked to estimate how fast the car was going when it "smashed into" the tree, whereas others were asked how fast it was going when it "hit the tree." Participants in the first condition not only estimated the car to have been traveling faster but also, in a later memory task, were more inclined to report having seen broken glass at the scene of the accident. These participants apparently constructed a new mental image of the accident and, in doing so, added features to the image that were consistent with the implications of the question. Consequently, they "remembered" these features later.

The research described in this section has generally concerned communications that were conveyed out of their social context. However, the interplay of visually and verbally coded features of a message is particularly important in social interactions in which people convey information not only through what they say but also by their tone of voice, facial expressions, and other nonverbal behaviors. In these interactions, communicators' nonverbal behavior not only can convey information in its own right but also can influence how the verbal information accompanying it is interpreted (for reviews of this research, see Krauss & Chiu, 1998; DePaulo & Friedman, 1998). (We reconsider these effects later in this chapter.)

***The Impact of Information Format on Comprehension and Judgment.*** The mental representations of information that are formed in the course of comprehending it can be influenced not only by the modality of the information but the format in which it is presented. Most of the knowledge we acquire through daily life experience is conveyed in the form of a temporally ordered sequence of events. In fact, Schank and Abelson (1995) claimed that virtually all social knowledge is in the form of stories or narratives that people construct of the experiences they observe or learn about. Although this claim may be overly zealous (Brewer, 1995; Rubin, 1995), the role of narrative representations of knowledge in comprehension and judgment has been recognized in such diverse areas as parent-child relations (Miller, 1994), close relationships (Miller & Read, 1991; Murray & Holmes, 1996), jury decision making (Pennington & Hastie, 1986, 1992), and community psychology (Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995).

Schank and Abelson's (1995) observations suggest that information is more easily comprehended, and is more likely to elicit mental images, if it is conveyed in the form of a narrative (i.e., a temporally or thematically related sequence of events) than if it is conveyed in other ways. In fact, people who read descriptions of social events mentally reorganize them in a way that conveys their temporal relatedness regardless of the order in which they are presented (Wyer & Bodenhausen, 1985; see also Read,

Druian, & Miller, 1989). This could result in part from the fact that information is more easily understood when it is presented in the same form that it is usually acquired through direct experience.

Pennington and Hastie (1986, 1992) convincingly demonstrated the facilitative influence of narrative forms of information on comprehension and judgment. In one study, participants read the transcript of a court case. In some conditions, the testimony was organized according to the witness who conveyed it, independently of when the events described in the testimony took place. In other conditions, the testimony was presented in the order it became relevant in the temporal sequence of events that occurred (i.e., those leading up to the crime, the act itself, and its aftermath). When the prosecution and defense testimonies were presented in different orders, more than 80% of the participants favored the side whose testimony was presented in narrative order. When the evidence for both sides was presented in the same way, participants were equally divided in terms of which side they favored. They were more confident of their judgment when the testimony was conveyed in narrative order than when it was not, however. These findings clearly indicate that the information was more easily comprehended and, therefore, was more influential, when it was presented in a way that conveyed its temporal relatedness.

A study with similar implications identified the role of visual imagery in the comprehension of narrative information (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). Participants in this study read two travel brochures, one pertaining to India and the other to Thailand. Each brochure described the places to be visited and the events that would occur at each place. One brochure, however, conveyed the information in an ostensibly unordered list, with no indication of when the events would occur. The other conveyed the information in the form of a narrative that indicated the sequence of activities that would occur over the course of the vacation. The information typically had more impact on liking for the vacation when it was conveyed in a narrative, confirming Pennington and Hastie's conclusions. Moreover, introducing negative features of the vacation into the generally positive descriptions had less impact when the information was conveyed in a narrative than when it was listed.

Perhaps more provocative was evidence that accompanying the verbal description of the vacation with pictures increased participants' liking for vacations that were described in narrative form but actually decreased their liking for vacations for which features were simply listed. Moreover, telling participants to imagine the events that occurred (thus stimulating them to construct their own mental pictures) had similar effects. These results suggest that when information is conveyed in a way that makes it easy to construct a mental representation of a sequence of events, mental images of the events facilitate comprehension of the sequence as a whole. When information is conveyed in an unordered list, however, participants consider each piece of information separately and use a more mechanistic computational procedure to evaluate its implications (e.g., Anderson, 1971; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In this case, visual images of the features can interfere with this computation and, therefore, can decrease the impact of the information.

To summarize, the effects of information format and modality on a message's impact are mediated by the influence of these variables on the ease of comprehending and using the information to attain one's processing objectives at the time. The influence of other features of a message could also be mediated by their impact on comprehension difficulty. For example, messages that refer to the recipient as "you" may stimulate the recipient to retrieve and use integrated bodies of self-knowledge to understand the message and elaborate its content. As a result, it may increase the

impact of these messages relative to those that refer to a third person (Burnkrant & Unnava, 1995; but see Meyers-Levy & Peracchio, 1995, for contingencies in this effect). The effects of other communication characteristics might be conceptualized analogously.

### ***Influences of Knowledge Accessibility on Message Comprehension***

In many instances, several alternative concepts can potentially be brought to bear on the interpretation of information. In such instances, people are unlikely to conduct an exhaustive review and evaluation of the implications of each alternative. Rather, they tend to apply the concept that is most easily accessible in memory (Higgins, 1996; Taylor & Fiske, 1978; Wyer & Srull, 1989). The accessibility of knowledge can be influenced by a number of factors. When people have a particular goal in mind when they receive information, they might intentionally retrieve concepts that are relevant to the attainment of this objective and use them to interpret the information to which the concepts apply. Thus, people may use different concepts to interpret information about someone's behavior if they are considering the person for a job than if they are looking for a dinner companion. Once they have applied these concepts, they may later retrieve and use them as a basis for judging the person without considering other possible implications of the information they received initially. Higgins and Rholes (1978), for example, asked participants to read about a man's behaviors for the purpose of describing the person to someone who either liked or disliked him. To attain this goal, they used concepts to interpret the man's behaviors that were evaluatively consistent with the intended recipient's attitude. Once participants applied these concepts, they used them as a basis for their own evaluations of the man they had described.

The concepts that people apply to information are not influenced by their communication objectives alone, however. Recent experiences that have nothing to do with the person or object to which a message pertains can also influence the concepts they use to interpret it. In a study by Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977), participants were unobtrusively exposed to either favorable trait concepts (adventurous, self-confident, persistent, etc.) or unfavorable ones (reckless, conceited, stubborn, etc.) while they performed a perceptual task. Then, as part of a different experiment, the participants read a paragraph describing the behaviors of a target person (Donald) to which both sets of concepts could be applied (e.g., wanting to cross the Atlantic in a sailboat, being well aware of his ability to do things well, rarely changing his mind after making a decision, etc.). Participants interpreted Donald's behavior in terms of the set of concepts to which they had been exposed, and their evaluations of the target were based on these interpretations. Srull and Wyer (1979, 1980) reported results with similar implications.

In addition, concepts can become "chronically" accessible as a result of as a result of life experiences that have caused them to be frequently used (Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, and Tota (1986), for example, found that differences in the chronic accessibility of trait concepts influenced their use of these concepts to interpret a target person's behaviors independently of the effects of transitory, situation-specific influences on the accessibility of these concepts. More direct evidence of the effects of life experiences on the chronic accessibility of concepts was established in a study by Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goetz (1976). Participants in this study, who were either music education or physical education majors, read the following story:

Every Saturday night, four good friends get together. When Jerry, Mike and Pat arrived, Karen was sitting in her living room writing some notes. She quickly gathered the cards and stood up to greet her friends. They followed her into the living room but as usual, they couldn't agree on exactly what to play. Jerry eventually took a stand and set things up. Finally, they began to play. Karen's recorder filled the room with soft and pleasant music. Early in the evening, Mike noticed Pat's hand and the many diamonds. As the night progressed, the tempo of play increased. Finally, a lull in the activities occurred. Taking advantage of this, Jerry pondered the arrangement in front of him. Mike interrupted Jerry's reverie and said, "Let's hear the score." They listened carefully and commented on their performance. When the comments were all heard, exhausted but happy, Karen's friends all went home.

After reading the story, participants were asked questions concerning what the story was about (e.g., "What did the persons comment on?"). Music majors were likely to interpret the story as pertaining to the rehearsal of a woodwind ensemble, whereas physical education majors were more likely to interpret it as a description of people playing cards. Analogously, a story that could potentially describe either a wrestling match or a jail break was more often given the first interpretation by physical education majors than by music majors.

**Persisting Effects of Abstract Encoding.** The importance of understanding situational and individual-difference variables that affect the interpretation of information is magnified by the fact that once this initial interpretation is made, its effect may not only persist over time but may actually increase. In a study by Carlston (1980), participants read a passage describing behaviors of a target person that could be interpreted as both kind and dishonest (e.g., covering up for a friend who cut class to go swimming) and judged the target with respect to one of these traits. Then, either a few minutes or several days later, they judged the target with respect to the second trait. Participants tended to base their second judgment on the evaluative implications of their first judgment rather than the descriptive implications of the behaviors they had read. (Thus, they judged the target to be honest if their first judgment had pertained to kindness and to be unkind if their first judgment had pertained to honesty.) Moreover, this tendency increased over time.

In a study by Srull and Wyer (1980), participants were asked to form an impression of a target person whose behaviors were ambiguous with respect to the hostility they conveyed. They judged the target as more hostile if this trait concept had been unobtrusively primed in the course of performing an earlier unrelated task than if it had not. As in Carlston's study, however, priming had greater effects on judgments reported 24 hours after receiving the target information than on judgments reported immediately. These results also suggest that once information is encoded in terms of more abstract concepts at the time it is received, these concepts are retained in memory for a longer time than the information itself and, therefore, are increasingly likely to be used as a basis for judgments as time goes on. Consequently, fortuitous factors that bias the interpretation of information at the time it is first received can have enduring effects on judgments of the persons or objects that are described by the information.

**Effects of Awareness.** The effects of situational and individual difference factors on recipients' interpretation of information can occur without awareness. Indeed, the concepts that persons use to interpret information can be primed subliminally

(Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982; Devine, 1989; for a review, see Bargh, 1997). In fact, when people are aware that their interpretation of a message might be influenced by factors that are irrelevant to the message's content, they often may try to correct for this influence. Because they do not know the magnitude of the influence, however, their attempts are not always successful. In some cases, in fact, they may overadjust.

In a series of studies by Martin, Seta, and Crelia (1990), for example, participants who had been required to use either favorable or unfavorable trait concepts during an initial (priming) task were asked to form an impression of a target person whose behaviors could be interpreted in terms of both sets of concepts. Participants who were both able and motivated to avoid being biased by the priming task used the primed concepts less often to interpret the target's behaviors than they would have in the absence of priming. Similar "boomerang" effects of priming have been detected in other research paradigms when participants were aware that extraneous factors might bias their interpretation of information (Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987; Ottati & Isbell, 1996; Wyer & Budesheim, 1987).

The adjustments that people make to correct for the biasing influence of an irrelevant experience can be partly a function of implicit theories they have acquired about the magnitude and direction of this influence (Petty & Wegener, 1993). For example, people are likely to perceive themselves to be less biased by extraneous concepts and knowledge with implications that are consistent with their expectations. Thus, suppose people believe that individuals usually behave in desirable ways; they should perceive themselves to be less biased by extraneous situational factors that lead them to interpret a person's behavior favorably than by factors that induce them to interpret the behavior unfavorably. As a result, the first set of factors may have relatively greater influence on their interpretation of information and the judgments they make on the basis of it (Wyer & Budesheim, 1987).

### ***Comprehension Processes Underlying Humor Elicitation***

The comprehension processes discussed thus far are generally applicable independently of the content of the message being transmitted; however, the special circumstances surrounding one important situation deserve attention. That is, many messages that are received in a social context are amusing. Indeed, humorous jokes and stories are one of the most common forms of interpersonal communication. They are told to relieve boredom, to decrease tension in a heated debate, to warm up an audience, or to exemplify a more serious point the speaker wishes to make. Despite the pervasiveness of humorous communications, however, the factors that underlie their effectiveness are not well understood. Particularly unclear is how or why a joke or story elicits amusement.

Several theories have been proposed to account for the effects of humor-eliciting jokes and stories. Some conceptualizations are rooted in psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1928, 1905/1960). Others assume that humor elicitation is motivated by hostility or by a desire to enhance oneself by disparaging others (Bergson, 1911; LaFave, Haddad, & Maesen, 1976; Zillman & Cantor, 1976). Still others focus on the impact of arousal and arousal reduction (Berlyne, 1969, 1971) and the resolution of cognitive incongruities (Koestler, 1964; Suls, 1972, 1983). Many of these theories are typically restricted to certain types of jokes and stories, however, and cannot account for the wide variety of humor-eliciting communications that occur (for a typology of different types of humor, see Long & Graesser, 1988).

A more comprehensive theory of humor elicitation that potentially accounts for the humor elicited both intentionally and unintentionally by communications was

proposed by Apter (1982) and extended by Wyer and Collins (1992). These theories assume that two conditions are necessary for humor to be elicited by a communication. First, a new piece of information is received that cannot be interpreted in terms of concepts and knowledge that were activated and applied to earlier pieces that were conveyed in the same context. Thus, some features of the information must be reinterpreted to comprehend the message as a whole. Second, the reinterpretation must in some way diminish the importance of either a referent of the communication (e.g., a person, object, event, or general state of affairs) or, in some cases, the communication itself.

As an example, consider the following:

A blind man enters a store with his dog. Suddenly, he picks it up by the tail and begins twirling it over his head. A salesman immediately rushes over and asks if he can be of help. "No thanks," says the blind man. "I'm just looking around."

Comprehension of this story requires a shift in the meaning of "just looking around." Moreover, the altered interpretation trivializes the man's rather bizarre behavior by likening it to other, more common situations in which people enter a store to "look around." Moreover, the reinterpretation also diminishes the seriousness of the man's disability. As a result, humor is elicited. Apter (1982; see also Wyer & Collins, 1992) analyzed a number of humor-eliciting communications in terms of this general conceptualization. He pointed out that in some instances, the shift in meaning does not diminish the protagonists in a story, but trivializes the story itself. A shaggy dog story, for example, purports to convey an important situation but is later revealed to be totally mundane. Similarly, a pun purports to convey something meaningful but is reinterpreted as merely a play on words.

Not all reinterpretations of information are diminishing, of course. Scientific discoveries can result from a reinterpretation of preexisting knowledge in terms of different concepts. These reconstruals are likely to elicit delight but not amusement. Moreover, a distinction should be made between diminishment and disparagement. For one thing, a disparaging message is only diminishing when one's initial interpretation of the message enhances its referent. Thus, information that an ostensibly sophisticated waiter tripped and fell into a hotel swimming pool is much more likely to elicit amusement than information that a paraplegic did so. Similarly, information that a person failed his written driver's license examination three times is more likely to elicit amusement if the individual is a Nobel Prize-winning physicist than if he is mentally disadvantaged.

By the same token, not all diminishing reinterpretations are disparaging. As Shurcliff (1968) found, persons who were asked to extract blood from a white rat were more amused upon finding that the rat was made out of rubber than were persons who were simply asked to hold the animal. This is presumably because the ostensible importance of the situation was greater in the first case, and so the realization that the rat was made of rubber was correspondingly more diminishing.

The amount of humor a story elicits may be governed by two additional factors (Wyer & Collins, 1992). First, the humor elicited by the reinterpretation of a message is related nonmonotonically to the difficulty of making this reinterpretation. Put more simply, stories elicit less humor if they are either very easy or very difficult to understand than if they are moderately difficult (Wyer & Collins, 1992; Zigler, Levine, & Gould, 1967).

Second, the humor elicited by a story may increase with the amount of cognitive elaboration that can be performed on its humor-eliciting aspects. This may be partly

a function of the content of the story itself. For example, jokes are likely to elicit more amusement if they evoke mental images of the humor-eliciting state of affairs and its implications for the parties involved. Thus, the blind-man joke described earlier is likely to elicit more amusement than a joke that does not stimulate a visual image of the humor-eliciting event and its aftermath.

On the other hand, humor elicitation also depends on the type of elaboration that is performed. Many jokes have negative implications for members of a social or ethnic group or may be potentially offensive to the listener for other reasons. To the extent that recipients elaborate on these negative implications rather than the humor-eliciting aspects of a story, amusement is likely to decrease. Wyer and Collins (1992) distinguish between the cognitive processes that spontaneously elicit amusement in the course of comprehending a message and the more deliberative cognitive elaboration that occurs subsequently. Differences in perceptions that a joke is offensive may only influence the amount of amusement it elicits when recipients have the opportunity to engage in cognitive elaboration of the joke's implications. When recipients are prevented from engaging in this post-comprehension activity, they may be equally amused in both cases. Thus, for example, a sexist joke might spontaneously elicit equal amusement in men and women when it is told at a party under conditions in which they do not have time to think about it carefully. Gender differences may only emerge after recipients have had time to elaborate its sexist implications.

### ***Summary and Implications for Message Reception Skills***

Several general principles emerge from the preceding discussion.

1. In the course of comprehending a message that occurs in a social context, recipients may spontaneously form a mental representation of the people and events it describes. This representation can contain both verbal (linguistic) features and non-verbal ones (i.e., a mental image). If recipients have a specific goal in mind, they may form an additional representation in terms of concepts that are relevant to this goal.
2. Once a mental representation has been formed, it can influence later responses to its referents independently of the information on which the representation was based. For example, memory for the original information may be distorted, and judgments may be biased toward the implications of the concepts that were used to interpret the information. Moreover, the magnitude of this bias may increase over time.
3. The concepts that people use to interpret a message can be influenced by the purpose for which they expect to use the information (Higgins & Rholes, 1978); however, situational and individual-difference variables that are objectively irrelevant to the content of a message can also influence the concepts and knowledge that recipients bring to bear on its interpretation. Consequently, these variables can also affect the way the message is interpreted. The influence of these variables can occur without awareness. Calling recipients' attention to extraneous factors that could bias their interpretation of the information may lead them to adjust their responses to correct for this bias. They often adjust too much, however, with the result that the factors have a negative, "boomerang" effect on their responses to the information.

These conclusions call attention to differences in the knowledge that individuals have available for use in comprehending information and their skill in applying this knowledge. At the same time, they raise questions concerning the extent to which

these differences exert an influence. An adequate comprehension of a message is determined by the amount of knowledge one is able to bring to bear on its interpretation, but it also depends on the accessibility of this knowledge. People are unlikely to perform an extensive search of memory for concepts that might potentially be used to interpretation and may apply only the concepts that come to mind most quickly and easily (Higgins, 1996). Consequently, even though individuals have the knowledge required to understand the alternative ways in which a message might be interpreted, they do not always consider these alternatives unless there is some extrinsic reason to do so. Moreover, when recipients do attempt to adjust for biases in the interpretation they give to a message, they generally do not know how much to correct and may overcompensate. Therefore, although expertise in the area to which a message is relevant might increase recipients' sensitivity to the possibility of bias, this is not a guarantee that bias will not occur.

## Determinants of Pragmatic Meaning

In many instances, a recipient may simply assume that a communicator's statement is intended to be taken literally without much deliberation. In other cases, however, a recipient may be stimulated to consider more carefully the communicator's motives for conveying the message and, in doing so, may infer that the message's literal meaning was not the meaning the communicator actually wished to transmit.

In informal conversations, clues that a statement should not be taken literally are often provided by the speaker's tone of voice or facial expression. An equally important indicator is the extent to which its semantic implications violate normative expectations for the sort of messages that are transmitted in the situation at hand. Grice (1975) identified a number of normative principles that govern both the transmission of messages in social situations and the interpretation that is placed on them. (For more recent refinements and extensions of these principles, see Green, 1989; Higgins, 1981; McCann & Higgins, 1992; Schwarz, 1994; Sperber & Wilson, 1986.) Five of these principles are particularly relevant to the communication processes of concern in this chapter:

1. *Informativeness*. Messages should convey information that the recipient does not already have.
2. *Relevance*. Messages should be relevant to the topic under discussion.
3. *Truthfulness*. Messages should convey the truth as the communicator sees it.
4. *Politeness*. Messages should avoid unnecessarily offending the intended recipient.
5. *Modesty*. Messages should avoid promoting the virtues of the speaker or to be otherwise self-aggrandizing.

There are obviously constraints on the conditions in which recipients expect a communicator to apply these principles. People may not expect a used-car dealer to be truthful, for example, or a politician to be modest. Moreover, some principles are specific to the type of situation in which communications are exchanged. The principles that govern get-acquainted conversations between strangers may not apply to discussions between close friends, job interviews, or business meetings. Nevertheless, the five principles described above are applicable in a wide range of situations.

Communication principles guide not only the messages that persons generate but also the way these messages are interpreted. That is, in the absence of information

to the contrary, recipients assume that the communicator has, in fact, applied the principles in constructing his or her message. Therefore, when a message's literal meaning appears to violate a principle, recipients may try to understand why the violation occurred. In doing so, they may be stimulated to reinterpret its meaning or the circumstances surrounding its transmission. Thus, for example, if a person's statement appears to go without saying, recipients may speculate that the person might in fact have some reason to believe it to be informative. Alternatively, they may conclude that the communicator did not intend the statement to be taken literally. Similarly, a person who receives a communication that is obviously false may infer that the communicator is being sarcastic.

### ***An Illustrative Example***

Although Grice's (1975) principles were initially applied to informal conversations, they are potentially applicable to any situation in which people receive a communication from a specified source. The information conveyed in the public media, for example, may be assumed by recipients to be both informative and truthful. Respondents in opinion surveys may assume that the questioner expects them to provide information that is truthful, informative, and relevant. Later sections of this chapter discuss implications of these possibilities in some detail. A study by Gruenfeld and Wyer (1992) also may be useful to illustrate the effects of communication principles in social comprehension.

Briefly, participants read a series of statements about familiar people and events that were ostensibly taken from either an encyclopedia or a newspaper. Several of the statements either asserted or denied the validity of propositions that participants at the time of the study typically assumed to be false ("The CIA is engaged in illegal drug trafficking," "Lyndon Johnson was responsible for the assassination of John F. Kennedy," "Some members of the U.S. Congress belong to the American Nazi Party," etc.). Thus, affirmations of the propositions were newsworthy, whereas denials would normally go without saying and, therefore, appeared uninformative. Participants after reading each statement reported their beliefs that the proposition to which it pertained was true. These beliefs were compared with those reported by participants in a control condition who were not exposed to either denials or affirmations of the propositions' validity.

When participants were told that the statements had come from an encyclopedia, affirmations increased their beliefs in the proposition's validity and denials decreased these beliefs. In contrast, statements that had ostensibly been taken from newspapers increased participants' beliefs that the propositions were true regardless of whether the statements affirmed or denied their validity. In fact, denials of a proposition's validity increased participants' beliefs in it just as much as assertions that the proposition was true.

Thus, participants apparently recognized that the denial of a proposition they already believed to be false violated the informativeness principle. In attempting to reconcile this apparent violation, participants speculated that there must be some reason to believe that the proposition was in fact true (thus making its denial newsworthy). As a result of this speculation, however, they increased their beliefs in the proposition's validity relative to conditions in which the denial had not been encountered. Note that this processing only occurred when statements ostensibly came from a newspaper, whose presumed objective was to convey new information. The objective of an encyclopedia is presumably to record archival knowledge regardless

of how well known it is. Thus, participants did not consider the informativeness principle to be applicable to statements from this source, and so they did not revise their interpretation of its meaning.

Not all uninformative statements can be reinterpreted in the way suggested by the aforementioned study. For example, the statement "United States citizens can vote at the age of 18" cannot possibly be false. Individuals who encounter such a statement, therefore, do not speculate that it might not be true. Instead, they may infer that the communicator's objective is to express an implicit attitude (e.g., "United States citizens can vote at the age of 18, and this is a terrible policy," or "U.S. citizens can vote at the age of 18, but citizens of many other countries cannot"). To this extent, an assertion that the statement is true may not alter recipients' beliefs in its validity, but rather may influence the favorableness of their attitudes toward the state of affairs it describes. Gruenfeld and Wyer (1992) found evidence of this as well.

As Wegner, Wenzlaff, Kerker, and Beattie (1981) noted in their discussion of innuendoes, communicators sometimes intentionally capitalize on recipients' application of communication principles to stimulate them to make inferences that were not literally implied. For example, a politician's comment that "I have no direct evidence that my opponent is a heavy cocaine user" might be made to plant the idea that it could, in fact, be true. Analogous effects could occur in advertising. For example, the claim "Soft and Sudsy does not contain ecoplassterol," which consumers never believed in the first place, may lead them to question why the assertion is made and, in doing so, to infer both that ecoplassterol is an undesirable attribute and that competitive brands have it. (For indications that persons often respond to the pragmatic implications of advertising claims in much the same way they respond to direct assertions, see Searleman and Carter (1988). These possibilities have somewhat ironic implications for the role of communication skills in message transmission and reception. That is, communicators' skills lie in their ability to lead recipients to identify the pragmatic meaning of their statements. (For theoretical analyses of the role of conversational norms in the transmission of intentionally deceptive messages, see Jacobs, Dawson, & Brashers, 1996, and McCornack, 1992.) On the other hand, recipients' skills reside in their ability to avoid spontaneously extracting this meaning.

### ***Recognition of Norm Violations***

People obviously do not assess the pragmatic implications of every message they receive. If a message's literal meaning falls within a range of acceptability along the dimension to which the principle pertains (informativeness, truthfulness, etc.), its literal meaning is likely to be accepted as its intended meaning without considering alternative interpretations. In this regard, Wyer and Radvansky (1999) found that the validity of statements about known persons or objects is often assessed automatically in the course of comprehending the statements. In a quite different paradigm, Bargh (1997; Bargh, Chaiken, Govender, & Pratto, 1992) found evidence that all stimuli are spontaneously evaluated as either favorable or unfavorable at the time one is exposed to them. People may not be consciously aware of these verification and evaluation processes unless the results of these processes exceed some "expectancy" threshold. That is, persons may not recognize that a statement violates the informativeness principle unless the spontaneous validity assessment that occurs in the course of comprehending it exceeds some maximum threshold value of plausibility. Correspondingly, they may not recognize that a statement violates the truthfulness principle unless its validity is below some minimal value. Similarly, statements may

not be regarded as violating a politeness or modesty principle unless the desirability of their implications are outside certain boundaries of undesirability or desirability as a result of processes postulated by Bargh (1997).

Although these possibilities are speculative, they are consistent with a two-stage process of comprehension in which recipients of a message first assess its literal meaning and only consider its pragmatic meaning if its literal meaning violates their expectations for its validity or favorableness. This two-stage conceptualization helps to localize the point at which different types of message reception skills are likely to operate. At the initial stage, these skills depend on the knowledge and concepts that recipients have accessible in memory at the time they receive information, their awareness of the possible communication-irrelevant factors that could influence the accessibility of these concepts and knowledge, and their perceptions of how much they should adjust to compensate for this influence. At the second, pragmatic stage of processing, these skills depend on the recipient's ability to identify factors that convey the communicator's knowledge of both the topic and the recipient as well as the purpose for which the message is transmitted. The effects of these skills become apparent in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Caution should nevertheless be taken in overgeneralizing these effects. For one thing, messages are often received for a purpose that requires an assessment of their accuracy. The need to attain this objective may motivate recipients to attend to pragmatic aspects of the message that they would otherwise ignore. By the same token, recipients might spontaneously recognize that a statement violates a conversational norm but might not be sufficiently motivated to engage in the cognitive effort required to construe its nonliteral implications. Hewes (1995) reviewed a number of situational and individual-difference variables that can influence the extent to which recipients of a message are likely to be sensitive to its inaccuracy and to be motivated to identify its true implications. These factors can exert an influence over and above the processes considered here.

## **COMMUNICATION AND COMPREHENSION IN FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS**

The messages exchanged in everyday conversation consist of a complex of verbal and nonverbal features. Moreover, the generation and interpretation of these messages can both be influenced by the objectives of the parties involved. They can also be influenced by participants' perceptions of one another's goals and knowledge of the topic under discussion. In light of these complexities, the fact that people typically communicate quite well in these situations (or, at least, believe they are doing so) might seem rather remarkable.

As noted earlier, many communications are inherently ambiguous, and communication effectiveness can sometimes be facilitated by this ambiguity. Thus, a woman's statement to a colleague that his research is "provocative" could reflect her perception that the colleague's findings are artifactual and his conclusions are completely implausible, but the colleague might interpret her remark as an indication that his research has far-reaching implications. Similarly, a communicator who believes a woman's hairstyle would be more appropriate for a 3-year-old might refer to it as "cute," but the recipient might interpret the statement as evidence that her hair is becoming. In such instances, the speaker might intentionally choose an ambiguous descriptor to be polite while at the same time maintaining a self-perception of being truthful. In short, the imprecision of language often permits conversation participants

to perceive that they are communicating effectively and harmoniously even when they are not.

Two sets of factors noted earlier influence the effectiveness of comments made in conversations. First, recipients often use communicators' nonverbal behaviors as clues to the meaning they wish to convey in the things they say. Second, as noted earlier, the statements made in conversations are guided by a number of implicit rules or principles that influence recipients' expectations for the form and content of communicators' statements. Neither set of factors is totally reliable. Moreover, the way in which the factors come into play depends on the type of conversation being conducted, its situational context, and idiosyncratic characteristics of the parties involved. These contingencies are examined in the pages that follow.

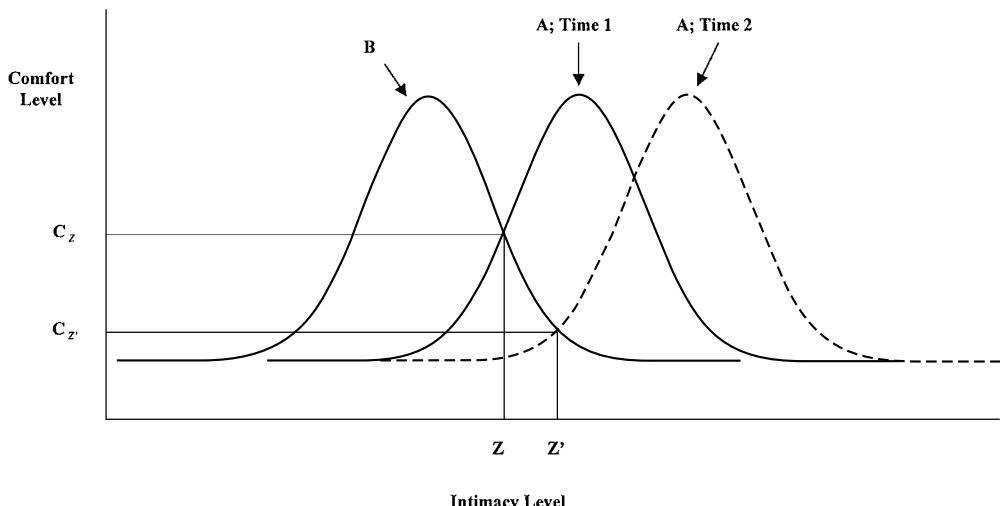
## **Nonverbal Indicators of Meaning**

A critical component of the communications conveyed in face-to-face interactions is nonverbal. A speaker's facial expression, tone of voice, eye contact with the recipient and bodily movements can all influence how the speaker's statements are interpreted. These nonverbal behaviors can occur without the communicator's awareness.

The nonverbal components of the messages transmitted in a social interaction are often as important to comprehension as the statements that accompany them. In fact, the two components are highly interactive. Nevertheless, they have typically been investigated independently. Theory and research on nonverbal communication are discussed in detail elsewhere (e.g., DePaulo & Friedman, 1998; see also Krauss & Chiu, 1998, and Burgoon & Bacue, this volume). Although this work is of interest in its own right, its importance in the present context derives from its implications for the pragmatic meaning that participants in a social interaction are likely to extract from one another's communications and the impact of this meaning on their subsequent judgments and behavior. This importance is increased by virtue of the fact that neither communicators nor recipients are fully aware of the specific behaviors that transmit meaning. Thus, communicators may unwittingly convey attitudes and emotions through their nonverbal behavior that they do not wish to reveal. By the same token, recipients may infer a communicator's intentions from a configuration of nonverbal behaviors without being fully aware of the specific bases for this inference. In informal conversations, a communicator's nonverbal behaviors are particularly likely to influence perceptions of intimacy, interpersonal attraction, and emotion. They can also influence perceptions that a communicator is lying or telling the truth. We consider these matters in turn. An overriding consideration in our discussion surrounds the extent to which the information conveyed by these behaviors is transmitted intentionally or unwittingly.

### ***Interpersonal Attraction and Intimacy***

Individuals' attraction to one another is obviously conveyed through their facial expressions and tone of voice as well as other nonverbal behaviors (Cappella, 1981; Palmer & Simmons, 1995). Two factors, eye contact and physical proximity, are particularly important (Argyle & Cook, 1976; Argyle & Dean, 1965; Patterson, 1976). The effects of these latter factors are often compensatory, however. Argyle and Dean (1965; see also Cappella, 1981) note that for each participant in an interaction, an optimal level of intimacy exists at which the participants feel comfortable and that this level is communicated through both eye contact and physical closeness. Therefore,



**FIG. 8.2.** Subjective comfort experienced in an interaction between two persons, A and B, at different levels of intimacy. Z denotes the theoretical level of intimacy at which the initial interaction between A and B should occur, and  $C_Z$  denotes the comfort experienced by both persons in this interaction. The dashed line denotes the subjective comfort experienced by A as a result of a change in preferred intimacy, and  $Z'$  and  $C_{Z'}$  denote the intimacy and comfort experienced in an interaction that occurs subsequent to this change.

to maintain his or her intimacy at a desired level, a participant may compensate for an increase in physical proximity by decreasing eye contact, or conversely.

The association between nonverbal behaviors and intimacy could reflect learned or unlearned approach or avoidance tendencies that are expressed as feelings of attraction or repulsion. However, people often respond configurally to social situations without articulating their specific features (Lazarus, 1982). Consequently, as Palmer and Simmons (1995) showed, the particular nonverbal behaviors that elicit these feelings may not be clearly identified. (For summaries of evidence that people are generally uncertain of the source of their affective reactions, see Schwarz & Clore, 1988, 1996.) That is, when one person's nonverbal behavior conveys a level of intimacy that the other considers suboptimal, it may elicit vague feelings of discomfort, and these feelings may stimulate the other to behave in a way that decreases or eliminates this discomfort.

These possibilities have interesting implications for interactions between individuals whose preferred levels of intimacy differ. Certain of these implications, considered in detail by Cappella and Greene (1982; see also Wyer & Carlston, 1979), can be conveyed through an example. Suppose persons A and B are interacting and that the comfort each experiences at different levels of perceived intimacy is shown in Fig. 8.2. The intimacy that A considers optimal, as conveyed through a combination of eye contact and physical proximity, is greater than the level that B prefers. Therefore, if A attempts to establish a degree of eye contact and proximity that corresponds to his or her preferred intimacy level, B will feel uncomfortable and therefore may decrease both eye contact and proximity. Thus, behavior should decrease B's discomfort but will increase A's. Over a series of iterative adjustments, the parties are likely to adopt a level of intimacy that corresponds to the intersection of the two comfort gradients (point  $Z'$  in Fig. 8.2). However, the comfort experienced by A and B at this level ( $C_{Z'}$ ) is not optimal for either party.

To take this example one step further, suppose conditions arise that increase the level of intimacy that A considers optimal without affecting B's preferred level, as shown by the dashed curve in Fig. 8.2. This change should theoretically lead to the establishment of a new level of overall intimacy ( $Z'$ ) that is greater than it was initially. At the same time, the actual comfort experienced by both parties to the interaction ( $C_{Z'}$ ) should decrease. In other words, A's efforts to establish greater intimacy are counterproductive.

The preceding analysis is undoubtedly oversimplified. A discrepancy-arousal theory proposed by Cappella and Greene (1982) provides a more precise formulation of the interplay of interaction expectations, expressive behavior, and intimacy and has implications for the conditions in which reciprocal as well as compensatory behavior will occur. For example, the theory predicts that intimacy-related responses will be reciprocated when interacting parties have similar expectations for one another's feelings and behavior but will be compensatory when parties' expectations differ. The theory also takes into account differences in interaction participants' latitudes of acceptance for expressive behavior.

In addition, nonverbal behavior is usually accompanied by verbal behavior, and the two modes of communication can interact. This is particularly true in the case of eye contact (Cappella, 1981; DePaulo & Friedman, 1998). In an early study, Ellsworth and Carlsmith (1968) found that eye contact increased participants' liking for persons who expressed views that agreed with their own, but decreased their liking for persons who expressed opposing views. Eye contact can function in other ways, however. Hornik (1987), for example, found that people were more likely to comply with a request to be interviewed when the interviewer made eye contact with them.

The function of eye contact can vary over the course of an interaction (Kendon, 1967; Krauss, Fussell, & Chen, 1995). Its function also depends on the role of the participant. For example, a speaker often uses eye contact to punctuate or to emphasize points he or she wishes to make, or alternatively, as a signal that it is the listener's turn to speak (Kendon, 1967). Simultaneously, listeners often use "back-channel" responses (smiling, nodding, etc.) to convey understanding or agreement. These back-channel responses undoubtedly influence speakers' perceptions that the listener is interested in what they have to say and, as a result, their attraction to the listener.

### ***Communication of Emotion***

Eye contact can often be interpreted as an indication of the intensity of a communicator's feelings about the topic of discussion (Ellsworth & Carlsmith, 1968). For example, a communicator's compliments to a recipient may be interpreted as friendlier if the communicator maintains eye contact, whereas his or her criticisms may be interpreted as conveying more hostility in this condition. More generally, eye contact may have an important impact on perceptions of emotion. Other nonverbal and paralinguistic factors influence these perceptions as well, such as facial expressions and tone of voice. In this regard, Ekman (1972; see also Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1972; Izard, 1971) concluded that one's facial expressions are natural responses to the emotions one is experiencing and that as a result, several distinct emotions are reliably conveyed through these expressions. More recent work, however, suggests that facial expressions may not be as reliable indicators of emotion as had originally been assumed, and their implications may not be perceived similarly in different cultures (Russell, 1994). In fact, emotions may only be accurately inferred from facial expressions when the expressions are posed rather than occurring naturally (Motley,

1993; Motley & Camden, 1988). In a normal conversation, the emotions conveyed by facial expressions are typically inferred from the verbal context in which they occur, and inferences of their meaning when presented out of context are not appreciably better than chance (Motley, 1993). Thus, although facial expressions are used extensively to infer one another's feelings, this is not done independently of the verbal statements that accompany them.

Persons' expressions may not only be consequences of their emotional states but also determinants of them. That is, proprioceptive feedback from one's facial expressions can actually elicit emotions with which the expressions are associated (Laird, 1974; Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988; Zajonc, Murphy, & Inglehart, 1989). One interesting implication of this stems from evidence that people unconsciously imitate the facial expressions of the persons with whom they interact (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). (For example, speakers who smile may elicit smiling in the listeners.) If this is so, and if proprioceptive feedback from facial expressions elicits feelings, it raises the possibility that the emotions communicators experience and reflect in their facial expressions are transmitted to observers who unwittingly imitate these expressions.

### ***Nonverbal Influences on the Detection of Deception: Controlled Versus Uncontrolled Processes***

People who wish to express positive or negative feelings can sometimes try to convey these feelings intentionally through their nonverbal behavior. In other cases, however, people try to hide their feelings from the persons with whom they interact. Their success in either endeavor depends on (a) whether the nonverbal behaviors that provide cues to their feelings are under conscious control and (b) whether the nonverbal behaviors that persons believe convey feelings are actually used by others to infer these feelings.

In the first regard, DePaulo and Friedman (1998) summarized evidence that persons regulate their nonverbal behaviors in presenting themselves to different audiences. This may reflect a general strategy of impression management (Schlenker, 1980; Leary, 1995). At the same time, communicators are not aware of the entire configuration of cues that they actually transmit in a social situation, nor are they aware of the cues that recipients will use to infer their attitudes and emotions (Barr & Kleck, 1995; Buck, 1984; Ekman & Friesen, 1969). Consequently, communicators' conscious attempts to control their nonverbal behaviors in ways that either express or suppress an emotion are often unsuccessful.

The empirical research that bears most directly on these possibilities has focused on the factors associated with deception and the ability to detect it. Based on a review of a number of correlates of deception, Zuckerman, DePaulo, and Rosenthal (1981) concluded that of all the factors that message recipients might use to detect deception (voice tone, body movements, etc.), facial cues are the least reliable. In many cases, these cues might even interfere with accurate detection (Ekman & Friesen, 1974). Nevertheless, facial expressions can sometimes be revealing. For one thing, deception is more easily detected when communicators are highly motivated to deceive than when they are not. DePaulo and Friedman (1998) concluded that "the most consistent results across . . . different ways of manipulating motivation was that when communicators were highly motivated to get away with their lies, their lies were more likely to be betrayed by their nonverbal cues, including their facial expressions" (p. 18). Individual differences in the ability to exercise this control are

correlated with high expectations for success and with lack of concern about the inappropriateness of deceiving (DePaulo & Kirkendol, 1989). This suggests, somewhat ironically, that the people who are least concerned about their ability to deceive are the most successful in doing so.

### ***Final Comment***

The research and theory reviewed briefly in this section exemplify the influences that nonverbal behavior can have on the transmission and reception of pragmatic meaning in social interactions. On the other hand, it also conveys the difficulty of acquiring a full understanding of this influence. It seems likely that just as communicators are often unaware of the configuration of nonverbal behaviors that conveys a particular emotion, or desire to deceive, recipients are unaware of the configuration of nonverbal behaviors they use to infer it. Rather, they are likely to respond schematically to the communicators' behavior without identifying specific features (Lazarus, 1982). To this extent, research and theory that concerns the impact of isolated types of individual nonverbal behaviors on perceptions of emotions, feelings of intimacy, or intentions to deceive may be of limited value.

## **The Role of Normative Expectations in Message Comprehension**

As we noted in our more general discussion of message reception processes, people's expectations for the communications they receive in a social interaction are sometimes the result of implicit rules that govern communications in general (cf. Grice, 1975). However, they can also result from factors that are idiosyncratic to the type of situation in which the interaction occurs and the persons involved in it. In this section, we consider the influence of individuals' norm-based expectations for the messages they receive in a conversation on (a) their attention to one another's statements, (b) their interpretation of these statements, and (c) their attraction to the communicator. We also consider the effects of speakers' expectations for how a recipient will react to their statements on the recipient's actual reactions.

### ***Effects of Expectations on Attention to Message Content***

People are more likely to think about the statements they hear in a conversation if the statements deviate from expectations. In fact, when people have acquired expectations for the type of statements that are often made in a given situation, they may respond to comments whose general structure is consistent with these expectations without carefully analyzing their actual content. Thus, if a person's greeting to a colleague, "Hi, how are things going?" elicits the comment "I just lost my job," the person might nevertheless respond with "Good, glad to hear it," without registering the negative implications of the colleague's utterance.

Studies reported by Langer and her colleagues exemplify this possibility. In one well-known study (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978), Xerox machine users were approached by a confederate who asked if she could interrupt them to make either 5 or 20 copies. In one condition, the confederate gave no explanation at all for the request, simply stating, "Excuse me, I have to make 5 (20) copies. Can I use the Xerox machine?" In this condition, few persons complied with the request regardless of the number of copies requested. In a second condition, the confederate gave a legitimate reason for the request: "Can I use the Xerox machine because I'm in a rush?"

In this case, most persons complied regardless of the number of copies to be made. A third condition was the critical one. In this case, the confederate's explanation was "placebic"; that is, it had the form of an explanation but in fact only repeated the original request: "Can I use the Xerox machine because I have to make copies?"). In this condition, users refused to grant the request to make 20 copies, just as they did in no-explanation conditions; however, they were as likely to comply with a request to make 5 copies as they were when a legitimate reason was given. Thus, users only paid attention to the content of the request when they were confronted with a major inconvenience. Otherwise, they responded to the form of the request, apparently based on a normative principle that one should comply with requests "if there is a reason to do so," without thinking about the nature of the reason. (For other evidence suggesting that the effects of appeals for help are often independent of the amount of justification that is given for the appeals, see Jason, Rose, Ferrari, & Barone, 1984.)

A quite different study by Langer and Abelson (1972) has somewhat similar implications. Persons in a shopping center were approached by a woman who was apparently limping and in pain. In one, explanation-first condition, her statement was, "My leg is killing me. I think I sprained it. Would you do something for me? Would you call my husband and tell him to pick me up?" In a second, request-first condition, she said, "Would you do something for me? Would you call my husband and tell him to pick me up? My leg is killing me. I think I sprained it." Two other conditions were similar except that the request was to call the woman's boss and tell him she would be late. The woman's request to call her husband was assumed to be legitimate, as it reflected a genuine need on the part of the victim. In contrast, the request to call her boss was not sufficiently important to justify inconveniencing a stranger. Giving the explanation first focused persons' attention on the victim. This made the legitimacy of her request salient and led decisions to be based on this factor. That is, persons were more likely to comply with the woman's request to call her husband than with her request to call her boss. Making the request at the outset appeared to focus persons' attention on themselves, however, activating a concept of themselves as someone who gives help when asked. In this case, therefore, persons complied with the woman's request regardless of its legitimacy.

These findings provide additional support for the conjecture that when the structure of a communication is consistent with normative expectations, its specific content and implications are often not thought about at all. When a communicator's statements are inconsistent with expectations, however, recipients may be more inclined to think about why they were made. This could be true regardless of whether the recipients are active participants in the conversation or passive observers. Participants in a study by Wyer, Budesheim, Lambert, and Swan (1994) listened to a tape-recorded conversation between two male students, P and O. In the course of the conversation, P mentioned both favorable and unfavorable behaviors that O had performed at an earlier point in time, and O described several positive and negative things that he personally had done. Thus, P's unfavorable descriptions of O violated a politeness principle, whereas O's description of his own favorable behaviors violated a modesty principle. To the extent that norm-violating statements stimulated attempts to explain their occurrence, listeners should remember them better than statements that are consistent with expectations. This was true. Listeners had better recall of things P said about O if they were unfavorable than if they were favorable but had better recall of things O said about himself if they were favorable than if they were unfavorable.

### **Effects of Expectations on the Interpretation of Messages**

A very large proportion of the comments that people make in everyday conversation are not taken literally. The most obvious examples are the questions and statements that constitute indirect speech acts (Searle, 1990). A person who asks, “Can you tell me what time it is?” is not really interested in the recipient’s ability to read a clock. Similarly, a person who interrupts an ongoing conversation by commenting that “It seems stuffy in here” is not trying to convey information but rather, is suggesting that someone open the window. The processes that underlie responses to the two statements might be somewhat different, however. The first request is essentially idiomatic and is automatically interpreted as equivalent in meaning to “What time is it?” (Gibbs, 1986). In contrast, comprehension of the second may require a conscious recognition that the statement’s literal meaning violates a norm to be informative and relevant to the topic under discussion. Therefore, a deliberative construal of the statement’s intended meaning is more likely.

In many instances, the use of an indirect speech act reflects a learned tendency to be polite. For example, the statements “Can you tell me what time it is?” and “It seems cold in here” seem more polite than the statements “What time is it?” and “Close the window.” Exceptions to this rule can occur when participants have substantial prior knowledge about one another that they bring to bear on the interpretation of a statement’s intended meaning (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). For example, if a hostess comments, “It’s cold in here,” at a dinner party, her guests are likely to interpret her statement as a polite request to her husband to turn up the thermostat. Her spouse, however, with whom she had had many heated arguments about his obsession with energy conservation, might interpret the comment as hostile.

An interesting indication of the role of speech acts is provided by Albert and Kessler (1978; see also Knapp, Hart, Friedrich, & Shulman, 1973) in a more general analysis of how conversations are terminated. When participants in a conversation are ready to end it, how is this done? To investigate this matter, Albert and Kessler (1978) asked either friends or strangers to call one another and engage in either an unstructured get-acquainted conversation or to discuss a particular topic. No indication was given of how long they should talk. The comments that were made in the course of ending the conversation were tabulated. Endings often included justifications (“e.g., “Well, I have to get back to work”), well-wishing statements (e.g., “Have a good time at the party,” “take care,” etc.), and informal summaries of what had been accomplished (“Well, I guess we agree that . . .”). Of particular interest in the present context was the frequency of continuity statements, that is, comments that ostensibly set plans to continue the interaction without necessarily intending to do so (e.g., “Let’s get together for lunch some time,” “See you later,” etc.). These statements were made equally often by friends and strangers.

The ability to recognize that a statement’s intended meaning is not its literal meaning is of importance in informal conversations. This importance is exemplified in (a) the identification of sarcasm and witticisms, (b) sensitivity to the distinction between hostility and teasing, and (c) the communication of affect.

**Recognition of Sarcasm and Witticisms.** The ability to distinguish between a statement’s literal meaning and its intended meaning obviously comes into play in the detection of sarcasm. People who hear the statement “Central Illinois is certainly a great place to spend the summer—all that corn and high humidity” are likely to recognize it as a disparagement of Illinois rather than praise of it. This is partly because

the statement's literal meaning violates the truthfulness principle, stimulating the recipients to realize that this is not the meaning intended.

Many sarcastic remarks elicit amusement. Although the cognitive processes that underlie humor elicitation were discussed earlier in this chapter, some additional considerations are worth noting briefly in the present context. According to the theories of humor elicitation proposed by Wyer and Collins (1992) and Apter (1982), a statement should be recognized as a witticism if the statement's intended meaning trivializes or diminishes its referent relative to the statement's literal meaning. Thus, the intended meaning of the aforementioned statement about Illinois summers diminishes Illinois relative to its literal meaning, and so the statement might be considered mildly amusing. People who are familiar with Switzerland and hear the statement "Switzerland is an awful place to spend the summer—all those ugly lakes and high mountains" should interpret it as ironic as well. Because the statement's intended meaning enhances Switzerland rather than diminishing it, however, the statement should theoretically elicit less humor than the statement about Illinois. Similarly, a person who is asked, "Who is the most intelligent public figure you can think of?" and answers "Dan Quayle" is likely to elicit more amusement than someone who is asked, "Who is the least intelligent public figure you can think of?" and responds, "Albert Einstein."

But how does one recognize that a statement is not intended to be taken literally? This recognition requires knowledge of not only the statement's referent but also the attitudes and opinions of the communicator. (See Sanders, this volume, for a more detailed analysis of this possibility.) To identify a statement extolling the desirability of a summer vacation in Illinois as a witticism, one must obviously be familiar with Illinois' climate and geography. One must also know that the speaker is not personally enamored of hot muggy weather and unending expanses of farmland, however. As a second example, a person who comments, "What this country needs is another Ronald Reagan" is more likely to elicit amusement in a liberal Democrat, who presumably considers the statement to be false, than in a conservative Republican. On the other hand, an identification of the statement as ironic also requires knowledge that the speaker believes the statement to be false. Thus, the comment is more likely to be considered amusing if the speaker is a liberal Democrat than if he is a conservative Republican.

These possibilities are captured by the sort of two-stage comprehension process proposed by Wyer and Radvansky (1999) and discussed earlier. That is, recipients first identify a statement's literal meaning on the basis of concepts and knowledge that are accessible in memory at the time and, in the course of this activity, spontaneously assess the validity and desirability of its implications (Bargh, 1997; Wyer & Radvansky, 1999). However, they may only recognize that the statement's intended meaning differs from its literal meaning if its validity or desirability falls outside the range that they expect for communications that are apt to occur in the situation at hand. Thus, only in the latter case will they identify a statement as ironic or, perhaps, as a witticism.

One implication of this two-stage process is that people are only likely to consider a speaker's beliefs and attitudes in assessing the intended meaning of his or her statements if they perceive the statements to violate a normative principle of communication in the situation at hand. Thus, in the preceding example, liberal Democrats may be more amused by the statement "What this country needs is another Ronald Reagan" if it is uttered by another liberal Democrat (who presumably shares the recipient's belief that it is untrue) than if it is uttered by a conservative Republican.

Conservative Republicans who hear the statement may consider it to be true and therefore may not identify the statement as a witticism regardless of its source.

**Hostility and Teasing.** The preceding considerations also come into play when persons respond to statements about themselves. For example, statements that disparage the recipient are likely to be interpreted as a violation of the politeness principle and therefore may lead the recipient to infer that the speaker was only teasing and did not really intend the statement to be rude. One somewhat ironic implication of this possibility is that the more disparaging a statement's literal meaning, the more likely it is to be recognized as a violation of the politeness principle, and therefore the more likely it is to be identified as a tease rather than a genuine expression of the speaker's beliefs and opinions.

A speaker's statement can vary not only in politeness but also in accuracy, however. For example, suppose a 65-year-old man who is observed to have trouble balancing his checkbook hears the comment, "Life certainly becomes difficult as one approaches senility." If the man has confidence in his mental abilities, he may believe that the comment's implications that he is becoming senile as untrue rather than impolite, and this may stimulate him to consider whether the speaker also regards the statement as false. On the other hand, suppose the man is worried about the loss of his mental abilities. Then, he might perceive the communicator's statement's implications to be true and therefore might be inclined to take the statement literally regardless of other considerations.

In some cases, the implications of politeness and truthfulness principles can conflict. For example, after a man's third automobile accident in 2 years, a colleague may observe, "You are certainly a wonderful driver." If the man believes the speaker is aware of his driving record, he may reinterpret the statement as a criticism of his driving ability and not a compliment, but this reinterpretation would violate the politeness principle. As a result, the man may construe its intended meaning to be less disparaging than he would otherwise and might even be somewhat amused. This analysis assumes that politeness only comes into play once the truthfulness principle is applied; whether this is actually so is unclear, however, and no existing evidence bears on it.

### ***Comprehension of Emotion in Close Relationships***

The influence of conversational norms on the emotional impact of statements is particularly evident when the parties involved have a large pool of shared knowledge about both one another and life experiences more generally. Married couples often develop a "private meaning system" that permits them to communicate attitudes and opinions to one another without other listeners' awareness (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Thus, a man's comment that "Bali would certainly be a nice place to visit" would appear to most listeners to be a simple expression of opinion. His wife, however, might interpret the statement as a veiled expression of hostility toward her because of her unwillingness to take off work to make the trip. More generally, communications among partners in close relationships can take on an idiomatic character that others are unlikely to understand and appreciate (Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Gore, 1987; Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981).

Shared knowledge, however, does not guarantee that people interpret one another's comments accurately. Moreover, the inaccuracy of their interpretations may

be particularly evident in the communication of emotions. For one thing, indirect expressions of emotion are inherently ambiguous. In addition, normative expectations exist that can interfere with comprehension. A study by Gaelick, Bodenhausen, and Wyer (1985) demonstrates these effects. Married couples engaged in a 10-minute discussion of a problem they were having in their relationship. Then, in a later session, they independently reviewed a videotape of the discussion and reported both their own and their partner's emotional reactions to specific things that were said. Two sets of findings emerged:

1. Persons attempted to reciprocate the emotion they perceived their partner had conveyed to them. However, only partners' intentions to convey hostility were perceived accurately. Consequently, expressions of hostility were actually reciprocated, whereas expressions of love were not.
2. When women did not attempt to convey any particular emotion in a statement, men interpreted the statement as an expression of hostility; however, women interpreted similar statements by their husbands as expressions of love. The authors attributed these misperceptions to the different expectations that men and women hold for one another, that is, women may expect men to be generally hostile and aggressive and so interpret relatively neutral emotional responses, which deviate from these expectations, as expressions of positive feelings. By the same token, men expect their female partners to be warm and nurturing and so interpret emotionally neutral expressions of feelings as relatively hostile.

In combination, these results have implications for the progression of an interaction. That is, a woman who makes what she considers to be an emotionally neutral statement to a man may be interpreted by the man as conveying hostility, and this may lead the man to express hostility in return. In contrast, a man who intends to convey neutral feelings to a woman may be interpreted by the woman as conveying love, and this may lead the woman to reciprocate these feelings in her response. Unfortunately, because expressions of love are generally not perceived accurately, the man may often not perceive the woman's intentions. As a consequence, hostility is more likely than love to be reciprocated and to escalate over an interaction.

Gender differences in the interpretation of communications and responses to them are not restricted to love and hostility. Tannen (1990), for example, noted that men and women differ in the types of social support they provide. Men prefer to give instrumental support, attempting to convince the victim that the problem is not serious and suggesting ways to resolve it. Women, on the other hand, prefer to receive emotional support, characterized by an acknowledgment of the problem and the legitimacy of their reaction to it. Consequently, men's attempts to convey support to women are often misperceived and unappreciated.

### ***Effects of Normative Expectations on Interpersonal Attraction***

When the individuals involved in a conversation are not well acquainted, different normative expectations may govern the communications that are exchanged. For example, conversation partners may expect one another to make comments to which they can respond easily, thereby maintaining the flow of conversation. In get-acquainted situations, in which people typically exchange information about themselves and explore common interests, the flow of conversation is typically maintained

both by asking questions and by responding to others' questions in enough detail to stimulate a response by the recipient. When this does not occur, the conversation becomes strained.

For example, consider the following interchange:

Q1. Where do you live?

A1. Well, I used to live in Detroit, but last year I moved to the south side of Chicago.

What about you?

Compare this interchange with the following:

Q2. Where do you live?

A2. Chicago.

The second interchange, unlike the first, places the burden of the conversation back on the questioner, requiring him or her to search for a new topic to discuss. In addition, the questioner might interpret the respondent's failure to elaborate or to reciprocate the question as lack of interest in him or her or in the conversation more generally.

A study by Wyer, Swan, and Gruenfeld (1995) demonstrated these phenomena. Undergraduate students engaged in a get-acquainted conversation with someone of the same gender. On the pretense of controlling for the content of the conversations, one partner in a pair was told to insert five questions into the conversation of the sort one might normally ask when meeting someone for the first time (e.g., "Where are you from?" "Do you like school?"). Unbeknownst to the questioner, the other partner was told that the questions would be asked and to respond to them (a) by either giving a single-word answer or elaborating and (b) by either reciprocating the question or not. Participants were told that except for their answers to these specific questions, they should respond normally.

After participating in the conversation, questioners reported their reactions to both the conversation and their partner. Male participants' perceptions of the ease of conducting the conversation were primarily influenced by whether their partner reciprocated their questions, whereas female participants' perceptions were primarily determined by whether their partner elaborated. In both cases, however, participants' perceptions of the difficulty they encountered in conducting the conversation decreased both their liking for the conversation and their belief that their partner liked them. These factors then combined to decrease their liking for the partner.

A second study confirmed the assumption that questioners respond to norm violations by seeking explanations for their occurrence. In this study, questioners before engaging in the conversation were ostensibly exposed by mistake to a third person's trait description of the person with whom they would be interacting. These trait descriptions only influenced questioners' liking for partners whose responses to questions during the conversation deviated from normative expectations. In other words, questioners only considered these descriptions when they were motivated to seek an explanation for their partner's counternormative responses that the descriptions potentially provided.

These findings call attention to the inherent interrelatedness of communication and reception skills in social interaction. That is, individuals who are asked a question have two tasks. First, they must understand what it is the questioner wants to know. (We elaborate on the factors that influence this understanding in a later section of this chapter.) Second, they must respond in a way that is likely to facilitate the continuation

of the information being exchanged. A failure to fulfill either of these objectives is likely to have an adverse effect on the interaction and to interfere with further information exchange.

### **Expectancy-Confirmation Processes**

There is yet another way in which expectations for another can influence communication in conversations. Specifically, one's expectations for another's behavior can influence one's own behavior toward this person, and this behavior, in turn, may elicit responses that confirm these expectations. This possibility was first demonstrated by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966), who found that teachers' expectations for their students' ability influenced them to respond to the students in ways that influenced their actual classroom performance (for similar effects in other situations, see Rosenthal, 1993, 1994; see also Zanna, Sheras, Cooper, & Shaw, 1975).

Research by Mark Snyder and his colleagues provides more direct evidence of expectancy confirmation. In a study by Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid (1977), for example, male and female students engaged in get-acquainted conversations with one another over the telephone. Before beginning the conversation, each male participant was shown a picture of either an attractive or an unattractive woman and told that it was his conversation partner. In fact, the pictures bore no relation to the women's actual physical appearance. The women's comments during the conversations were recorded and later replayed to blind judges who rated them in terms of likeableness and friendliness. Women were rated as friendlier and more appealing if the man to whom they had been talking believed they were attractive than if he did not. Apparently, men who believed their partner was attractive conversed in a way that actually elicited warmth and friendliness, whereas men who believed she was unattractive conversed in a way that elicited aloofness.

In a quite different study, Snyder and Swann (1978a) showed that participants who were led to believe that another person was likely to be hostile and aggressive behaved toward this person in ways that actually elicited aggressive behavior (as reflected in the shocks the person administered to the participant for making errors in a learning task). Thus, both this study and Snyder et al.'s (1977) indicate that when people expect someone to respond to them in a particular way, they often behave toward the person in a way that elicits these responses, thereby confirming their expectations.

The expectancy-confirmation processes identified by Snyder and his colleagues are of clear social importance. For example, they could contribute to the tendency for physically attractive individuals to acquire more effective interpersonal skills than unattractive individuals (Berscheid & Walster, 1974). On the other hand, they also suggest that people who hold a negative stereotype of a social group may behave toward individual group members in ways that confirm this stereotype, leading the stereotype to be perpetuated.

## **THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES IN PERCEPTIONS OF A COMMUNICATOR'S INTENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRES AND OPINION SURVEYS**

As the preceding discussion testifies, the reception and transmission of information in a social interaction are often inextricably intertwined. In a conversation, for example, one party's statements often depend on this individual's interpretation of the

statements that others have made earlier. This dependence is most obvious in the course of responding to questions. In these instances, a person's answer is obviously determined by his or her perception of the meaning of the question and what sort of information is being requested.

The principles of communication identified by Grice (1975) and others presumably govern these processes. That is, people who are asked a question are usually motivated to answer it in a way that is both informative and accurate. To do so, however, they must be able to understand what it is that the questioner really wants to know. In addition, they must be able to predict whether the questioner will be able to understand their answer. For example, suppose a man is asked, "Where do you live?" To answer this question in a way that will be informative, he must infer whether the questioner is interested in his country of origin or his street address. To make this inference, however, he must be able to predict what the questioner already knows or assumes about his place of residence. Thus, the man is likely to give his country of origin if he is asked, "Where do you live?" in London by a stranger who has no knowledge at all about his nationality. He may give his street address if he is asked the question by a local resident of his community.

These comprehension processes are obviously not restricted to questions asked in informal conversations. They also come into play when individuals respond to questions in interviews, opinion surveys, or questionnaires. Some of the most interesting work to emerge on the role of communication principles in these situations has been conducted by Norbert Schwarz, Fritz Strack, and their colleagues (for reviews, see Schwarz, 1994; Strack, 1994). Schwarz and Strack note that the rules that govern these questions and answers are similar to those that govern communication processes in informal conversations. To this extent, an understanding of the role of communication principles in responding to questionnaires and opinion surveys has implications for communication phenomena in more informal social situations as well. In the discussion to follow, we consider several different conditions in which respondents are requested to communicate an opinion or judgment to others in a questionnaire. We first discuss the manner in which respondents interpret the meaning of a question they are asked, and the manner in which this interpretation influences the responses they make. Second, we discuss the processes that underlie respondents' interpretation of the "language" they are asked to use in reporting their answers under conditions in which the meaning of this language (e.g., numbers along a response scale) is unclear.

## **The Role of the Informativeness Principle in Interpreting and Responding to Questions**

People who are asked a question are likely to assume that they are being requested to provide information that the questioner does not already have. As Schwarz (1994) and Strack (1994) both have pointed out, this can have somewhat ironic implications. Researchers often include several items pertaining to the same characteristic in a questionnaire in an attempt to increase the reliability of their measure. To ensure that the items are assessing the same thing, they are often very similar except for minor changes in wording. In fact, the inclusion of these items can often decrease reliability rather than increasing it.

This possibility was confirmed in a series of studies by Strack, Schwarz and their colleagues (Ottati, Riggle, Wyer, Schwarz, & Kuklinski, 1989; Schwarz, Strack, & Mai, 1991; Strack, Martin, & Schwarz, 1988; Strack, Schwarz, & Waenke, 1991). In

the study by Ottati et al. (1989), for example, participants reported their agreement with each of several general propositions pertaining to social liberties (e.g., "People should have the right to express their views in public"). Before judging each proposition, however, they responded to a similar proposition about a specific group that was either desirable (e.g., "The American Civil Liberties Union should have the right to express its views in public") or undesirable (e.g., "The American Nazi Party should have the right . . ."). In one condition, the group-specific proposition and the general proposition were separated in the questionnaire by six other, unrelated items. In this case, agreement with the general proposition was greater when the specific proposition referred to a desirable group than when it referred to an undesirable one. Thus, the body of knowledge that respondents used to evaluate the first, group-specific proposition was apparently applied in evaluating the general one as well.

In a second condition, however, the two propositions occurred together in the questionnaire. In these conditions, references to an undesirable group in the first proposition increased respondents' agreement with the general proposition. In this case, respondents' attempts to convey new information apparently led them to use different criteria to evaluate the general proposition than they had used to judge the group-specific one. For example, persons who evaluated a statement pertaining to the American Nazi Party may have responded to the general item as if it meant "Except for the American Nazi Party, people should have a right to express their views in public." As a result of this exclusion, their agreement with the proposition increased relative to conditions in which the excluded group was favorable.

## **Inferences of Response Criteria From Question Wording**

Respondents' perceptions of the criteria they should use in answering a question can depend in part on how the question is worded. For example, questions can sometimes presuppose a certain type of answer. For example, "Did you see the stop sign?" unlike "Did you see a stop sign?" presupposes that a stop sign had actually been there to be seen. Thus, as studies by Loftus (1975) show, people who have watched a movie are more likely to respond affirmatively if they are asked the first type of question than if they are asked the second type. Furthermore, people in the first condition are relatively more likely to mention having seen the object at some later point in time, even though it had not actually been shown.

The presuppositions that underlie questions are often unintended. For example, people who wish to decide if a person has a certain attribute may spontaneously think of characteristics that are associated with the attribute and ask questions about them. Thus, for example, they may ask questions such as "What do you like about parties?" if they are trying to find out if a person is extroverted but ask "When do you like to be alone?" if they want to find out if the person is introverted (Snyder & Swann, 1978b). People regardless of their inclinations toward extroversion or introversion can usually identify at least a few things they like about parties and also a few times they like to be alone. Consequently, their responses to such questions will appear to confirm the hypothesis that the questioner is testing regardless of which hypothesis it happens to be.

People may sometimes intentionally convey biasing information through the questions they ask (Wegner et al., 1981). Persons who hear a question may infer that the questioner is requesting new information. That is, they assume that the answer could be either affirmative or negative, and the questioner is not sure which is the case. Thus, they may interpret a question such as "Does Senator Smith belong

to the Ku Klux Klan?" as an indication that there is some reason to suppose that Smith might, in fact, be a member of the organization. Consequently, as Wegner et al.'s (1981) findings suggest, people who are asked such a question might increase their belief that Smith is probably a racist.

In opinion surveys, respondents sometimes infer the answer a questioner expects from the response alternatives that are provided. Moreover, the inference may influence not only their answer to the question at hand but other responses as well. A series of studies by Schwarz and his colleagues are illustrative. In one study (Schwarz, Hippler, Deutsch, & Strack, 1985), some participants were asked to report their daily television viewing habits by checking an alternative along the following scale:

- up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 hour
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ –2 hours
- 2– $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours
- over  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours

Others, however, were asked to report their television viewing along the following scale:

- up to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ –3 hours
- $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours
- $3\frac{1}{2}$ –4 hours
- 4– $4\frac{1}{2}$  hours
- over  $4\frac{1}{2}$  hours

The authors speculated that persons would infer the typical amount of television watched to be near the middle of the scale they were given and would compare their own viewing habits to this standard. In fact, the actual amount of time spent watching television by participants in the study averaged about 2 hours. Consequently, most participants who received the first, low-frequency scale were likely to believe that their viewing behavior was above average, whereas those who received the second, high-frequency scale were likely to believe it was below average. After reporting their television viewing behavior, participants were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their leisure time. Participants reported feeling less satisfied if they had reported their television viewing behavior along the low-frequency scale than if they had responded along the high-frequency scale. In other words, respondents, who presumably considered television watching to be a waste of time, inferred whether they were above or below average in this activity from the range of response alternatives they were given, and this inference influenced their estimates of satisfaction. Survey research in other knowledge domains has similar implications (cf. Schwarz & Scheuring, 1988).

When the behaviors to be estimated are more ambiguous, the response alternatives that communicators are given can influence their interpretation of the characteristic being judged. This was demonstrated in a study by Schwarz, Strack, Mueller, and Chassein (1988). Some participants were asked to report how often they felt "irritated" along a scale ranging from "several times a year" to "less than once every 3 months."

Others were asked to do so along a scale from “several times daily” to “less than once a week.” Later, all participants were asked to give examples of things that irritated them. In the absence of a clear definition, participants inferred that “irritated” referred to more extreme emotional experiences when they were exposed to the first, low-frequency scale (suggesting that irritating events were fairly rare) than if they were exposed to high-frequency scale. Consequently, they listed more extreme annoyances in the first case than in the second.

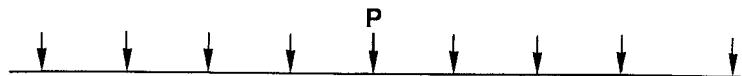
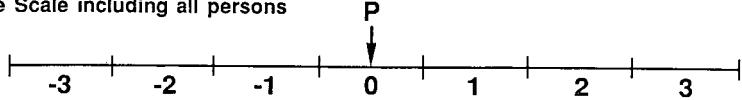
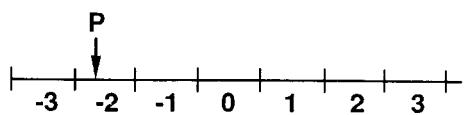
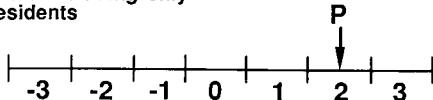
## Communication Principles in Response Scale Use

People are often expected to express their opinions in subjective terms. For example, a person may describe a colleague as “fairly intelligent” rather than reporting her scores on an IQ test, and may refer to a baby as “really big” rather than describing its size in pounds or inches. In many cases (e.g., when people are asked to report their liking for a person or social policy), objective units of judgment do not even exist.

When people are asked questions of this sort, therefore, they must make implicit assumptions about how the questioner will interpret the language they use to convey their judgments. These assumptions may often be based on their perception of the range of values that the questioner has in mind when asking the question. Thus, a woman may respond “really big” to a question about the size of her baby, but may respond “rather small” to a question about the size of her apartment, although the apartment is obviously much larger than the baby. This is because she assumes that the questioner wants to know the size of each object in relation to other objects of the same general type rather than all objects that exist in the world. Similarly, a research physicist may describe a colleague as “rather stupid” based on the implicit assumption that the questioner is interested in his appraisal of the colleague in relation to other physicists rather than individuals in the general population.

These considerations, which occur in everyday conversation, also come into play in research. In the social sciences, for example, participants are often asked to report their judgments of a person, object, or concept along numerical response scales. Moreover, the scales are typically defined in subjective rather than objective units. For example, a person might be asked to judge a person’s intelligence by placing a check along a scale from  $-5$  (*very unintelligent*) to  $+5$  (*very intelligent*), or to estimate the desirability of a social policy along a scale from  $-5$  (*very undesirable*) to  $+5$  (*very desirable*). These scales essentially require respondents to use an unfamiliar “language” in reporting their judgments. To communicate these judgments in a way the recipient will understand, the respondents must be able to translate this language (i.e., the numerical values along the response scale) into their own language (i.e., subjective values of the attribute they are asked to judge), and this translation requires implicit assumptions about the meaning that the questioner assigns to these labels. When these assumptions are incorrect, miscommunication is inevitable.

A formal description of the processes that underlie a respondent’s translation of values along a response scale into subjective values of the attribute to which the scale refers has been proposed by Parducci (1965) and Upshaw (1969; Ostrom & Upshaw, 1968). To convey its implications, suppose a woman is asked about the intelligence of an acquaintance, P, who comes from the same small mining town in Ohio where she herself grew up and who, like herself, became a research physicist. Suppose further that the woman has had a broad range of experiences with people that represent different subjective levels of intellectual ability and perceives P to be near the middle of this range, as indicated in Fig. 8.3a. Thus, if she is asked to

**A. Subjective Continuum of intellectual ability****B. Response Scale including all persons****C. Response Scale including only university professors****D. Response Scale including only hometown residents**

**FIG. 8.3.** (a) Locations of known persons along a subjective continuum of intellectual ability and positions of a category response scale to include (b) the full range of known persons, (c) only university professors, and (d) only residents of the communicator's home town. Arrows denote the projected rating of a hypothetical person, P, onto these scales.

estimate P's intelligence along a scale from  $-3$  (*very low*) to  $+3$  (*very high*) and is communicating to an unspecified audience, she might subjectively position the scale to include the most intelligent and least intelligent persons she has encountered in the past, as shown in Fig. 8.3b and might then map P's position onto the scale, thus assigning P a relatively neutral value (0).

However, suppose the woman is asked her opinion by someone at her university. Then, she might assume that the questioner is concerned only with research physicists and that the scale she is asked to use pertains only to people of this type, as shown in Fig. 8.3c. Alternatively, if the questioner is someone from her home town in Ohio, she might infer that she is expected to consider only persons of the sort she has encountered in this community and might position her scale as shown in Fig. 8.3d. If she maps P onto these scales in order to report her judgments, she would appear to judge P to be of relatively low intelligence in the first case, but to be of relatively high intelligence in the second. This could occur despite the fact that she has the same subjective opinion of P's intelligence in all cases.

A general implication of the preceding analysis is that the higher the range of stimulus values to which respondents believe a response scale refers, the lower the value they will assign to any given stimulus along the scale. Respondents' assumptions about this range can be influenced by not only their perceptions of the questioner's objectives and expectations but the situational context in which the question is asked. Thus, the woman in our previous example might be more inclined to evaluate her colleague's intelligence in relation to other research physicists (and therefore report

him as less intelligent) if she is asked about the colleague in her office at the university than if she is asked in a bar, and this might be true regardless of the person to whom she is communicating.

Once respondents report a judgment, however, this response presumably becomes part of their accumulated knowledge about the object being judged. Consequently, they may later retrieve this response out of its original context and use it as a basis for both additional judgments and behavioral decisions (Sherman, Ahlm, Berman, & Lynn, 1978; see also Higgins & Lurie, 1983). As Sherman et al. (1978) found, for example, people rated recycling as less important when it was presented in the context of other, very important social issues (e.g., nuclear disarmament) than when it was presented in the context of trivial ones (e.g., pay-on-entry buses). Later, however, they recalled their rating out of context and used it as a basis for deciding whether to help out on a recycling project, volunteering less help in the former condition than the latter.

## **Summary**

The effects we have described in this section have obvious methodological implications for research that uses opinion surveys and questionnaires to assess attitudes and opinions. They also have implications for social communication processes more generally. In informal conversations, people must also decide what language to use in conveying their opinions to others. Many of the factors that govern people's responses to questionnaires in the more formal survey situations described in this section are therefore likely to have their counterparts in these conversations as well.

## **MESSAGE RECEPTION IN A NONSOCIAL CONTEXT: EFFECTS ON PERSUASION, IMPRESSION FORMATION, AND PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL REALITY**

Our discussion thus far has focused on message reception under conditions in which messages are expected to be both truthful and informative; these conditions do not always exist. In many instances, for example, a communicator's objective is to persuade the recipient to adopt a particular point of view or to convey a favorable or unfavorable impression of the person or object being described. A conceptualization of message reception under these conditions requires an understanding of both the factors that influence recipients' perceptions of the communicator's objective and also their motivation to take these factors into account in responding to his or her message. This motivation, in turn, can depend on the importance of the issue to which the message pertains. The last section of this chapter is concerned with these matters.

Persuasive communications can be of two types. Some messages concern a topic in which recipients have a personal interest and advocate a position with which they are likely either to agree or to disagree. Recipients of such a message are usually motivated to evaluate its implications at the time they receive it. Other communications concern people and objects about which recipients have little if any prior knowledge and do not have strong preformed opinions. These messages are typically intended to create a favorable or an unfavorable impression of their referent rather than to change an existing one. Advertisements and television commercials, for example, concern topics in which recipients typically have little immediate interest at all. Although recipients of these latter messages are likely to be aware of the communicator's intentions to persuade them to adopt a particular attitude or

behavior, they nevertheless spend little cognitive effort in evaluating the validity of the information. Before considering the factors that influence the reception of these two types of messages, a more general discussion of the processes that theoretically underlie responses to persuasive messages is desirable.

## Theories of Persuasion

Current research on communication and persuasion has been based in large part on two theoretical formulations proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and Chaiken (1980, 1987). However, these conceptualizations have their roots in a more general formulation of information processing developed by McGuire (1968, 1972). We first describe briefly this more general conceptualization and then discuss similarities and distinctions between the theories that are derived from it.

**McGuire's Information-Processing Model.** McGuire (1968, 1972) identified several different stages of processing that can mediate the impact of a persuasive message on judgments. Two stages of particular importance concern (a) the recipients' comprehension of the message content<sup>1</sup> and (b) their attempts to refute the validity of its implications (e.g., to counterargue). The amount and type of processing that occurs at each stage can depend on the implications of the information presented, the consistency of these implications with recipients' prior knowledge, and recipients' perception of the communicator's intention (e.g., to persuade or simply to inform).

McGuire (1968) noted that the persuasive impact of a message is likely to increase with recipients' ability to comprehend it, but to decrease with their ability and motivation to refute its validity. This means that if a situational or individual-difference variable (e.g., distraction, the recipient's general intelligence and knowledge about the issue, etc.) has simultaneous effects on both comprehension and counterarguing, it can often have a nonmonotonic effect on the communication's influence. This can be seen from the equation

$$P(I) = P(R)[1 - P(CA)], \quad (8.1)$$

where  $P(I)$  is the probability of being influenced,  $P(R)$  is the probability of receiving and comprehending the message's implications, and  $P(CA)$  is the probability of effectively counterarguing these implications. Note that  $P(I)$  is less when  $P(R)$  and  $P(CA)$  are either both low (e.g., .1) or both high (e.g., .9) than when they are both moderate (e.g., .5). Thus, for example, people with little knowledge about the topic may be unable to comprehend it fully, and so they are not influenced by it for this reason. Very knowledgeable persons, on the other hand, can comprehend it but also can refute its implications. Consequently, they may also not be influenced. The message may be most effective on persons who are only moderately knowledgeable and therefore are reasonably able to comprehend it but find it moderately difficult to refute. Situational distraction that simultaneously influences both reception and counterarguing may be nonmonotonically related to communication impact for similar reasons.

<sup>1</sup> McGuire did not distinguish between the two aspects of comprehension we discussed in earlier sections of this chapter (i.e., the identification of the literal implications of information and a construal of its pragmatic, or intended, implications; however, both of these aspects of comprehension are presumably involved).

The interactive effects of ability and message factors can also be conceptualized in terms of this equation. Suppose a message is moderately easy to comprehend and refute by recipients who have little knowledge about the topic and have little ability to assess its implications (i.e., in terms of Equation 8.1,  $P(R) = P(CA) = .5$ ). Then increasing the recipients' ability both to comprehend and to refute the message (i.e.,  $P(R) = P(CA) = .9$ ) should decrease the message's impact. In contrast, suppose the message is extremely difficult to comprehend and refute in the absence of these reception skills (e.g.,  $P(R) = P(CA) = .1$ ). Then increasing these skills should increase the message's influence. (For a more detailed discussion of the implications of Equation 8.1, see Wyer, 1974.)

These considerations call attention to the need to consider both participants' ability to comprehend and evaluate the content of a persuasive message and the nature of these cognitive activities. The importance of considering persons' cognitive responses to a persuasive message was established by Greenwald (1968). He found that the influence of a message was more strongly related to the implications of the thoughts that recipients reported having while reading a message than by the content of the message that they could recall at the time their attitudes were assessed. More recent research (for reviews, see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty, Priester, & Wegener, 1994) confirms the fact that recipients' recall of a message's content only predicts its impact when their cognitive elaboration of this content is minimal, for example, when they are unmotivated to think about the message's implications (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992) or are distracted from doing so (Mackie & Asuncion, 1990).

In some instances, however, people's thoughts may not concern the message content at all but may focus on peripheral aspects of the message or the conditions in which it is presented. The formulations of communication and persuasion proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and by Chaiken (1980, 1987) specify the conditions in which this is the case. Both theories recognize the need to consider the nature of individuals' cognitive responses to a persuasive communication in predicting its impact. They differ in their specification of the conditions that give rise to these assessments, however.

### ***Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model***

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) postulated two alternative routes through which a persuasive message can be effective. The first, the central route, requires effortful cognitive activity in which recipients draw on both past experience and previously acquired knowledge in assessing the validity of the message's content and implications. When recipients are either unable or unmotivated to engage in this extensive cognitive activity, however, they choose a peripheral processing mode that does not require a careful evaluation of the message arguments. For example, they may base their responses to the message on the credibility of its source (Chaiken, 1980) or on the affect they happen to be experiencing and attribute to positive or negative feelings about the position being advocated (Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 1988). The relative likelihood of choosing these two processing strategies can depend on a number of situational and individual-difference factors that influence one's motivation or ability to think about the message (e.g., recipients' personal interest in the topic, their general desire to engage in cognitive activity, or situational distraction (for a summary of these and other effects, see Petty et al., 1994).

### **Chaiken's Heuristic-Systematic Processing Model**

Chaiken (1980, 1987) made a distinction between systematic and heuristic processing that is similar in most respects to the distinction between central and peripheral processing postulated by Petty and Cacioppo: Systematic processing entails a detailed analysis of the message's content, whereas heuristic processing typically involves the use of criteria that can be applied quickly and easily with a minimum of cognitive elaboration. Chaiken's conceptualization differs from the elaboration likelihood model in one important respect. Petty and Cacioppo appear to have assumed that the choice of a particular mode of processing occurs at the time a message is encountered and that recipients employ one mode or the other but not both. In contrast, Chaiken assumed that heuristic criteria are always applied first, and systematic processing comes into play only when these criteria prove to be inadequate.

More specifically, individuals with a particular processing objective are postulated to have a level of confidence that they consider sufficient for making a judgment or decision. When they receive a message, they evaluate its implications on the basis of the criterion that is simplest and easiest to apply, and then assess their confidence that these implications are valid. If this confidence above threshold, they base their judgment or decision on this criterion without engaging in further processing. Otherwise, they resort to other criteria that may require more extensive processing and assess the implications of these criteria as well, continuing until the level of confidence necessary to make a decision is reached. This latter, more extensive processing is likely to include an evaluation of the message content. Recipients' confidence threshold presumably increases with the importance of the issue addressed by the message and the judgment or decision to be made on the basis of it. It can also depend on the difficulty of processing the message content (e.g., the subjective cost associated with engaging in extensive cognitive activity). Therefore, the likelihood of relying on heuristic criteria rather than conducting a careful analysis of the message content varies correspondingly.

Chaiken's conceptualization, like Petty and Cacioppo's, suggests that when recipients are either unable or unmotivated to think extensively about a message, aspects of the message and its communication context are simplest and easiest to evaluate (e.g., the prestige of its source) are likely to have greater influence. However, whereas Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) theory assumes that people make an *a priori* decision as to which criterion to apply, Chaiken's (1980) theory assumes that people engage in extensive processing of the message content in addition to heuristic processing when the latter criteria prove insufficient. To the extent that the cognitive activity involved in central (or systematic) processing requires reception and comprehension of the message's content and attempts to refute its validity, each conceptualization is compatible with the more general processing formulation suggested by McGuire (1968, 1972). That is, the theories can simply be viewed as alternative hypotheses concerning the conditions in which the cognitive activities postulated by McGuire will in fact be performed.

### **The Influence of Counterattitudinal Messages on Highly Involved Recipients**

McGuire's (1968, 1972) theory is particularly useful in conceptualizing the processes that underlie persuasion when recipients of a message oppose the position it advocates and therefore are motivated to attend to the message's content. If such a message is both easy to comprehend and easy to refute, it should theoretically have

little impact; however, preventing recipients from thinking about such a message (thereby decreasing both comprehension and counterarguing) should increase the communication's influence (see Equation 8.1). These implications are confirmed by evidence that when recipients hear a message advocating a position with which they initially disagree, they are more persuaded when they are distracted from attending to the message than when they are not (Festinger & Maccoby, 1964; Osterhouse & Brock, 1970). Note, however, that if a message is moderately difficult to comprehend and refute in the absence of distraction, situational factors that further decrease comprehension and counterarguing should decrease the message's impact rather than increase it. Research supports this possibility as well (Regan & Cheng, 1973).

An interesting factor to consider in this context is the general level of affect that participants experience at the time they receive a communication. For example, participants who experience positive affect appear unmotivated to engage in cognitive activity that they consider unpleasant (Schwarz & Clore, 1988, 1996). To this extent, they may be less inclined to devote cognitive resources to thinking about a counterattitudinal message with undesirable implications. Consistent with this speculation, Bless, Bohner, Schwarz, and Strack (1990) found that happy persons, unlike unhappy ones, were equally persuaded by a persuasive message regardless of whether the arguments contained in it were weak or strong. These participants were apparently unmotivated to expend the cognitive effort necessary to refute the message content regardless of their ability to do so (but see Wyer & Srull, 1989, for an alternative interpretation). If persons read a persuasive message that they expect to be enjoyable, however, they may be more motivated to think about its content and consequently may actually be more sensitive to differences in the quality of arguments contained in it than are other, less happy individuals (Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995).

### **Resistance to Persuasion**

Perhaps the most important aspect of McGuire's (1968) conceptualization concerns its implications for the factors that influence the ability to resist being influenced by a persuasive message. An impressive series of studies by McGuire (1964) demonstrated that recipients' resistance to an attack on their initial point of view was minimally influenced by giving them information that supported this point of view before the attack was administered. Giving them information that permitted them to refute arguments against their position was much more effective, however. Moreover, giving participants practice in refuting arguments against their position also increased their resistance to persuasion, and this was true even though the arguments that participants practiced refuting differed from those in the persuasive message they encountered subsequently. Evidence obtained in a marketing context (Szybillo & Heslin, 1973) confirms these effects.

Finally, and perhaps most important, McGuire (1964) reported evidence of an "inoculation" effect. That is, merely exposing participants to a mild attack on their point of view, even without explicitly asking them to refute it, called attention to their vulnerability and stimulated them to engage spontaneously in the cognitive activity required to refute these arguments. This spontaneous practice increased their resistance to a persuasive message they encountered subsequently.

**Source Effects on Persuasion.** Recipients' responses to a communication are clearly influenced by their perceptions of its source. These perceptions can pertain both to the purpose for which the communicator is transmitting the message and

his or her personal characteristics (e.g., expertise, trustworthiness, or general attractiveness). As noted earlier, the effects of these perceptions on message impact are presumably mediated by their influence on both recipients' attention to the message content and the type and implications of their cognitive responses to it. Thus, people are more likely to use the credibility of the source as a basis for evaluating a message when their motivation is low (Chaiken, 1980). However, the source of a message can also determine the way in which its content is thought about, and can therefore affect its impact for this reason as well.

For example, recipients are more likely to think carefully about the quality of the arguments contained in a message if they perceive that the communicator wishes to influence their attitudes or behavior than if they perceive that he or she is simply trying to be informative. Schwarz, Kumpf, and Bussmann (1986), for example, found that descriptions of a new textbook had less impact if it was ostensibly taken from an advertisement than if it was described as a book review. Moreover, it was less influential if it contained a statement that was explicitly intended to persuade them to purchase the book than if it did not. An earlier study by Freedman and Sears (1965) had similar implications.

In addition, people's cognitive responses to a message can depend on why its source is positively regarded (Petty & Wegener, 1998). In a classic study by Kelman (1958), for example, some persons received messages from a source who ostensibly had the power to reward them. These messages only influenced the attitudes that recipients reported when they believed that the source would have access to their responses. When the same message was attributed to a high prestige peer, it had an influence even when recipients reported their attitudes privately; however, this influence dissipated over time. The message only had an enduring influence on recipients' attitudes when it ostensibly came from a source who had high knowledge and expertise in the area to which it pertained. Thus, only in the latter conditions did the message appear to induce a true underlying change in participants' opinions.

In the context of the considerations raised earlier, Kelman's results suggest that messages from a source with coercive power may stimulate counterarguing and thus may induce little underlying attitude change despite public compliance with the position advocated. In contrast, the content of messages from a source whose opinions are believed to be socially desirable may not be paid much attention at all. That is, recipients may conform to the position being advocated without evaluating the message arguments, and so the effects of the message do not persist over time once the source is no longer salient.

The persisting impact of a message from a highly knowledgeable source could be a result of two factors. First, participants' memory for the source's expertise and the validity of his or her opinion might persist over time and therefore be used as a basis for reporting attitudes toward the position advocated independently of the content of the communication itself. Second, an expert source might stimulate recipients to think more about the message content without trying to refute its validity, and so the effect of this content persists even after the source has been forgotten. The second of these possibilities seems more viable. For one thing, research in a number of paradigms indicates that participants are inclined to forget the source of information they receive while retaining implications of the information itself (Hasher, Goldstein, & Toppin, 1977; Jacoby, Kelley, Brown, & Jasechko, 1989). This suggests that the persuasive impact of the information in Kelman's study was not a result of their memory for its source, but resulted from the source's impact on recipients' attention to the message

content—an influence that persisted even though the recipient no longer thought about the source of the message.

A further manifestation of this dissociation between the source of a message and the message content is the “sleeper effect”: The influence of a message that comes from a negative source appears to increase as time goes on (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; Cook, Gruder, Hennigan, & Flay, 1979). This effect is presumably attributable to the fact that the negative impact of the source decreases over time, leading the effect of the message content to be more apparent. Although the reliability of the sleeper effect has been questioned (Gillig & Greenwald, 1974), its failure to occur could be in part due to the fact that few incredible sources actually have negative impact. (That is, their opinions are more likely to be wrong than to be right.) Rather, these sources are simply disregarded and have no impact whatsoever. Sources with “negative credibility” may be more common in some domains than others. For example, unpleasant advertisements may decrease product evaluations immediately after they are viewed but can have a positive influence on these evaluations after a delay (Moore & Hutchinson, 1995). Although the negative ads are unpleasant, they apparently increase attention to the substantively favorable information presented about the product and lead this information to be retained in memory. As a result, the information has a positive influence on judgments after the source is no longer salient.

Few studies have examined the cognitive mechanisms that underlie source effects on communication impact. An exception is a study by Birnbaum and Stegner (1979), in which participants judged the amount of money an automobile was worth on the basis of (a) its blue book value and (b) the opinion of a person who varied both in expertise (i.e., knowledge about cars) and bias (reflected in whether the person was a friend of the buyer or a friend of the seller). The expertise of the source influenced the weight attached to the information, whereas bias influenced recipients’ perception of the information’s implications. (That is, the source’s estimate was perceived to imply a higher value if he was a friend of the buyer than if he was a friend of the seller.)

### ***Implications for the Influence of Message Reception Skills***

The impact of persuasive messages that oppose one’s a priori beliefs and opinions is clearly influenced by the motivation and ability to think carefully about the messages’ implications. This motivation and ability, in turn, depends on recipients’ prior knowledge about the topic to which the message refers. More general motivational factors, such as the desire to engage in cognitive activity (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) or need for closure (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996) can also influence the nature of recipients’ cognitive responses to a persuasive message. When persons report their responses to a message publicly, factors such as self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) can also play a role (for a discussion of this possibility, see Hewes, 1995). Finally, quite independently of the motivation to refute the content of a persuasive message and the knowledge required to do so, practice in refuting arguments that favor the position being advocated can have an important impact on the later ability to avoid being influenced (McGuire, 1964).

Although message reception ability obviously influences the processing of a persuasive message, its impact on the influence of any given message is difficult to predict. As noted earlier, an increase in the ability to comprehend and assess the implications of a counterattitudinal message can decrease its influence if the message is fairly easy to understand in the absence of special skills; in contrast, an increase in reception skills could increase the influence of a message that is inherently difficult

to understand and refute. Consequently, general conclusions concerning the effects of message reception ability on message impact are difficult to draw.

## The Impact of Messages on Impression Formation

The preceding discussion was devoted primarily to the impact of persuasive messages that advocate positions with which recipients are likely to disagree. Many messages, however, concern persons and objects about which recipients are unfamiliar and have no clear a priori opinions. Recipients may nevertheless be motivated to evaluate the implications of the message and to arrive at an accurate impression of the person or object to which it refers. Thus, for example, people may wish to decide whether a defendant in a court trial is guilty or innocent, to vote for a political candidate, to hire someone as a research assistant, to invite a new acquaintance out for dinner, or to buy a car. The question is how to use the information available to form such impressions.

Chaiken's (1980, 1987) conceptualization has implications for the particular aspects of a message that recipients are likely to consider in such conditions. To reiterate, she noted that recipients first use the criterion that comes to mind most quickly and is easiest to apply and that they perform a more detailed evaluation of the information available only if their confidence in the validity of the first criterion is below some minimal threshold. The question arises as to what these simplifying, "heuristic" criteria might be. Two bodies of research and theory that bear directly on this question surround (a) the role of stereotypes in perceptions and judgments of individuals and (b) the impact of people's affective reactions on their evaluations of the persons and objects to which these reactions are attributed.

## *The Impact of Stereotypes on Responses to Communications*

The influence of stereotypes on judgments and behavioral decisions has been a major concern of social scientists since the time of Lippman (1922) and continues to one of the most extensively researched topics in psychology (for reviews, see Hamilton & Sherman, 1994; Fiske, 1998). Early theory and research assumed that the use of stereotypes was largely a result of prejudice and hostility toward the stereotyped group (cf. Allport, 1954; Katz & Braly, 1933). However, more research has revealed that the impact of stereotypes on social perception and judgment is more pervasive than had originally been assumed. This influence is therefore worth discussing in some detail.

Stereotypes are typically viewed as "abstract knowledge structures linking a social group to a set of traits or behavior characteristics" (Hamilton & Sherman, 1994, p. 3; for a similar definition, see Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1998). These structures can consist of trait and behavior concepts that are applied to a particular ethnic or social group (women, African Americans, fraternity members, etc.). These concepts can influence responses to messages about a stereotyped individual in a number of ways. Most obviously, they can be used as direct bases for judging the individual independently of any other relevant information that might be available (Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein, 1987; Futoran & Wyer, 1986). Perhaps more provocative is the evidence that once a stereotype is activated in memory, the concepts contained in it may influence the processing of information about other individuals to whom the stereotype is objectively irrelevant (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997). Moreover, these effects can occur in the absence of awareness. In some instances, people who are aware that a stereotype might be influencing their judgments and behavior attempt to compensate

for its influence. In doing so, however, they may actually overcompensate, thus responding in a way that is opposite to that implied by the stereotype. Furthermore, attempts to suppress the use of a stereotype at one point in time can actually increase its use once conscious efforts to suppress it are no longer made. Research bearing on these possibilities is summarized in the sections that follow.

**Stereotypes As Judgmental Heuristics.** The most obvious influence of stereotypes surrounds their use as direct bases for judgment. That is, an individual who belongs to a stereotyped group may be inferred to possess attributes that are believed to be typical of group members. To the extent stereotypes have some basis in reality, this is not entirely inappropriate. Locksley and her colleagues (Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, & Hepburn, 1980; Locksley, Hepburn, & Ortiz, 1982), for example, found that participants were inclined to base a male or female target person's assertiveness on a description of the person's behavior in a particular situation alone, without taking into account the fact that proportionately fewer women are assertive than men. Thus, their judgments were suboptimal according to Bayes's theorem. In other words, ignoring stereotypes entirely can sometimes be as biasing as relying on them exclusively.

As Chaiken's (1980) theory suggests (see also Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), people's tendency to use a stereotype as a judgmental heuristic may depend on their perception of the cognitive effort necessary to evaluate the implications of other available information. That is, people may be more inclined to employ a stereotype if the judgment they expect to make is complex and effortful than if it is not. In one demonstration of this contingency, Bodenhausen and Lichtenstein (1987) gave participants a transcript of a court case involving assault in a bar. In some cases, the defendant was assigned a nondescript name and place of residence (e.g., "Robert Johnson, from Dayton, Ohio") and in other cases a name that identified him as Hispanic ("Carlos Ramirez, from Albuquerque, New Mexico"). Some participants read the transcript with the expectation that they would be asked to judge the defendant's hostility (a relatively simple judgment that could be made on the basis of the defendant's behavior alone). Others were told that their goal was to assess his guilt (a complex judgment requiring an integration of several factors other than the defendant's behavior). After reading the information, however, all participants judged both the defendant's hostility and his guilt regardless of which judgment they had anticipated making.

Participants who expected to make a simple (trait) judgment formed an impression of the defendant on the basis of the transcript information that had implications for his hostility. Moreover, once this impression was formed, they used it as a basis for later judgments of not only this particular attribute but the defendant's guilt as well. Thus, the defendant's ethnicity had little effect on either type of judgment. In contrast, participants who anticipated making a complex (guilt) judgment, which presumably required integration of several pieces of information, based their impression on the stereotype-related implications of the defendant's name. This impression, once formed, also influenced both of the judgments they were later asked to make; they rated "Carlos Ramirez" as both more hostile and more likely to be guilty than "Robert Johnson." In other words, the critical factor underlying the use of the stereotype was not the judgment that participants actually made. Rather, the complexity of the judgment that participants anticipated having to make influenced their processing of the information at the time they first received it, and the mental representation that resulted from this processing was later used as a basis for respondents' judgments regardless of the nature of these judgments.

**Contrast Effects of Stereotypes.** Although stereotypes are often used as heuristic bases for judgment, they can sometimes have the opposite effect. That is, when an individual is atypical of the group to which he or she belongs, people may use the group stereotype as a standard of comparison in evaluating the person. As a result, they may judge the individual to have less of the stereotyped attribute than they otherwise would. Thus, although mothers are typically evaluated more favorably than businessmen, an unkind mother is judged less favorably than an unkind businessman (Higgins & Rholes, 1976; Wyer, 1970). Analogously, although women may be stereotyped as less suited than men for administrative positions, a highly qualified female for such a position may be judged as more competent than a similarly qualified male (for evidence, see Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). Correspondingly, although men may be seen as less suitable than women for secretarial positions, a qualified male applicant for such a position may be judged as more competent than a similarly skilled female.

Whether people use a stereotype as a standard of comparison or as a direct basis for judgments can depend on their perception of the variability of the group members with respect to the attribute being judged. Lambert and Wyer (1990), for example, found that persons who believed priests to be homogeneous with respect to morality judged a particular priest who had embezzled funds to be more immoral than a businessman who had engaged in this behavior; participants who believed priests to be heterogeneous with respect to morality judged the embezzling priest to be less immoral than the embezzling businessman. Interestingly, participants judged the priest as more likely than the businessman to have other stereotype-related attributes (e.g., kindness) regardless of their perceptions of group homogeneity. In other words, all participants relied on the group stereotype when no other relevant bases for judgment were available.

**Effects of Suppressing Stereotypes on Their Later Use.** Several of the preceding experiments indicate conditions in which the activation of a stereotype influences people's use of other available information about the individual to whom the stereotype is applied. The activation of a stereotype can influence people's reactions in still other ways. For example, when people believe that the use of a stereotype is socially undesirable, they may actually overcompensate for its potentially biasing impact. As a result, the stereotype can have the opposite effect than it would otherwise have. In a study by Sherman and Gorkin (1980), for example, male participants were asked to explain the following situation: A father and his son are out driving. They are involved in an accident. The father is killed, and the son is in critical condition. The son is rushed to the hospital and prepared for the operation. The doctor comes in, sees the patient, and exclaims, "I can't operate; it's my son."

Only 18% of the participants identified the possibility that the surgeon was the boy's mother. Later, in an ostensibly unrelated experiment, participants were asked to estimate the amount of compensation that should be awarded to a woman in a fair employment case. Participants awarded more compensation to the woman if they had failed to solve the problem than if they had not. Calling participants' attention to the fact that they might have a negative stereotype of women apparently led them to overcompensate to convince themselves (and perhaps others) that this was not the case.

Sherman and Gorkin's findings suggest that persons may consciously attempt to avoid the use of stereotypes in making judgments, but such attempts can sometimes have a rebound effect, increasing the use of stereotypes in later situations. As Wegner

(1994) pointed out more generally, one cannot actively attempt to suppress an idea without thinking about the idea being suppressed. To this extent, trying not to think about a stereotype may actually increase its accessibility in memory and therefore might increase the likelihood of using it later, once conscious efforts to suppress it are no longer made. In a series of studies by Macrae, Bodenhausen, and their colleagues (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994), participants were asked to describe the personality of a person on the basis of a picture that identified him as a skinhead. Some participants were told to avoid using a stereotype in generating the description, but others were not. The former participants were more likely than the latter to apply the stereotype to a second skinhead and also more inclined to avoid sitting by a person who ostensibly belonged to the stereotyped group. A second study (Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1998) demonstrated similar effects under conditions in which participants were not explicitly told to suppress the stereotype but were exposed to conditions that increased their self-consciousness (and therefore their desire to avoid appearing biased). Thus, these studies suggest that inducing persons to avoid the use of stereotypes in responding to information about a person is short lived and might actually increase the use of stereotypes in the long run.

Caution should be taken in assuming that people always attempt to suppress the use of stereotypes in making judgments when they believe they might be seen as biased. This may only be true when they do not have the opportunity to justify their use of these stereotypes to the individuals who are likely to be aware of this bias. In a study by Lambert, Cronen, Chasteen, and Lickel (1996), participants were asked to form an impression of an African American. Participants with negative attitudes toward African Americans reported generally unfavorable evaluations of the target; however, their judgments were more polarized when they expected to discuss their impressions with others than when they did not. These participants apparently engaged in anticipatory bolstering of their stereotype-based judgments in preparation for the group discussion and, having done so, were more willing to report extreme judgments than they otherwise would have been.

***Influences of Stereotypes on the Interpretation of Information.*** To the extent that a stereotype is composed of trait and behavioral concepts, activation of the stereotype should make these concepts accessible in memory. To this extent, the concepts are more likely to be used to interpret new information to which they are applicable. For example, Sagar and Schofield (1980) found that behaviors were interpreted as more aggressive when they were attributed to an African American than when they were attributed to a Caucasian. On the other hand, stereotypes can also be used as standards of comparison in evaluating the implications of a message, producing a contrast effect on its interpretation. For example, assertive behaviors may be interpreted as more assertive if they are performed by a woman than if they are performed by a man (Biernat, Manis, & Nelson, 1991).

The occurrence of these apparently contradictory effects may depend on the ambiguity of the information to be interpreted and therefore the extent to which stereotype-activated traits can be meaningfully applied to them. In a study described earlier, Herr (1986) found that exposing persons to stimuli that exemplified moderate levels of hostility increased their tendency to interpret a target's ambiguous behaviors as hostile; exposing persons to exemplars of extreme hostility decreased this tendency. Thus, when the activated concepts were so extreme that they could not be used to interpret the target's behaviors, they were used as standards of comparison instead. Similar effects might underlie the use of stereotypes.

A further implication of Herr's (1986) research is that the concepts activated by a stereotype can influence the interpretation of information even when the information does not pertain to a member of the stereotyped group. Moreover, this influence can occur without awareness. In a study by Devine (1989), some participants were subliminally exposed to nouns and adjectives associated with African Americans as part of a perceptual task. Later, as part of an ostensibly unrelated experiment, they read about a nondescript person's behaviors that were ambiguous with respect to hostility (a trait that was stereotypic of African American men). These recipients interpreted the behaviors as more hostile, and judged the target as more hostile, than recipients who had not been exposed to the priming stimuli. Moreover, these effects are likely to increase with recipients' prejudice toward the stereotyped group (Lepore & Brown, 1987; but see Devine, 1989, for an alternative conclusion).

It is worth noting in passing that the concepts activated by a stereotype can influence not only persons' interpretations of others' behavior but also their own behavior. Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996, Experiment 2) found that activating a stereotype of the elderly led college students to walk more slowly after leaving the experiment. Moreover, subliminally exposing participants to African American faces led them to express more irritation in response to an experimenter's request to perform a boring task (Bargh et al., 1996, Experiment 3). In a similar vein, stimulating participants to think about either university professors or soccer hooligans in an ostensibly unrelated experiment can stimulate them to perform either well or poorly, respectively, in a game of Trivial Pursuit (Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998). Aside from its intrinsic interest, this research indicates that aspects of a message of which one is unaware can affect one's later judgments and behavior.

### ***The Impact of Affective Reactions on Message Reception and Impression Formation***

Recipients of information about a person may not base their impressions of the individual on the substantive implications of the information itself but use the affective reactions that the information elicits. For example, descriptions of an individual's behavior or physical appearance can induce positive or negative affect, and these feelings can provide the basis for judging the person independently of the descriptive implications of the information. This possibility, which was first recognized by Clore and Byrne (1974), was elaborated by Schwarz and Clore (1983, 1988) in conceptualizing the use of affect as information. These authors demonstrated in a number of studies (for reviews, see Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1994; Schwarz & Clore, 1996) that the affect people experience for reasons that are quite irrelevant to the target person or object they are judging can become confused with the affect elicited by information about the target and therefore can influence their evaluation of the target.

***Affect and Interpersonal Attraction.*** The importance of Schwarz and Clore's research in the present context derives primarily from its implications that people often use their affective reactions per se as a basis for their evaluations of a person. When people are both motivated and able to think extensively about the information they receive about a person, they may use their affective reactions to specific details of this information to evaluate the individual. When this motivation or ability does not exist, however, recipients may base their evaluations on a more global assessment of their feelings toward the person. In these latter conditions, extraneous sources of affect can also have an influence. Thus, recipients of information about a person may evaluate the person less favorably when they are in unpleasant physical surroundings than

when they are not (Griffitt & Veitch, 1971) and less favorably if a task they recently performed has made them feel unhappy than if it has made them feel happy (Gouaux, 1971; see Clore & Byrne, 1974, for additional evidence bearing on these effects).

**Affect, Image, and Political Judgment.** The impact of affect on judgments may be particularly important in the political arena, where voters' reactions to a political candidate can be influenced by the "image" of the candidate as well as by the candidate's positions on specific issues (e.g., Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1980; for reviews, see Iyengar & Ottati, 1994; Ottati & Wyer, 1993). That is, factors that stimulate positive or negative feelings for reasons that have little to do with a candidate's qualifications for office may have a major impact on impressions of the candidate and ultimately voting decisions. The best known example of this is the 1960 Kennedy–Nixon debates, the impact of which was determined to a greater extent by differences in the candidates' nonverbal mannerisms and demeanor than by things the candidates actually said.

The effects of image-eliciting information and more substantively relevant information may not be independent, however. In a study by Wyer et al. (1991), nonacademic university employees watched a videotaped nonpolitical speech by a politician whose speech style and nonverbal behaviors conveyed either a favorable or an unfavorable image. Then, either immediately or 1 day later, they listened to an audio-taped newscast describing the politician's stands on a number of social issues, the majority of which were either liberal or conservative. People who had viewed the image-eliciting tape 24-hours earlier based their evaluations of the candidate on their agreement with his issue stands; however, making the candidate's image salient at the time his issue stands were revealed decreased the effects of agreement with his stands on specific issues and correspondingly increased the impact of more general, ideological implications of these stands. The videotape of the candidate's speech was not directly relevant to either the candidate's political orientation or his stands on specific policies. It nevertheless influenced the way in which recipients thought about the candidate's issue positions, leading them to apply broader, ideological criteria rather than construing the implications of each stand individually. It seems reasonable to suppose that the image-evoking videotape elicited positive or negative affective reactions to the candidate. To this extent, the salience of these reactions may have been the major contributor to the processing differences that occurred, rather than the politician's image per se.

### ***General Implications***

As the research described in this section clearly indicates, both stereotypes and affective reactions can influence the impact of messages that people receive about a person or object. Moreover, the nature of this influence can vary. For example, stereotypes not only can decrease the use of other available information, but can influence the way this information is interpreted. Affective reactions, elicited by either the information presented or external sources, can have similar effects. As we noted earlier, the use of these sources of information is not necessarily inappropriate. If stereotype-related attributes are objectively associated with members of the stereotyped group, it would be as irrational to ignore them entirely (Locksley et al., 1982). Moreover, as Wyer et al. (1999) pointed out, many judgments of liking for a person or object are inherently judgments of one's feelings toward the referent, and it would be inappropriate to exclude these feelings from consideration. The problem

confronting message recipients is not whether to consider or ignore their feelings toward the person they are judging, but how to assess the implications of their feelings accurately in the context of other available information.

In fact, this assessment is difficult. As studies by Sherman and Gorkin (1980) and others have pointed out, people who are made aware of their use of a stereotype may often overcompensate, leading the stereotype to have negative impact. Overcompensation in the use of affect can occur as well (Isbell & Wyer, 1999; Ottati & Isbell, 1996). In Ottati and Isbell's (1996) studies, for example, participants evaluated a politician on the basis of information about his stands on a number of social issues. Before receiving the information, however, participants were induced to feel either happy or unhappy for reasons that were irrelevant to the judgment to be made (e.g., good or bad performance on an examination). Participants with little political expertise judged the politician more favorably if they were feeling happy than if they were not; participants who were experts in the area judged the politician relatively less favorably when they were happy. Conceivably both novices and experts attempted to adjust their judgments to compensate for the extraneous feelings they were experiencing, but novices perceived themselves to be relatively unbiased by these feelings, and so they did not adjust enough. Experts, however, overadjusted, producing a contrast effect of the affect they were experiencing on their judgments.

## **Responses to Communications in a Low-Involvement Medium: The Impact of Television on Attitudes, Values, and Perceptions of Social Reality**

As the preceding discussion indicates, recipients often do not respond passively to a message that concerns an issue they consider to be important. Many messages concern issues, persons and objects in which recipients have little if any immediate interest, however. In these cases, recipients may have little motivation to think carefully about the content of the messages even if they are able to do so. A major source of such messages is television. Americans watch television an average of more than 4 hours a day (Nielsen, 1995). Moreover, they often do this for no particular reason other than to be entertained or to escape from more pressing cognitive demands. (For a comprehensive review of the uses and gratifications that derive from television and the mass media more generally, see Rubin, 1994.) Consequently, they are rather passive information processors.

The messages conveyed on television differ from those considered in the previous section in several important respects. For one thing, they consist of a complex of visual and verbal information that is transmitted in a short period of time, at a rate that recipients cannot control. Consequently, recipients are often unable to think carefully about the implications of the information even if they were motivated to do so, and so television may be a particularly effective medium for persuasion.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, the impact of information conveyed on television may be largely a function of recipients' ability to comprehend it rather than their tendency to refute its implications. Two aspects of this information are worth noting in this context. First, although the information is transmitted in a complex audio-visual format, this

<sup>2</sup>This possibility is recognized in Ray Bradbury's (1953) novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, in which all reading materials were being destroyed by a totalitarian regime and only television was allowed. This was because recipients could control the rate of information input from books and newspapers and therefore more easily refute its validity. Although Bradbury's account is fictional, his basic premise seems likely to have some basis in reality.

format is similar to that in which people receive information in the course of daily life experience and therefore may be easy to comprehend (cf. Adaval & Wyer, 1998). At the same time, the features of events encountered on television are often similar to those encountered in daily life. Consequently, once the events seen on television are stored in memory, they are often difficult to distinguish from actual experiences one has had or learned about from other sources. As a result, the information acquired on television can have an impact on beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of social reality that is similar to the impact of actual life experiences and, moreover, may do so without awareness. This may be true even though the information conveyed on television concerns persons and situations that are clearly fictitious.

We consider these possibilities in the discussion that follows. First, we discuss briefly the effects of messages that are conveyed both visually and linguistically under conditions in which recipients are unmotivated to think carefully about their implications. We then turn to a discussion of the impact of television on recipients' perceptions of social reality and the beliefs and attitudes that these perceptions are likely to influence. Although our discussion focuses largely on the impact of messages that are conveyed on television, the processes underlying this impact may operate more generally.

### ***Effects of Visual Information***

The communications conveyed on television are distinguished by their strong visual component. As discussed earlier in this chapter, visual information is more memorable than verbal information, and so its impact may increase over time relative to information that is conveyed only verbally. Correspondingly, information that elicits visual images of events that occur in a particular situation may have more impact than abstract, consensus information, the implications of which are difficult to imagine (Nisbett & Borgida, 1975; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; but see Zuckerman, 1978, for qualifications on this conclusion). This suggests that communications are more likely to have an impact if they provide concrete examples of an event or situation than if they consist of abstract summary descriptions, even if the latter are objectively more reliable.

In the domain of advertising, however, the influence of visually conveyed information is not completely clear. The effect of pictures on the processing of verbal information has been investigated in several studies (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Childers & Houston, 1984; Costley & Brucks, 1992; Edell & Staelin, 1983; Miniard, Bhatla, Lord, Dickson, & Unnava, 1991). In general, this research shows that accompanying verbal descriptions of a product by pictures increases evaluations of the product only if recipients have little a priori interest in the information and its implications (Miniard et al., 1991) or, alternatively, the information is conveyed in the form of a narrative (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). In this research, however, the visual information consisted of a set of pictures accompanied by written descriptions of the objects involved. Thus, their implications for the effects of visual information of the sort conveyed on television are hard to evaluate.

### ***The Role of Symbolic Meaning in Communication and Persuasion***

We have already discussed many of the factors that influence the interpretation of information, but several additional issues arise that are particularly important in understanding communication processes in low-involvement situations. These

considerations arise from the fact that the meaning of a message may not only be literal but also symbolic. The American flag, for example, may symbolize patriotism, and the color white may symbolize purity. Such symbols can often be used to convey abstract concepts and ideas that would otherwise be difficult and cumbersome to communicate. The use of symbols for this purpose is documented not only in television (Hirschman, 1988) but also films (Holbrook & Grayson, 1986), comic books (Belk, 1987), and advertising (Belk & Pollay, 1985; see also Moeran, 1984). The transmission of these "hidden" messages obviously requires that the recipient attach the same symbolic meaning to pictures and objects that the communicator does. The meaning of a symbol may be assigned spontaneously at the time it is encountered, however, and its effects might therefore occur without conscious awareness (Bargh, 1997). It is interesting to speculate that the use of symbols by a communicator may often occur without awareness as well.

The use of symbols to convey more abstract meaning has a parallel in the use of metaphors. In science, the communication of complex ideas through metaphors is commonplace. For example, insight into the way information is represented in the mind can be gained by likening the human information processing system to that of a computer (Anderson, 1983; Wyer & Srull, 1989) or to a neurological network (Collins & Loftus, 1975). Although these metaphors are recognized as invalid by both communicators and recipients, they are useful heuristic devices that generate empirically testable predictions.

Metaphors are also common in persuasive communications (Mio, 1996; Ottati, Rhoads, & Graesser, 1999; Read, Cesa, Jones, & Collins, 1990). In this case, however, their influence may be largely unconscious (Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Thus, we spontaneously understand the meaning of someone's statement that "love is a battlefield" or that "love stinks" but also the observation that "love is a warm puppy." In the advertising domain, suggestions that soap powders are "liberators" that "force out" or "attack" dirt, and that cold remedies "fight" bacteria, are also understood with ease. These "war" metaphors may be effective in part because they convey impressions of aggressiveness in the service of combating a despised opponent (Barthes, 1972). Graesser, Mio, and Millis (1987) also recognized that the power of metaphors results in part from their ability to evoke spontaneous visual images, thus conveying more concretely concepts that are difficult to get across in literal terms.

The power of metaphors also derives from the fact that their meaning often extends beyond the object or event to which they are applied. In some cases, these extensions can be misleading or inappropriate. As noted in describing Bransford et al.'s (1972) research, a single cue (e.g., "parachute") can activate a large body of knowledge that can give meaning to an otherwise anomalous statement ("i.e., "The haystack was important because the cloth would rip"). Similarly, likening a foreign ruler to Adolf Hitler might elicit images of the Holocaust, and of attempts to conquer the world, that go far beyond the individual to whom the metaphor is applied.

Metaphors may often be applied automatically in the course of comprehending information. An understanding of their influence is therefore particularly important in low-involvement media, for which individuals are unlikely to engage in the cognitive activity that is necessary to assess their appropriateness. Metaphors can also influence the attention paid to other available information. This latter influence, however, may depend on recipients' attitudes toward the metaphor.

This contingency was demonstrated by Ottati et al. (1999). College students were exposed to persuasive communications that contained either strong or weak arguments in support of a senior thesis requirement. Phrases were inserted into the

message that in some conditions employed a sports metaphor (e.g., "If students want to play ball with the best, . . .") and in other conditions did not ("If students want to work with the best, . . ."). The impact of the message on recipients who had favorable attitudes toward sports was more strongly affected by the strength of the arguments contained in it when these arguments were embedded in a sports metaphor. In contrast, the effects of argument strength on reactions by recipients with negative attitudes toward sports did not depend on the introduction of a metaphor. Although this study was not conducted in a low-involvement situation, it seems likely to have implications in these situations as well.

### ***Influences of Television on Perceptions of Social Reality***

To reiterate, the information that is conveyed on television is likely to be processed with minimal cognitive elaboration. Moreover, this information, like that acquired in other media, often becomes dissociated from its source. Consequently, the information is likely to become confused with knowledge acquired through other sources. This becomes particularly important in light of the fact that much of the television people watch deals with fictitious persons and situations. To this extent, television may bias both people's perceptions of reality and the beliefs and attitudes that they base on these perceptions.

The tendency for viewers to integrate the information they receive on television into their perceptions of real-world phenomena is referred to more formally as a "cultivation" effect (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). Instances of crime and violence, affluence, marital conflict, and selected occupations (doctors, lawyers, policemen, etc.) are overly represented on television relative to their incidence in the real world (Gerbner et al., 1994; Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman, 1994). Consequently, persons who watch television regularly are likely to have these instances easily accessible in memory and therefore are likely to use them as a basis for their judgments for reasons noted earlier in this chapter (see also Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). As a result, they typically estimate these objects and events to be much more common than they actually are.

Although a review of 20 years of research on cultivation effects suggests that these effects are not large in magnitude (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997), they are nevertheless of both practical and theoretical importance. Shrum (1995, 1996) and his colleagues (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1998) have further documented the phenomenon and the reasons for its occurrence. That is, heavy television viewers make higher estimates of events that are shown frequently on television than do light viewers. For example, they are relatively more inclined to overestimate not only the incidence of violent crimes, prostitution, and alcohol addiction (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Shrum, 1996; Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993) but also the likelihood of owning expensive products (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997). Moreover, they make these judgments more quickly than light viewers do (Shrum, 1996), confirming the assumption that the information people acquire on television and use as a basis for their judgments is easily accessible in memory.

Considered in isolation, the relation between television viewing and perceptions of social reality might be subject to alternative interpretations. (For example, heavy television viewers might be more likely to live in areas where crime is a common occurrence and overestimate its incidence for this reason.) A meta-analysis conducted by Morgan and Shanahan (1989) calls many of these interpretations into question, however. The causal influence of television viewing on judgments was established

by Shrum et al. (1998), who showed that the relation between television viewing and perceptions of reality remains even when variables that might account for the relation (socioeconomic status, education level, etc.) are controlled. On the other hand, calling people's attention to the potentially biasing effect of television leads them to discount television-based exemplars and therefore decreases the magnitude of this effect. The latter finding suggests that cultivation effects typically occur without awareness.

**Illusory Correlations.** Although evidence in support of a cultivation effect is substantial, it could sometimes be offset by a tendency for individuals to overestimate the likelihood of infrequently occurring events. In a study by Hamilton and Gifford (1976), for example, participants were exposed to information about individuals who belonged to two groups. The number of members of each group varied but the proportion of members who were described as performing a certain behavior was the same; however, participants later estimated this proportion to be greater when the group was small than when it was large. By analogy, suppose the proportion of African Americans versus the proportion of European Americans who commit crimes are actually the same. Nevertheless, because fewer residents of the United States are African American than European American, people may overestimate the proportion of African Americans who commit crimes relative to the proportion of European Americans who do so.

Although Hamilton and Gifford's (1976) research was conducted in the laboratory, it has clear implications for the effects of the media on perceptions of reality. These effects could occur over and above the cultivation effects identified by Shrum and others. For example, suppose African Americans were less frequently depicted as criminals on television than European Americans were. Hamilton and Gifford's findings suggest that viewers might still perceive them as proportionately more likely than European Americans to engage in criminal activity.

**Effects on General Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values.** To the extent that television influences people's perceptions of social reality, it is likely to influence more general beliefs, attitudes, and values that are based on these perceptions. This is in fact the case. For example, heavy viewers not only overestimate the incidence of doctors in American society but also report greater faith in the ability of doctors to cure disease (Volgy & Schwarz, 1980). Similarly, they not only overestimate the incidence of crime and violence but perceive themselves to be in relatively greater danger (Gerbner et al., 1980) and exhibit greater fear and anxiety (Bryant, Carveth, & Brown, 1981).<sup>3</sup>

The influence of the media on general beliefs and values was more formally recognized by Marchand (1985), who identified at least four general beliefs that were implicit in an analysis of print ads:

1. First impressions are important in acquiring popularity and social success.
2. People, regardless of their social status, have equal access to both the benefits of

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<sup>3</sup>This anxiety may be partially offset by a tendency for people who are frequently exposed to criminal activity to become desensitized to its seriousness. Zillman (1989), for example, showed experimentally that exposing volunteer participants to sadomasochistic pornography over a period of several weeks increased their tolerance for rape—an effect that persisted over a period of several months (For other evidence of the impact of pornography on the trivialization of rape, see Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982; Zillman, 1983).

society and to its dangers. (Thus, for example, everyone can potentially have a beautiful figure. At the same time, everyone is potentially afflicted with halitosis.)

3. The past, in which people were closer to nature, is superior to the soft, artificial quality of the present.
4. Left to their own ends, children often choose the wrong things and parents have the responsibility to guide their tastes.

To the extent the content of television programs, like that of print ads, frequently exemplifies these general propositions, it is likely to be incorporated into viewers' perceptions of social reality. Thus, they attain the status of social clichés, or implicit "theories" (Ross, 1989) that, once acquired, can be used as a basis for evaluating new information to which they apply. To this extent, advertisements and commercials that implicitly or explicitly illustrate them may be effective. For example, persons who have acquired the theory that first impressions are important for social success may be more vulnerable to advertisements for products that are described as improving one's personal appearance (e.g., a toothpaste that gives people "that winning smile"). Similarly, persons who have acquired the theory that getting back to nature is important might be more vulnerable not only to advertisements for natural food products but also, somewhat ironically, to smoking advertisements that feature the Marlboro man. (For an interesting analysis of the implications of implicit theories about men's and women's use of the telephone on the choice of strategies to promote telephone use, see Alexander, Burt, & Collinson, 1995.)

It should nevertheless be noted that the impact of television on perceptions of social reality is not always undesirable. Television programs that consistently associate certain types of individuals with a particular social or vocational role could of course create an implicit theory that only individuals of this type are qualified to fulfill this role. On the other hand, portraying members of a social category in roles to which they have traditionally been excluded can be instrumental in decreasing social stereotypes. Thus, for example, portraying women as airplane pilots, and African Americans as business executives, can gradually eliminate stereotype-based beliefs that members of these groups are unsuitable for these positions.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As we have emphasized throughout this chapter, the ability to understand and evaluate the literal implications of the messages conveyed in a social context does not guarantee that these messages will be interpreted correctly. In describing the general processes that underlie the comprehension of a message's literal implications, for example, we pointed out that recipients are often unaware of the factors that lead them to use one set of concepts to interpret a message rather than another. As a result, the particular concepts they apply can be influenced by experiences that have occurred frequently or recently in the past but are quite unrelated to the issues of concern in the message itself. Message reception skills per se may have little influence on these processes.

When recipients are aware that their interpretation of a message might be influenced by extraneous factors that are irrelevant to its referent, they may attempt to adjust for the influence of these factors. Message recipients may differ in their sensitivity to the possibility of bias and therefore in the likelihood of adjusting for it. Even when recipients are conscious of the possibility of bias, they may find it difficult if

not impossible to determine the amount they should adjust their responses to compensate for its influence. In fact, recipients with substantial knowledge about the topic at hand often appear to overcompensate for the biasing influence of irrelevant experiences. As a result, these experiences have a negative impact on their reactions to the messages they receive.

Recipients' general knowledge about a topic can help them to determine the extent to which the statements pertaining to this topic are true or false and therefore may increase their sensitivity to the possibility that the statements' literal meaning is not the meaning the speaker intended to convey. An accurate assessment of a communicator's intentions often requires inferences about the communicator's own knowledge about the topic and attitude toward the message's referent, as well as the communicator's objectives. These inferences can depend greatly on the situation in which the message is received and the recipient's personal relationship with the source. Consequently, skills and knowledge that allow message recipients to assess the implications of a message accurately in one situation may not generalize to other situations. When a message is composed of several parts, the processes that underlie the extraction of meaning from it can depend on both its modality and its format (e.g., whether it is conveyed in the form of a narrative or in a list of temporally unrelated pieces of information). Message reception skills are likely to depend on the process that is invoked.

The interplay of message reception and transmission is particularly evident in answering questions. In informal conversations, respondents to a question may desire not only to provide the information requested but also to facilitate the interaction. To attain these objectives, they must be able to respond in a way that makes it easy for the questioner to react to this response. But even when questioners and respondents do not directly interact, respondents' ability to provide information depends on their ability to determine what it is that the questioner wants to know and how their answers will be interpreted.

In many situations, a communicator's objective may be to persuade the recipients to adopt a certain attitude or behavior. Recipients' responses to such a message depend on their recognition of these intentions. It may also depend on recipients' previously formed beliefs and opinions about the position being advocated. When messages are counterattitudinal, recipients' ability to resist being influenced can vary not only with their knowledge about the topic but also with the extent to which they have had previous opportunities to "practice" refuting arguments against the position advocated. However, the way in which recipients' ability to comprehend and counterargue a persuasive message influences its impact can depend on characteristics of the message itself. For example, these abilities may decrease the impact of a message that is easy both to understand and to refute, but they may increase the influence of a message that is difficult to comprehend but contains strong arguments.

On the other hand, people are often not motivated to engage in the cognitive activity required to refute the validity of information they receive, regardless of their knowledge and ability to do so. Information transmitted on television, for example, which recipients often acquire for the purpose of being entertained, may often be comprehended and stored in memory without taking into account the validity of its implications. Later, the information may be retrieved out of context and used as a basis for inferences about one's world and for attitudes and values to which the perceptions are relevant.

In summary, the general conclusion that message reception depends on both the motivation and the ability to comprehend the literal and pragmatic aspects of a

message seems self-evident, but the way in which these factors combine to influence message reception in specific situations is much less so. As we noted at the outset, the reception of a message is inevitably imperfect regardless of the ability and motivation to comprehend and evaluate its implications. On the other hand, these imperfections can often be beneficial. The fact that communications are ambiguous may often permit them to be interpreted in a way that avoids controversy and therefore may preserve harmony between the communicating parties. This suggests that even if it were possible to impart skills that would permit complete understanding of one another's messages, the desirability of doing so is open to question. A discussion of this question is, perhaps fortunately, beyond the scope of this chapter.

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CHAPTER

9

## IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND SKILLS

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It is difficult to imagine any social, professional, or public context in which people do not engage in some level of impression management. From the most mundane decision of what to wear on a given day to enacting scripted routines for exiting a boring conversation, people display awareness that their verbal and nonverbal actions are open to scrutiny by other people. Although these inconsequential enactments may not be as strategically orchestrated as a formal presentation before an audience or as newsworthy as the efforts of a politician to publicly reframe a moral lapse, they are no less indicative of the central role played by impressions in the process of social organizing. Other than walking upright and producing speech, there are few qualities so manifestly human as impression management.

When skillfully performed, impression management elicits favorable attributions that in turn promote satisfying interactions, social affiliation, and tangible rewards in the form of job success and promotion. Indeed, some scholars suggest that the willingness to moderate personal expression in response to social constraints provided an evolutionary advantage for early human beings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Poorly equipped for survival as isolated individuals, early humans found great advantage when organized into social units. Although social integration may no longer be necessary for survival, those who are integrated tend to prosper in ways not characteristic of those who are socially isolated.

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the large and increasingly sophisticated body of theoretical and empirical research that informs our understanding of the skills involved in managing impressions. We organize this information into four general sections to address the concerns of interest. In the first section, we provide an overview of the scholarly literature on impression management, reviewing three analytic and conceptual traditions that fall within that rubric. We close this introductory section with a clarification of the terms to be used in the remaining pages of the chapter. In the second section, we introduce four higher order goals toward

which impression management efforts are directed. In the third section, we explore the strategies and tactics that more or less skillfully facilitate the accomplishment of these goals, closing with a brief overview of individual differences in enactment patterns. In the fourth section, we summarize approaches to skill training as evidenced in professional and trade journals.

## IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: MAPPING THE CONCEPT

The term *impression management* is an umbrella term within which are found several research traditions concerned with how individuals present themselves and respond to the presentations of others. Although the term appears most explicitly within social psychology, its conceptual equivalent can be found in sociology under the labels face and facework as well as in the language and discourse literatures under the labels politeness and identity management. Because we recognize that each of these traditions has distinguishing analytic and theoretical foci, we review each tradition briefly in this section to acknowledge its “location” in the conceptual map of impression management. More extensive discussions are available in Baumeister (1986), Cody and McLaughlin (1990), Cupach and Metts (1994), Giacalone and Rosenfeld (1991), Leary (1995), and Rosenfeld, Giacalone, and Riordan (1995).

### Self-Presentation

The terms *self-presentation* and *strategic self-presentation* stem from the early work of Jones and colleagues (e.g., Jones, 1964; Jones & Berglas, 1978; Jones & Pittman, 1982) in psychology and social psychology, who were interested in how the motivations of the “inner” or “private” self are strategically manifested and monitored in public displays. Hence, the term *impression management* came to be associated with the production of coherent sets of behaviors that would lead others to infer a corresponding private self that may or may not exist. For example, the motivation to be liked might encourage overt behaviors that, taken together, constitute a public self who is likable (i.e., similar to target others), responsive to others’ needs, positive and supportive, and so forth.

Continued interest in this phenomenon has led scholars toward three general questions: (a) What goals (motivations) are met through what types of self-presentational strategies? (b) To what extent do individual dispositions (e.g., personality traits, attitudes, and moods) influence self-presentation strategies? and (c) To what extent do self-presentations, once performed, act back on or influence individual dispositions, self-concepts, and behaviors? These second two questions are distinguished by locating impression management as a dependent variable or as independent variable.

The answer to the first question can be found in typologies of the types of impressions that interactants seek to establish and the strategies employed to create those impressions. Jones and Pittman (1982) offered the now classic typology of “attributions” or “impressions” that persons seek in their self-presentational attempts. Each of these five goals is associated with a characteristic strategy and various tactics to implement that strategy. A person who seeks the attribution of affiliative or likable will probably use an *ingratiation* strategy (e.g., doing favors, giving compliments, telling self-deprecating anecdotes, and agreeing). A person who seeks the attribution of competent will probably use a *self-promotion* strategy (e.g., talking about good performance or commenting on achievement to make it evident to others). A person

who seeks the attribution of worthy will probably use an *exemplification* strategy (e.g., demonstrating abilities, honesty, or integrity, or claiming high moral values). A person who seeks the attribution of helpless will probably use a *supplication* strategy (e.g., soliciting help by inducing guilt, appearing weak to evoke nurturance, or claiming incompetence to avoid responsibility for a task). Finally, a person who seeks the attribution of dangerous or powerful will probably use an *intimidation* strategy (e.g., demonstrating the willingness and ability to inflict harm). Presumably, if these impressions are adequately sustained, they lead to intended attributions.

Research subsequent to Jones and Pittman (1982) indicates support for their impression management typology and assumptions that underlie its structure. Behaviors consistent with the typology have been observed in studies of impression management in the workplace (Frink & Ferris, 1998; Rosenfeld et al., 1995) and scales developed to measure impression management behaviors confirm the validity of the strategies (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991). Systematic manipulations of goal conditions in laboratory studies indicate that even the expression of emotional states (happiness, sadness, and anger) exhibit patterns of intensification and inhibition consistent with the typology (Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996).

In an effort to retain the conceptual base but render a more parsimonious model than the original, Schutz (1998) proposed that the strategies can be sorted along two dimensions: the *intention or goal* (trying to look good vs. trying to avoid looking bad) and the *manner or style* of the presentation (assertive to aggressive). A person might try to look good assertively using such strategies as ingratiation and self-promotion; a person might also try to look good aggressively by derogating his or her competitors, blasting the opposition, or criticizing the questioner.

The second question that has interested researchers is the question of whether certain characteristics of individuals influence the types of goals selected. Research in this area identifies several personality and dispositional factors associated with self-presentation processes, including public self-consciousness, self-monitoring, approval motivation, self-esteem, extraversion, and depression (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Such factors are typically treated as independent variables linked to the use of certain types of presentational strategies or encouraging the development of cross-situational presentational "styles." For example, some persons with generally competent self-images do not promote their accomplishments but instead promote the presence of some type of impediment to their success. Typically referred to as a "self-handicapping" strategy (Berglas, 1988), this preference seems to be linked to personality variables such as public self-consciousness (i.e., high desire for social acceptance and high concern for the opinions of others; Sheppard & Arkin, 1989) or affective states such as depression (Weary & Williams, 1990).

The third question stimulating research on self-presentation moves personality from an independent to a dependent variable, exploring the possibility that self-presentation choices, over time, begin to influence personality and dispositional factors. To the extent that social actors feel some investment in or commitment to their public performances, it follows that they might bring their private identities (e.g., values, beliefs, attitudes, and even behaviors) into alignment with these displays (Martin & Leary, 1999). Evidence from experimental studies suggests this is the case. Schlenker, Dlugolecki, and Doherty (1994) found that subjects who were asked to present themselves as sociable to an interviewer, compared with control subjects, later raised assessments of their own sociability, behaved more sociably in a subsequent situation, and recalled personal experiences that indicated they were more sociable. Strategic self-presentations thus produced both an attitudinal and a

behavioral carryover that influenced the actor's identity in a new situation with a new audience.

In sum, self-presentation refers to the process by which individuals, more or less intentionally, construct a public self that is likely to elicit certain types of attributions from others, attributions that would facilitate the achievement of some goal, usually to acquire social rewards or advantages, or to prevent loss of self-esteem when future failure seems probable. Although some scholars associate the terms *impression management* and *strategic self-presentation* with deception, manipulation, and self-aggrandizement (Buss & Briggs, 1984; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981), most recognize the elusive nature of authenticity (Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990) and view self-presentation as the necessary abstraction of complex personalities (Schlenker, 1986). Thus, although empirical work continues to explore the prevailing theme of how persons strategically construct a social image, the negative connotation of this process has been attenuated. Schlenker et al. (1994) argued that "the concept of self presentation must not be limited solely to occasions involving pretense, formality, and manipulativeness, because so doing fails to recognize the instrumental, performative aspects of social behavior in general" (p. 32). And after three decades of research on social anxiety, Leary (1995) concluded that "paying some degree of attention to others' impressions is healthy and adaptive" and "a moderate degree of social anxiety is a productive response to the awareness that one's public self is open to scrutiny by others" (p. 2).

## Situated Social Identity

The term *situated social identity* has its roots in sociology and its branches widely dispersed through sociolinguistics, linguistics, and communication. Consequently, the notion of "impression," as strategically linked to specific motives, is reformulated as the inevitable and fundamental "image" of self as a social interactant with an emphasis on the rights and responsibilities that attend that role. We present here the two prominent traditions associated with social identity: face and facework as proposed by Goffman (1959, 1967) and politeness theory as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987).

**Face and Facework.** Although Goffman recognized that individuals are the essential elements in social processes, he was not concerned with their distinguishing psychological qualities, but with their behavioral regularities as participants in the "orderly traffic" of social interaction (Goffman, 1967, p. 3). For Goffman, the fundamental organizing principle of social interaction was the alignment of social identities or *face*. Whether an interactant strategically presents an identity or not, others will form impressions and respond to those impressions. According to Goffman (1967, p. 5):

Every person lives in a world of social encounters . . . in each of these contacts, he tends to act out what is sometimes called a line—that is, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself. Regardless of whether a person intends to take a line, he will find that he has done so in effect. The other participants will assume that he has more or less willfully taken a stand, so that if he is to deal with their response to him he must take into consideration the impression they have possibly formed of him.

Consistent with this view of social framing, Goffman elaborated a “dramaturgical perspective” on impression management. He compared social encounters to stage performances in that social actors deliver their lines (i.e., perform in accordance with their social identity or face) and support their enactments with the necessary props, staging, and demeanor. Other interactants serve as coactors or audience members, depending on the episode (scene) being played out. Interactants derive information about the line other actors have taken by processing both the “cues given” (verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are amenable to conscious control) and “cues given off,” nonverbal behavior that is difficult to control (height, weight, blushing, vocal quality, etc.) Performances are prepared in the “back stage” (e.g., home or office) and enacted on the “front stage” (e.g., at work, in the classroom, and other social setting).

Unlike real stage plays, however, which have the advantage of repeated rehearsals, social encounters are emergent performances. As Goffman (1967) noted, although face maintenance is ordinarily taken for granted in the backdrop of social interaction, it may on occasion become the focus. Because one’s face is merely “on loan” to him or her from society, it can be lost when other interactants refuse to support it or when he or she acts in a manner inconsistent with a proffered identity. More specifically, Goffman (1967) noted that a person can be “out of face” (unable to construct an identity or find a line appropriate for a situation) or be in “wrong face” (having been discovered presenting a face to which one has no legitimate claim). Moreover, the loss of face for any one of the interactants in a scene tends to disrupt the performances of others who are present. In a sense, when one social actor “drops a line,” it is difficult to know where to pick up the scene.

Thus, the fragile nature of social identity requires social interactants to be familiar with communicative strategies that facilitate not only the enactment of the scene, but also the reconstruction of the scene if it breaks down. Goffman (1967) refers to these communicative strategies as facework moves and distinguishes them according to (a) their temporal placement in the episode and (b) their style. Facework moves that prevent face loss before it occurs are known as avoidant or preventive facework, and those that restore face after it has been lost are known as corrective facework. Those facework moves that are done with positive regard (deference) toward others involved in the interaction are known as cooperative facework, and those that are done to enhance or save one’s own face at the expense of another’s face are aggressive facework.

**Politeness Theory.** Brown and Levinson (1987) extended Goffman’s notion of face by arguing that face concerns are motivated by two fundamental human needs: autonomy and validation. These needs are represented as negative face and positive face. Negative face refers to an individual’s desire to be free of imposition and restraint and to have control over his or her own territory, possessions, time, space, and resources. Positive face refers to the desire to be included in activities and relationships and to have the attributes or qualities that one values be appreciated and approved of by people who are relevant to those attributes or qualities. Lim (1990; Lim & Bowers, 1991) offered a modification of Brown and Levinson’s concept of positive face, arguing that it represents two separate needs: “fellowship” face, which reflects the desire to be included and to be viewed as a worthy companion, and “competence” face, which reflects the desire to be respected for admirable qualities.

Brown and Levinson (1987) formulated politeness theory based on four assumptions. First, they proposed that threats to both types of face need are endemic to social

organization. Personal, social, and professional interdependence of individuals necessitates infringements on the face needs of both self and others when doing such routine speech actions as making a promise, giving directives, asking favors, making excuses for one's own behavior, challenging the assertions of others, and so forth.

Second, Brown and Levinson argued that these face-threatening acts (FTAs) are related in complex ways to face needs of both speakers and hearers. Some speech acts threaten primarily positive face (e.g., ridicule, insults, challenges) or primarily negative face (e.g., orders, advice, warnings), whereas some speech acts threaten both negative and positive face (e.g., complaints, interruptions, strong expressions of emotion, and requests for personal information; p. 67). Likewise, although some speech acts primarily threaten speaker's face (e.g., expressing thanks, offering an apology) and some primarily threaten hearer's face (e.g., criticism, accusation, directives), some acts threaten both speaker's and hearer's face. For example, a speaker who asks a favor of another person and prefacing the request with a promise of indebtedness ("I will owe you one if you do this for me") threatens the listener's negative face in asking the favor, as well as his or her own negative face by incurring a reciprocal debt. Finally, even acts that enhance a listener's positive face may incur a threat to his or her negative face; for example, a compliment (or a gift) shows regard for hearer's positive face but simultaneously threatens negative face by obligating him or her to show appreciation (whether sincerely felt or not) or to provide a comparable expression of regard.

The third assumption underlying politeness theory is a premise derived from Goffman: Given the "mutual vulnerability of face," rational agents should seek to avoid FTAs or employ strategies to minimize the threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 68). In any particular instance, the decision to avoid face threat or to employ various strategies to minimize face threat is contingent on three factors: (a) the desire to communicate the content of a message, (b) the need for efficiency, and (c) the desire to preserve face (one's own, other's, or both). Given these constraints, Brown and Levinson proposed a five-level hierarchy of politeness. The most polite option is to avoid the FTA entirely (i.e., *Don't do the FTA*) and is a likely choice when the desire to maintain face is stronger than the desire to communicate the content of the message. The least polite option is to forego all efforts at face saving (i.e., *Go on record baldly, without redressive action*). This is a likely choice when a speaker feels compelled to communicate the content of the message with maximum efficiency and/or feels that the level of face threat is very low.

Situated between these extremes are three other strategies that provide various degrees of balance in the need to communicate content and minimize face threat. To do an FTA *off record* through hinting and innuendo is a polite option because speaker and listener both have flexibility to capitalize on the ambiguity in the message (e.g., "Oh darn, I forgot to go to the bank again; I was going to get some lunch but I'm out of cash"). Of course, this level of indirectness also compromises the efficiency with which the content of the message is communicated. To achieve some degree of efficiency in communicating the message while expressing appreciation for the face needs of a listener, speakers can go on record but use redressive action. A speaker who frames an FTA in terms that show regard for the listener's positive attributes (as a friend, a valued other, a competent person) is using *positive politeness* (e.g., "I hate to burden you with my troubles, but you are the only one I can trust"). A speaker who frames an FTA in terms that minimize imposition on a listener's autonomy (e.g., use of his or her time, freedom of action or choice) is using *negative politeness* (e.g., "If you happen to have time in your schedule this week, I wonder if we could plan

a short meeting"). According to Brown and Levinson, using negative politeness is somewhat more polite than using positive politeness because (a) it is marked by the speaker's self-effacement and deference toward the hearer and (b) it does not presume that hearer would value the speaker's appreciation for the hearer's positive attributes and their relationship as positive politeness does.

In further distinguishing positive from negative politeness, Brown and Levinson noted that the scope of redress for negative politeness is very narrow and "restricted to the imposition itself," whereas the scope of redress for positive politeness is widened to include "appreciation of alter's wants in general or to the expression of similarity between ego's and alter's wants" (p. 101). Brown and Levinson argued that positive politeness is essentially an exaggeration of the ordinary linguistic behavior we might expect between intimates where "interest and approval of each other's personality, presuppositions indicating shared wants and shared knowledge, implicit claims to reciprocity of obligations or to reflexivity of wants, etc. are routinely exchanged." During most interactions between nonintimates, it is unlikely that a person can sincerely say, "I want your wants." However, he or she can exaggerate interest or approval to convey a sincere attempt to enhance or protect the other person's positive face.

The fourth assumption underlying politeness theory is that the severity of a face threat, or its "weightiness," for both speaker and hearer is determined by three sociological factors: (a) the *social distance* between the interactants (i.e., status, familiarity, closeness), (b) the *power* of the speaker relative to the hearer (i.e., authorized or unauthorized ability to assert one's will over the other), and (c) the *ranking* of the face threat (i.e., the cultural and personal estimate of how much threat an act entails). The ranking of threats to negative face depends on the type of goods or services required (e.g., asking for or being asked for a quarter vs. \$5), whether a legitimate obligation to comply exists (e.g., terms of employment), and whether possible enjoyment might be associated with performing the act. The ranking of threats to positive face depends on the discrepancy between a person's desired image in a given context (e.g., successful, attractive, generous, intelligent, competent, moral) and the image conveyed in the FTA.

Politeness theory has generated a good deal of research, particularly by scholars interested in its manifestation in the microlevel processes of conversational episodes. Although Brown and Levinson did not fully develop the point when they list politeness tactics, they were sensitive to the fact that face threats and politeness are both deeply embedded in the structures of conversational turn taking. They state, "some strategies for FTA-handling are describable only in terms of sequences of acts or utterances, strung together as outputs of hierarchical plans" (p. 233). At the level of the individual turn, it may appear that no FTA has occurred; however, at a level of coherence or implicature greater than the single turn, the FTA (or conversely the use of politeness) is evident. They illustrate with the situation of a supervisor who is displeased with an employee's slow rate of completing correspondence. The employer might pick up an unanswered letter from the desk and ask if it has been answered, to which the reply is "no." The employer then picks up a second letter and ask the same question, and then a third, and so on. Only the implicature derived from this sequence would lead the listener to "hear" the simple request for information as corrective and threatening to both the positive and negative face of the employee.

Scholarly work subsequent to Brown and Levinson has pursued the interactive nature of politeness processes in how social role categories and emergent social

identities interface within ongoing talk (Buttny, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These scholars have suggested that roles (e.g., family member, therapist, case worker, presenter) provide members with a broad, normative range of conversational and discursive resources, such as who asks the questions and who gives the answers. However, the norms and shared rules for what actions are problematic, who is blameworthy and with what magnitude gets interactionally worked out in different contexts and in the course of questions, criticisms, and accounts. For example, Tracy and Naughton (1994) analyzed how the formulation and reformulation of questions during an intellectual discussion in the academy function as identity support or identity threat devices. Similarly, Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki (1997) analyzed interviews conducted by clinical psychologists using the Quality of Life Questionnaire. These interviews revealed a pronounced tendency for the interviewer to grant negative face to clients by reformulating questions when clients hesitated so that they led more easily to an answer. Even more interesting (although problematic for issues of validity in using the oral questionnaire format), interviewers reformulated questions in such a way that they inevitably led clients to the more optimistic and positive face-enhancing responses.

Support for Brown and Levinson's formulation of politeness has been offered in the scholarly literature, both for its broad social implications (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1994; Holtgraves, 1997; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990) and its role in personal relationships (Metts, 1997). Nonetheless, beginning with Baxter's (1984) early study of compliance gaining, several interesting critiques of the theory have been proposed. One common criticism is that face threat and politeness are difficult phenomena to operationalize, particularly during ordinary interaction (e.g., Craig, Tracy, & Spisak, 1986; Penman, 1990, Tracy, 1990; Wood & Kroger, 1994). Critics argue that the *a priori* assignment of speech acts to a type of face threat and the assignment of linguistic and nonverbal elements to a politeness strategy may misrepresent the situated flexibility in how speakers actually accomplish politeness. A second, and perhaps more fundamental, concern is Brown and Levinson's treatment of positive and negative politeness strategies as linearly arrayed and mutually exclusive (e.g., Dillard, Wilson, Tusing, & Kinney, 1997; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998). In actual practice, speakers often consider positive politeness strategies to be more polite and often use both types of strategies within the same utterance. Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 17–22) acknowledged both of these concerns but maintain their confidence in the essentials of the theory.

## Clarification of Terms

The purpose of this section has been to provide an overview of the theoretical and analytic traditions that inform current definitions of impression management and the characteristics of its manifestation. Although differences in terminology are important aspects of these traditions, for the sake of continuity in the remaining pages of this chapter, we are forced to gloss these differences to some degree. We refer broadly to all public enactments that reflect awareness of one's own and others' image as subject to evaluation by others as impression management. Furthermore, when these enactments involve an image that is granted or assumed for the duration of a particular interaction, we use the term situated social identity and when a particular feature of this identity is salient, such as interactional (in)competence in supporting positive or negative face, we use the terms associated with politeness theory. As evident in the next section, the goals of interactants can also be distinguished according to

the feature of evaluation that they target. We shift our attention now to impression management goals.

## IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT GOALS

Consistent with other discussions in the literature (e.g., Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000; Hewes, Roloff, Planalp, & Seibold, 1990, Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989), we define skills as acquired abilities to use interpretative and communicative resources, which are manifested in observable behavior with some degree of regularity, to achieve desired outcomes. Although persons may not be motivated in all situations to use their abilities, when they do produce messages to effect some outcome, these messages will be more or less effective and appropriate, and thus more or less skillful (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). For our purposes, desired outcomes include accomplishing those goals relevant to creating, maintaining, and repairing both one's own impression, identity, or face and the impression, identity, or face of others. A particular goal may not be what others would consider constructive, as when a person intentionally uses aggressive framework to discredit another, but if the goal is reached effectively and the user believes the actions were appropriate in that time and place, then the behaviors are skillful.

Goals serve an important function in activating a set of behaviors and possible contingencies that are believed to be efficacious in obtaining that goal. According to Schrader and Dillard (1998), "goals provide the impetus for planning which, in turn, makes action possible" (p. 277). In the case of impression management, the sequence of goal-to-plan-to-action is difficult to characterize because of the ubiquity of impression management concerns. To clarify this point, we draw on the goals-plans-action model (GPA) articulated by Dillard and his colleagues (e.g., Dillard, 1990a; 1990b, Dillard & Schrader, 1998; Schrader & Dillard, 1998).

According to the GPA model, goals can be distinguished as primary or secondary based on their priority during a given episode. Primary goals are the fundamental motivation for an interaction sequence; they motivate the plan, which in turn generates communicative actions. For example, primary goals associated with influence attempts might include changing someone's opinion, soliciting a favor, giving advice, or terminating a relationship. Secondary goals are concerns that arise in pursuit of primary goals and constrain the choices that a person might make in achieving the primary goal. Secondary goals can also emerge as the primary goals of an interaction when, for example, a faux pas needs to be corrected or a relationship threat needs to be minimized. In addition, although not addressed in the GPA model, when an influence goal is to persuade others that a speaker is likeable, dependable, qualified, and so forth (e.g., a job interview), impression management is likely to be the primary goal.

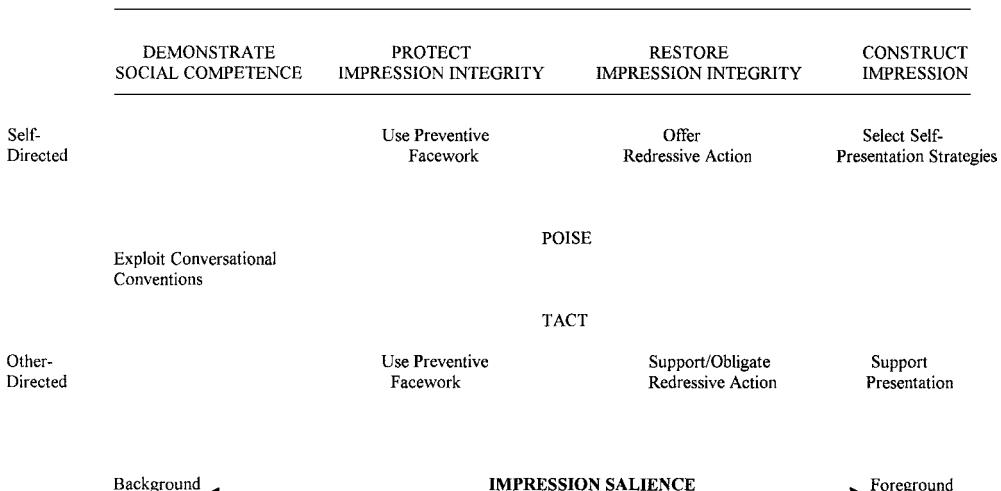
Dillard (1990a, 1990b) identified five types of secondary goals, at least when the primary goal is influence: identity goals, interaction goals, relational resource goals, personal resource goals, and arousal management goals. Interestingly, four of these five goals implicate some degree of impression management concern. Identity goals refer to the maintenance of ethical, moral, and personal standards; interaction goals refer to concerns about impression management and conversation maintenance; and arousal management goals refer to concerns for controlling displays of anxiety and, presumably, other detracting emotional states. Even relational resource goals may imply impression management to the extent that they involve concern for the worth, value, and inclusion of a partner (i.e., positive face). It is no surprise, therefore, to

learn that compliance-gaining plans, or strategies, often include messages (tactics) that appeal to the positive qualities of the target's social identity (e.g., Baxter, 1984; Leichty & Applegate, 1991; Levine & Wheless, 1997).

## A MODEL OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT GOALS AND STRATEGIES

As indicated in the previous discussion, impression management goals are pervasive, diffuse, and salient in various degrees during interactions. In an effort to organize our discussion of impression management skills, we preface it with a model of goals and their respective strategies based on the degree and focus of impression management concerns. For the sake of clarity, we identify four superordinate or metagoal categories that integrate and subsume the more specific interactional goals identified by previous scholars. These metagoals include (a) demonstrating social competence (maintaining smooth, routine interaction such that overt concerns for social identity do not surface), (b) protecting impression integrity (avoiding potential "incidents" that might affect some aspect of a situated identity), (c) restoring impression integrity (reestablishing the legitimacy or viability of social identity that has been damaged), and (d) impression construction (exhibiting behaviors, attributes, values, etc. that are intended to elicit particular attributions).

Within each of these goal categories, we list the principle strategy that functions to meet these goals. Consistent with previous research in impression management (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1959), we use the term *strategy* at this level to represent coherent behavioral schemas with the core feature of protection or affirmation of situationally relevant features of an image. We believe our use of strategy here is compatible with the notion of plans as described in the GPA model (i.e., "one or more schemes for goal attainment"; Dillard, 1990a, p. 48). In addition, we distinguish those strategies that are engaged primarily to address the impression concerns of self from those that are engaged primarily to address the impression concerns of another person. In the text that expands each of these broad strategies, we also refer to tactics or specific communicative actions that instantiate a strategy (Greene, 1990). Figure 9.1 illustrates our proposed model.



**FIG. 9.1. A model of impression management metagoals and strategies.**

The assumption that underlies the organization of this model is that on any occasion when people are interacting, there is some level of awareness that impressions are evaluated. Hence, the metagoals do not represent presence or absence of impression concern, but degree of salience and the feature of evaluation toward which messages and other actions should be directed. This suggests that enactment skills are predicated on the ability to recognize that impressions do matter and that they are negotiated in ways commensurate with the interactional context. We therefore begin our discussion of skills with a description of interpretive competence before moving to a description of enactment competence.

## IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT SKILLS: INTERPRETIVE AND ENACTMENT COMPETENCE

### Interpretive Competence

Interpretive competence refers to those abilities involved in identifying characteristics of social situations and interaction episodes that are relevant to impression management concerns—in a sense, constructing the social matrix that gives instructions for appropriate or expected identities (both one's own and others') and their enactment. Goffman (1967) used the term *perceptiveness* to describe this type of awareness: "If a person is to employ his repertoire of face-saving practices, obviously he must first become aware of the interpretations that others may have placed upon his actions and the interpretations that he ought perhaps to place upon theirs. In other words, he must exercise perceptiveness" (p. 7).

A person who is perceptive is able to recognize, integrate, and attend to the impression-relevant cues for both self and others inherent in social interaction. These cues include indicators of status and power (e.g., same/different, high/low); interaction tone (e.g., informal/formal, spontaneous/controlled); role requirements (e.g., parent, teacher, friend); types of episode(s) being enacted (e.g., seeking or providing emotional support; engaging in conflict; expressing sexual interest); the mood or dispositional qualities of others who are present; and relationship norms, rules, and expectations.

In addition, interpretive competence involves the ability to recognize those circumstances for which impression management has or should become the focus of the interaction (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Leary (1995, p. 49) suggested that this type of "impression awareness" is best conceived as a continuum from complete inattention to total attention. To illustrate, Leary characterized four points on an impression-monitoring continuum: (a) impression oblivion (lack of awareness that others might be forming impressions); (b) preattentive impression scanning (low level of impression monitoring while conscious attention is directed to other matters); (c) impression awareness (consciously aware that others may be forming impressions and thinking about the impressions others are forming); and (d) impression focus (all of the person's thoughts involve others' impressions of him or her and the possible consequences of the impression he or she is making). A comparable continuum could be said to exist for attention to the impressions of other persons.

Presumably, a person who exercises no perceptiveness (i.e., is oblivious to the fact that others are forming impressions of him or her), would be unwilling or unable to demonstrate even the most fundamental level of impression management skills. On the other hand, persons who are highly skillful communicators would have both

the motivation and the ability to move seamlessly along the impression-monitoring continuum by monitoring the emergent fluctuations in the salience of impression management concerns. He or she would be attentive to reactions of others and able to anticipate potential impression management faux pas. Of course, the frequency of embarrassment tells us that even highly perceptive people sometimes fail to monitor the flow of interaction, fail to manage their “props” adequately, and say inappropriate things. At these moments, the goal to restore face becomes relevant. We turn now to a discussion of communicative skills that are manifested in the strategies and specific tactics that enable interactants to restore impressions and accomplish the other impression management goals identified in the model.

## **Enactment Competence**

Before moving to the question of how people skillfully or unskillfully enact impression management strategies, we pause to offer two important caveats. First, when we refer to skillful impression management in the pages that follow, we attempt to substantiate our claims whenever possible by drawing on research that includes some type of evaluative assessment that might serve to index skill, such as ratings of satisfaction, effectiveness, or appropriateness for strategies or tactics. When such measures are not available, we rely on inferences that we draw from frequency data. Much of the impression management research concerns itself with what people are most likely to do in certain situations. We recognize that what is “typical” in terms of frequency is not necessarily isomorphic with what is skillful; however, we believe that persons who do not exhibit normative, and thereby expected or anticipated, lines of action are probably considered less skillful than those who do. If for no other reason, unexpected conversational moves and utterances probably arouse feelings of uncertainty and awkwardness in others as well as necessitate more cognitive and behavioral effort to coordinate conversational routines.

Second, we realize that even when research participants report knowledge of how a strategy is most likely to be enacted and provide ratings of tactic effectiveness, there is no guarantee that such knowledge is proficiently manifested in actual practice. The message tactics intended to implement an impression management strategy may be poorly executed for any number of reasons, including a limited repertoire of linguistic choices, poor timing or sequencing, cognitive overload, lack of cooperation from others, unexpected exigencies, and, as noted earlier, lack of motivation or perceived self-efficacy. In a more detailed explanation for the occurrence of “nonoptimal” performance, Greene and Geddes (1993) organized these intervening factors according to potential problems in various levels of the action assembly hierarchy.

With these caveats aside, we turn now to the question of how people enact impression management strategies. We use the model provided in Fig. 9.1 as the organizing framework, defining each metagoal, its relevant strategies, and the tactics that enact them.

## **Demonstrate Social Competence Metagoal**

The impression management metagoal that we have termed *demonstrate social competence* is, ironically, the desire to not have an impression management goal. That is, if this goal is met, impressions are formed and sustained far in the background of the actual “work” of the interaction, whatever that may be. Meeting this goal is seldom

problematic, but it does require a certain level of interactional skill. Specifically, it requires that people be able to enact the various tactics associated with the strategy that we have termed *exploiting conversational conventions*.

**The Strategy of Exploiting Conversational Conventions.** The distinction between *polite discourse* that demonstrates social competence and *strategic politeness* at the service of face needs is more a matter of degree than kind. As Craig et al. (1986) argued, positive politeness strategies are often “only slightly exaggerated variations of typical, friendly discourse” (p. 459). Indeed, Brown and Levinson (1987) made the point several times that positive politeness techniques are used for purposes other than redressive actions. They can function as “a kind of social accelerator” that signals to others (whether truly felt or not) a desire to decrease distance, increase familiarity, and move closer. Of course, facilitating polite discourse also requires that threats to other aspects of interactants’ social identity such as their autonomy be inconspicuously avoided. Many of the conventions employed during ordinary conversation function as face preservation moves, although they may not be strategically, or even consciously, enacted.

For example, the indirect speech acts allow interactants to issue directives in uneventful and cooperative ways (Searle, 1969). Speakers routinely preface their requests with what appear to be questions of ability, but are not literally so (Clark & Schunk, 1980). The question so common at meals, “Can you reach the salt?” appears to be a question of ability, but the felicity condition is clearly met by the presence of the salt directly in front of the hearer and so is “heard” as an indirect request for the salt to be passed. Exploiting the conventionalized function of this question enables a speaker to issue a directive without threatening face or sacrificing efficiency. Of course, if it should be the case that the salt is not within reach and still sitting in the kitchen, the request loses its conventionalized exemption and may be heard as a request to get the salt (threat to negative face), or a criticism if the listener was responsible for the salt not being on the table (threat to positive face).

Brown and Levinson (1987) used the term *conventional indirectness* to refer to polite discourse accomplished through the implicature derived from violations of Grice’s (1975) conversational maxims. When speakers adhere strictly to Grice’s cooperative principle, they produce messages that are relevant to the topic on the floor (relation maxim), truthful (quality maxim), only as long as necessary to make a point (quantity maxim), and clearly constructed without ambiguity (manner maxim). However, violations of these maxims are common and afford speakers the opportunity to demonstrate face regard without explicit facework. Brown and Levinson illustrated this process with a common exchange in which the quality maxim is violated:

Would you like a drink?  
Oh, no. Don’t bother.  
It’s no trouble.  
Well, then, okay.

Speakers also use violations of the quantity maxim to avoid appearing so abrupt as to be considered rude or brusque. In a field study of direction giving, Kleiner (1996) approached pedestrians and asked directions to specific locations. He found evidence of conventionalized indirectness in such microlevel structures as use of the generic “you,” the placement of “just” before the verb, and linguistic elaboration.

These variations yielded longer, but more frequent, indirect statements such as, “Well, um, the quickest way for you to go is probably to just go straight . . .” compared with shorter, less frequent, direct statements such as, “Go straight . . .”

Finally, speakers also violate the manner maxim when they wish to navigate the treacherous waters between obligated speech (e.g., to respond to a question) and negative consequences of revealing the full truth. A tactic sometimes referred to as “strategic ambiguity,” appears to be a skillful way to resolve the dilemma. It has been found helpful in maintaining organization harmony (Eisenberg, 1984) and inviting positive attributions from an audience in political contexts (Goss & Williams, 1973). Similarly, Bavelas, Black, Chovil, and Mullett (1990) argued that the somewhat broader tactic known as *equivocal communication* is a skillful (functional) conversational maneuver when unhinged from moral and ethical evaluations and examined as a tool to manage competing communicative constraints on achieving desired ends. No doubt, some desired ends are self-serving, but many are attempts to avoid the possible damage to others incurred by the full truth (Bavelas et al., 1990; Metts, 1989).

In sum, exploiting routine conversational conventions is a strategy that can be enacted by such tactics as using indirect speech acts and violating conversational maxims of relation, quality, quantity, and manner. In general, these appear to be skillful ways to keep social identity as taken for granted because they rely on the implicature generated by other participants, a smart move given the prevailing tendency for people to assume cooperation and agreement in conversation unless prompted to think otherwise. However, when no conventionalized avenue is available or when such conventions fail, the metagoal of protecting the integrity of a social identity emerges and requires the enactment of various types of more specific strategies that we have collapsed in the model under the broader strategy label “use preventive facework.”

## Protect Impression Integrity Metagoal

Sometimes interactants are able to anticipate that potential threats to established identities are imminent. To the extent that they are motivated to avoid these threats, they enact behaviors to prevent them or to minimize the probable damage. We have labeled this metagoal *protecting impression integrity* because it addresses the need to discern which aspect of one’s own or others’ impression is threatened and to respond skillfully to that threat. We refer to the global strategy that functions to meet this metagoal as *use preventive facework* after Goffman’s (1959) initial formulation but use the term *face* more broadly than Goffman. We also distinguish among tactics used when the strategy is primarily directed toward self from those used when the strategy is primarily directed toward others.

***Self-Directed Strategy: Use Preventive Facework.*** Interactants are often able to anticipate that some statement they are about to make or some action they are about to perform may reflect negatively on an otherwise satisfactory impression. Goffman’s advice to speakers in this regard was to control the content of conversation in such a way that face-threatening topics are avoided, to not make claims (i.e., offer a line) that one cannot sustain, and pay heed to the control of one’s “props” during social interaction (e.g., objects, clothing, etc.). Subsequently, other authors have proposed more specific tactics in the form of “prefatory” messages that instantiate the preventive facework strategy.

The two most common categories of prefatory messages found in the literature are *disclaimers* and *anticipatory accounts* (excuses and justifications). We use these labels to organize the following section but take note of the fact that some types of messages within the family of disclaimers and anticipatory accounts are found under other labels. For example, Tracy et al. (1996) observed several types of prefatory comments within their transcripts of oral requests and labeled them *self-directed redressive tactics*. Their examples slot comfortably into the more conventional categories of disclaimers, concessions, and excuses. The tactic *imply normality* by acknowledging the unusualness of the request ("I know this sounds crazy, but . . .") is a cognitive disclaimer. The tactics of *imply morality* by acknowledging personal fault ("This is all my fault") is fundamental to a concession, and *make excuses, appeal to temporary bad luck, mention one's efforts, emphasize reliability, and assert competence* are all examples of excuses.

Disclaimers (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975) are statements used to preface (frame) remarks that could reflect negatively on a speaker's knowledge, ability, character, and so forth. They include *hedging* (e.g., "I could be wrong, but . . ."), *credentialing* (e.g., "Some of my best friends are Catholic, but . . ."), *sin license* (e.g., "I never do things like this, but . . ."), *cognitive disclaimer* (e.g., "I know this sounds crazy, but . . ."), and *appeal for suspended judgment* (e.g., "Before you get angry, let me explain the whole situation"). In most circumstances, disclaimers are an effective means of positioning a speaker's comments as tentative and qualified; they signal a listener that the speaker recognizes the impression relevant attributions that might attend his or her comments and hopes to be exempt from these attributions. Of course, part of the enactment skill in using disclaimers is to be sincere (or at least appear to be so) to avoid attributions of manipulativeness, and to avoid excessive use so as not to invite attributions about one's personality (i.e., powerless, tentative, lacking self-confidence, etc.).

Although accounts (excuses or justification) are typically studied as mechanisms for restoring damaged impressions after a failure event (Scott & Lyman, 1968), they can also serve a person who wishes to provide an interpretive frame for observers before a negative event or action occurs. Anticipatory excuses are strategies available for speakers who wish to minimize their responsibility for a potential loss of face, such as anticipated poor performance (Snyder & Higgins, 1988). These excuses are a means of sustaining the integrity of one's impression in the event of a failure because observers (and self) have already been provided with reasons external to the social actor that explain his or her performance. This same strategy is found in the self-presentation literature under the label of self-handicapping as noted previously (Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Buttney, 1993).

The skill in using anticipatory excuses is recognizing when its advantage is outweighed by its cost. As Snyder and Higgins (1988) noted, anticipatory excuses are a useful means for people to protect their own self-esteem as well as the attributions that others might hold of them relevant to the pending failure event. The assumption is that observers will not feel inclined to threaten the actor's positive face with criticism for the failure event because he or she has established an external cause. Nonetheless, repeated use of anticipatory excuses, although minimizing attributions to ability or effort, can invite negative attributions about other aspects of the user's character or self-efficacy (Buttney, 1993; Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Snyder & Higgins, 1988).

A justification allows a person to accept responsibility for a behavior or an event but to reframe the meaning, severity, or consequences associated with it. In an interesting illustration of how the "meanings" of deviant behavior are reframed to prevent

possible face loss, Lewis (1998) examined the socialization process of exotic dancers. A series of interviews revealed, as might be expected, that exotic dancers learn how to manage impressions to create illusions and to manipulate their audience to achieve financial rewards. But in addition, learning how to become a successful member of the strip-club subculture included learning how to prevent their own self-reflected negative attributions by reframing or neutralizing their participation in exotic dancing. In general, strippers neutralized their participation through reliance on three forms of justifications: denying injury or harm (e.g., "We may take their money, and although sometimes it may be a lot, they are adults, they should know better. And besides, it's just money"; p. 61); condemning the condemners (e.g., "People may judge us and say that dancing is bad, but they seem to forget who it is we are dancing for—doctors, lawyers, sports figures. If it wasn't for them there would be no dancing—so maybe the focus is on the wrong people"; p. 61); and appeal to higher loyalties (e.g., "And I figured if it's a sin to take off your clothes and it's a sin to let your child starve, definitely, I would take care of the second one, and it's probably more normal"; p. 62). Thus, to deflect attributions that might be inferred about their moral character, exotic dancers reformulate their stage behavior as harmless, solicited by the audience, and necessary for survival.

***Other-Directed Strategy: Use Preventive Facework.*** Many of the same techniques that actors use to protect the integrity of their own social identity are used to protect the social identity of others. People gracefully steer a conversation away from topics that would be embarrassing to others, pretend not to hear a belch or burp, and ignore a rude comment or an accidental faux pas. For the most part, these "let it pass" tactics are examples of what Gross and Stone (1964) called the "giving the other fellow the benefit of the doubt" performance norm, and what Goffman (1959) called "tact," or the ability to graciously avoid threatening the enactment of others' impressions. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory builds on this work but provides a more detailed typology of preventive tactics.

As described previously, Brown and Levinson argued that interactants indicate regard for the two fundamental aspects of social identity, positive and negative face, by issuing face threatening acts "off record" through hinting and innuendo or on record through positive and negative politeness strategies. Table 9.1 summarizes the tactics that Brown and Levinson offered as illustrations for how positive and negative politeness, as well as off-record strategies might be enacted (adapted from Brown & Levinson, 1987).

A number of recent studies have applied politeness theory to various contexts in which communicators' goals entail threats to negative face, for example arguments, seeking compliance, giving advice, and criticizing a friend. Although we might expect that negative politeness would be the ascendant indicator of successful face maintenance in these situations, the findings encourage a more complex conclusion in terms of preventive skills. As noted previously, Brown and Levinson argued that many speech acts threaten both positive and negative face and that, of the two politeness strategies, positive politeness is the broader and more versatile strategy. As illustrated later in this section, in ordinary conversations between speakers of equal status, people seem to use and evaluate others as "polite" based on their skillful deployment of positive politeness tactics, even when the interaction is defined (by researchers) as threatening to negative face. In other words, when speakers demonstrate appreciation for the other as a worthy conversational partner and attempt to establish familiarity and common ground, threats to negative face descend

**TABLE 9.1**  
Politeness Strategies and Sample Tactics

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<i>Positive Politeness</i>	
Claim Common Ground	
Convey X is admirable/interesting	
Claim in-group membership with X	
Claim common point of view, attitude, opinions, knowledge, empathy	
Convey that S and H are cooperators	
Indicate S knows H's wants and is taking them into account	
Claim reflexivity through offers, promises, inclusion	
Fulfill H's want (for some x)	
Give gifts to H	
<i>Negative Politeness</i>	
Don't Presume or Assume	
Make minimal assumptions about H's wants	
Don't Coerce H	
Give H option not to act	
Minimize threat	
Communicate S's want to not impinge on H	
Apologize	
Dissociate S, H from the particular infringement	
Impersonalize S and H: Avoid pronouns 'I' and 'You'	
State the FTA as a general rule	
Redress other wants of H's negative face	
Give deference	
Go on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting H	
<i>Off-Record Strategies</i>	
Invite conversational implicatures (violate gricean maxims)	
Violate Relevance Maxim (e.g., Use hints, association clues, presuppose)	
Violate Quantity Maxim (e.g., understate, overstate)	
Violate Quality Maxim (e.g., Use contradictions, metaphors and rhetorical questions)	
Violate Manner Maxim (e.g., be ambiguous, be vague)	

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FTA = face-threatening acts.

S = speaker.

H = hearer.

inconspicuously into the background of relational entitlements. An illustration of the basis for this claim follows.

In a study of arguments, Holtgraves (1997) asked unacquainted college students who held different opinions on an issue (e.g., abortion) to discuss the issue for 10 minutes as they would with a friend or roommate. Not only did Holtgraves find strong evidence of hedging, expressing doubt, minimizing one's own opinion, and agreeing before disagreeing (yes, but) within these conversations, he also found that speakers who used the least positive politeness were rated by their interactional partners as more dominant and assertive. In an experimental study in which perceived politeness was used as the outcome variable, Dillard et al. (1997) used videotapes of an actor demonstrating four compliance-gaining situations (e.g., asking target a favor, giving target advice, asking target to share an activity, or changing target's opinion). Respondents were asked to rate the dominance (both verbal and nonverbal), the explicitness, the degree of argument (reasons), and the politeness (single item measure) reflected in the videotape. Results indicated that dominance (both its verbal and nonverbal dimensions) was a potent negative predictor of politeness; reasons given

and explicitness were much weaker, but positive, predictors of perceived politeness. The authors surmised that dominance cues may threaten both the positive and negative face of the recipient of a compliance-gaining message.

Taken together, these two studies suggest that although assertiveness in the discussions of unacquainted dyads and explicitness in the influence episodes of imagined relational partners (e.g., friends, roommates, neighbors) may not be considered a negative (impolite) outcome, being perceived as dominant probably is. Thus, consistent with Brown and Levinson, those who choose to be indirect in their assertions or to use positive politeness would be considered more skillful interactants when attempting to reach the conversational goal of persuasion. Apparently, cues that signal fundamental appreciation for other and signal friendly intent for the interaction and/or relationship provide an interactional frame within which negative implications for other's identity from specific face-threatening messages are moderated.

Wilson and Kunkel (2000) provided additional support for the utility of positive politeness as a framing strategy when threats to autonomy and competence are inherent in an interactional episode. In a study of the use of reasons in compliance-gaining episodes, Wilson and Kunkel asked college students to describe a recollected episode involving one of two types of directives: giving a friend or romantic partner advice or asking a friend or romantic partner for a favor. Regression analyses indicated that self-focused reasons were used by these respondents when they believed (at the time) that the request or advice would threaten the hearer's autonomy (negative face) or their competence (positive face) and when they believed that they might appear nosy or lazy (own positive face) when giving the advice or asking the favor. Examination of the self-focused reason categories provided by Wilson and Kunkel indicates that they are essentially examples of positive politeness that confirm both target's value and self's good intentions (e.g., expressing care or concern for the target; explaining why the speaker is concerned about the target; explaining why the target needs help; explaining why the speaker is making a request rather than doing it him or herself). We can reasonably infer, then, that in established relationships (as well as in the laboratory-created relationships mentioned previously), skillful speakers use the affiliative properties of positive politeness to soften the dual threats to positive and negative face inherent in these two types of directives. This inference, of course, presumes that frequency is an index of skill, an inference we believe is supported by the finding described in this section.

Goldsmith (2000) provided convincing evidence that skillful communicators take advantage of conversational structures to avoid threatening negative and positive face when they offer advice to a friend. Using sequences constructed from ethnographic observations of advice-giving conversations, Goldsmith asked respondents rate the degree of perceived threats to positive and negative face for 1 of 60 dialogues. Results indicated that face threat was less likely in those situations in which the recipient of the advice introduced the topic and where at least some discussion of the problem ensued before the advice was given. Goldsmith concluded that "being cautious about volunteering advice is one general principle for face sensitive advice-giving in this speech community" (p. 16). Thus, interactants appear to enact the preventive facework strategy not only at the level of specific utterances but also through tactical placement of their advice giving turns in ongoing interaction.

Finally, in one of the few studies to systematically examine nonverbal as well as verbal elements of politeness, Trees and Manusov (1998) investigated criticism in the friendship of female college students. Using written and videotaped conditions of a woman who feels neglected by her friend, they manipulated level of linguistic

politeness (bald on record and a combination of negative and positive politeness) and level of nonverbal politeness (aggravating, absent, and mitigating). Respondents rated the degree of perceived politeness in one of the several conditions. Results indicated that although linguistic features were the stronger cues for politeness ratings, mitigating nonverbal behaviors (e.g., pleasant facial expression, direct body orientation, touch, soft voice) increase perceptions of politeness when bald on record messages are used. In addition, aggravating nonverbal behaviors with linguistic politeness were perceived to be as impolite as aggravating nonverbal behavior without linguistic politeness. The authors concluded that nonverbal cues seem to function as indicators of politeness and provide “additional strategies for individuals wishing to mitigate or aggravate face threat” (p. 573). We turn now to a discussion of those situations in which politeness has not prevented threats to face, and interactants must restore the integrity of their impression.

## Restoration of Impression Integrity Metagoal

Restoration strategies and the tactics that enact them enable speakers to restore their impression through actions that effectively account for the element of identity that prompted negative evaluation. These elements might include a person’s moral character, his or her interactional or professional competence, his or her seeming disregard for the feelings of others, and so forth. According to Goffman (1959), corrective facework serves to counteract such incidents when their symbolic implications threaten face. The social order cannot be reconstituted until participants, or more accurately, identities, are realigned. We refer to the broad strategy that is used to accomplish this goal by a person whose own social identity has been compromised as “offer redressive action” after Goffman’s (1959) initial formulation. When the social identity of another person is in question, however, we believe that one of two general strategies will be enacted. We have labeled the first strategy *support redressive attempts* to indicate that in most cases, a skillful communicator would attempt to help another person regain the integrity of his or her social identity after it has been compromised. However, there are also occasions when people feel they need to elicit from others an explanation for untoward behavior, incompetent performance, and other actions that call a person’s established identity into question. In these cases, social interactions cannot continue until the aspects of identity in question have been redressed. We have labeled the second strategy *oblige redressive action*.

**Self-Directed Strategy: Offer Redressive Action.** Redressive actions function to restore one’s image and counteract possible attributions concerning one’s competence, moral character, abilities, motives, and so forth. The skillful person displays “poise” in these situations (Goffman, 1959) and thereby controls further collateral damage in an embarrassing or shameful situation. In other words, he or she remains composed (retains dignity) while offering the appropriate remediation, atonement, or explanation for an untoward act. If face loss is adequately compensated and the integrity of one’s impression is restored, social equilibrium is restored.

Typically, a ritualized sequence of four moves, known as the remedial interchange, suffices to restore the social order (Goffman, 1959, 1967; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Schonbach, 1980). The remedial interchange begins when a *challenge* (sometimes called a reproach) calls attention to some action that is inappropriate or inconsistent with a proffered identity. It may be verbalized (e.g., “You’re late again”) or expressed nonverbally (e.g., indications of surprise, an awkward silence, looking

angry or hurt). An *offering* is the attempt to repair face damage by expressing regret or providing an explanation. The most deferential and self-deprecating offering is an apology or concession; it not only acknowledges the severity of an offense but also assumes responsibility for the act, disparages the "bad self" who did the act, offers atonement or restitution, and promises more appropriate behavior in the future (Goffman, 1967; Schlenker & Darby, 1981). An excuse is a type of offering that provides an account for an offensive action by minimizing responsibility for the act. A justification acknowledges that the speaker is responsible for the act but focuses on minimizing the severity or consequences of the offensive act. Offerings may also consist of the expression of appropriate emotions such as embarrassment, shame, or guilt without an accompanying account. The remedial interchange continues when the offended person acknowledges and *accepts the offering*, and the offending person expresses *appreciation* or thanks. In ongoing dialogue, these four moves or "conversational slots" (Goffman, 1959) may not be adjacent and may be recycled several times (especially when an unsuccessful offering initiates another reproach). Nonetheless, the prevalence of this general pattern in ordinary conversation underscores its role as an episode schema onto which face restoration strategies can be mapped.

Efforts to understand the dynamics of the remedial interchange in actual practice have resulted in two general areas of investigation: how offerings, particularly accounts, are formulated (i.e., typologies of remedial actions), and how accounts are received (i.e., which are most effective, honorable, or acceptable in what types of situations).

With regard to formulations of offerings, a number of typologies of accounts and other remedial actions appear in the scholarly literature (e.g., Schlenker, 1980, Schonbach, 1980, 1990; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). Two that are widely recognized are the typologies for excuses and justifications generated by Scott and Lyman (1968) and Semin and Manstead (1983). Although they exhibit some overlap, they are clearly not redundant. We summarize both typologies in Table 9.2.

Investigations subsequent to Scott and Lyman (1968) and Semin and Manstead (1983) have added to the accounts family. For example, several scholars have found evidence that offending persons sometimes refuse to provide an account (refusals) or deny that the untoward event even occurred (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; Schlenker, 1980; Schonbach, 1980). Research on embarrassing predicaments (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1990; Cupach, Metts, & Hazleton, 1986) has identified additional types of offerings such as humor, remediation behaviors, offers of restitution, and escape from the scene.

Of particular importance for tactics that function as corrective facework is the observation that these tactics are necessarily embedded in particular contexts (Semin & Manstead, 1982). As Cupach et al. (1986) found in a two-part study of embarrassing situations, apologies and remediation efforts were equally likely to be used in both a loss of poise situation (spilling gravy) and an improper identity situation (being at a checkout counter without sufficient cash and forgetting one's checkbook). However, humor was much more likely to be used in the loss of poise situation than the improper identity situation, whereas a description (simple statement of the facts of the predicament) were only used in the improper identity situation. Surprisingly, excuses and justifications were rarely used in either case.

By contrast, in analyses of actual conversations that participants taped when they anticipated that they would be accounting for a failure event (e.g., not getting a job they expected to get or breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend), Manusov

**TABLE 9.2**  
Account Strategies

<i>Scott and Lyman (1968)</i>	<i>Semin and Manstead (1983)</i>
<i>Excuses</i>	
Appeal to accidents (it was unintentional, unexpected, uncontrollable)	Denial of intent (accident)
Appeal to biological drives	Denial of volition (fatigue, extenuating circumstances)
Appeal to defeasibility (claims that offender did not have full knowledge of the event and its consequences)	Appeal to mitigating circumstances
Scapegoating (passing the blame to others)	Denial of agency ("I didn't do it")
<i>Justifications</i>	
Denial of injury (no harm resulted)	Claim that effect has been misrepresented
Denial of the victim (no harm is done because victim deserved the act)	Appeal to principle of retribution
Appeal to loyalty (obligations or loyalties supersede consequences)	Appeal to values
Self-fulfillment	Appeal to higher authority
Condemnation of condemners (discrediting accusers)	Self-fulfillment
Sad tale (event is the product of unfortunate circumstances in the offender's life)	Appeal to utilitarianism (benefits offset harm)
	Appeal to the need for facework

(1996) found that speakers were more likely to provide excuses than justifications. This pattern held for both other-solicited accounts and self-initiated accounts, but the responses to other-solicited accounts were more fully developed in the number of elements offered, and they became increasingly complex when the initial formulation was not accepted.

These studies suggest that accounts are creative and adaptable tactics for speakers to use when identity has been compromised. Whether they prove to be a skillful technique or not, however, depends critically on whether they are accepted by others. Considerable attention has therefore been focused on the factors within problematic situations that affect the honorability, effectiveness, and acceptability of the tactics employed.

In terms of how offerings are received, one increasingly common approach to characterize the quality of an offering is to determine its placement on a continuum from mitigation (mitigating the effects of threatened or damaged identity) to aggravation (exacerbating the effects of threatened or damaged identity). Research on accounts and honoring of accounts provides some evidence that certain types of offerings are more mitigating and therefore more likely to be honored than others. Research using both hypothetical scenarios and confederate interaction conditions supports the conclusions that (a) concessions are uniformly considered to be mitigating, (b) excuses are considered more mitigating than justifications, and (c) refusals and denials are considered to be the most aggravating offerings (Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Gonzales, Pederson, Manning, & Wetter, 1990; Hodgins, Liebeski, & Schwartz, 1996; Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994). In addition, when excuses and justification are accompanied by concessions, they are more satisfying to hearers than when they are not (Holtgraves, 1989).

The conciliatory effect of concessions is obvious; they acknowledge the discomfort (pain, hurt, disappointment, anger) of the offended person, indicate that the offending person recognizes the legitimacy of norms for proper conduct, and assure other members of the social community that they can expect proper behavior in the future. They also signal that the offending person is willing to threaten his or her own positive face in accepting blame and his or her own negative face in making the effort to construct the apology rather than move more directly to an explanation. Recipients may view excuses as more mitigating than justifications because they uncouple bad behavior from intention or moral character, allowing the offended person to resent the act but forgive the actor. Recipients may view justifications as more aggravating than excuses because they attempt to redefine (or minimize) an event that the recipient already considers offensive.

Nonetheless, the utility of the mitigating-aggravating continuum to "locate" the effectiveness of any particular redressive action is problematic. As the typologies in Table 9.2 indicate, there are many tactics under the rubrics of excuses and justifications. For example, some excuses are almost as formulaic and routine as positive politeness (e.g., "I forgot to call yesterday. I've been so tired and distracted lately"). Other excuses, especially appeal to biological drives, are highly restrictive. Appeal to biological drive might be a reasonable excuse for smoking but not for rape. Moreover, even the supposedly mitigating effect of an excuse may be lost if it is not used judiciously. Arriving home late for dinner might be attributed to the external circumstance of a "traffic snarl," but repeated use of this same explanation under the same circumstances and to the same person will likely diminish its mitigating effect and perhaps become an insult to the recipient, who is expected to believe it yet again. The same sorts of arguments can be made about justifications. In short, the criterion by which offerings are judged as skillful is their responsiveness to the contingencies embedded in a particular context. Two contingencies that have received attention in the literature include the nature of the relationship between interactants and elements that characterize the severity of the offense.

Regarding the nature of the relationship, Manusov, Trees, Reddick, Rowe, and Easley (1998) found that when college students were assigned to a friend or a stranger as their conversational partner and one of them was told to introduce a "failure event" into the conversation, the types of accounts offered were responsive to the target relationship. Specifically, interactants offered more positive, external causes for their failures and less personal responsibility than they indicated in their private accounts when speaking to their friends. They offered more internal explanations and took more personal responsibility for failure events than they indicated in their private accounts when speaking to strangers. Moreover, when partners were strangers, they rated these accounts as more appropriate, effective, and coherent, perhaps because they were believed to indicate some degree of integrity and strength of character (p. 218). If we take some license with the terminology here and view external causes as excuses and internal causes justification, we can conclude that excuses (at least for minor events) work well with persons who already have a perception of someone's character, but justifications may be preferred if a person wishes to create the impression (for a stranger) of someone who takes responsibility for his or her actions.

Regarding the severity of the offense, three points are relevant. The first is so obvious it needs little elaboration. Some offenses are inherently more severe than others (Sheer & Weigold, 1995). Most embarrassing events are less severe than those that are morally reprehensible (Tangney & Miller, 1996). Those untoward acts that cause relatively little inconvenience to others are less severe than those that cause

a great deal. Those that violate an expectation (e.g., we usually see each other at the gym) are less severe than those that violate a rule (e.g., attendance is required). The termination of a relationship after 1 month is less severe than termination after 5 years. Clearly, both the type of account and the specific tactic within an account family needs to be suitable for the severity of the offense.

A second but less obvious feature of severity is whether potential recipients of accounts already have knowledge of the event and the offender's role in the event. If they do, then the option of reframing an event or denying one's behavior through the accounting process is not available to an offender. Assuming two similar offenses, one with the option for accounting and one without, the latter is more severe, at least from the offender's perspective. Research suggests that when this occurs, offenders either withdraw from the accounting process or react with excessive accounting. Both of these responses appear to be unskillful in the assessments of other people.

Hodgins et al. (1996) manipulated degree of blameworthiness in several types of scenarios and asked respondents what they would say. Respondents assigned to the high blame condition (e.g., they borrow a car and have to account to the owner who knows they had an accident while speeding) produced shorter accounts, more self-protective aggravating elements, less complex forms of mitigation, and more outright lies. This pattern suggests that when an offender sees few options to mitigate the consequences of his or her actions through concessions, or to redefine responsibility or event through excuses or justification, he or she simply refuses to attempt skillful identity management. At the other extreme, people sometimes react, unskillfully, by "overaccounting." When group participants were asked to rate other members of the group at the end of a semester project, those who had "loafed" (not carried their weight) during the semester and who also produced more accounting tactics (disclaimers, justifications, excuses, and apologies) were evaluated negatively by other group members (Mulvey, Bowes-Sperry, & Klein, 1998). Similarly, when Gendersen, Tinsley, and Terpstra (1996) manipulated level of performance and impression management tactics in videos of hypothetical appraisal interviews, they found that the use of apologies, excuses, and justifications for poor performance resulted in lower evaluations on such professional assessments as sales ability and product knowledge. The use of exemplification, ingratiation, and self-promotion, however, resulted in higher evaluations across all dimensions of professional competence.

Third, some offenses are more serious because they violate relational norms or rules and in so doing threaten the integrity of the offender's role enactment (e.g., as husband, friend, or coworker). In these situations, a justification may be more appropriate and effective than an excuse. In most romantic relationships, for example, a transgression such as sexual infidelity devalues the positive face of one's partner, calls into question the moral character of the transgressor, and threatens the legitimacy of his or her claim to the role of husband or wife. In such situations, an excuse that denies responsibility may be less effective than a justification that accepts responsibility but redefines the event to diminish its negative implications for partner and the primary relationship (e.g., "I admit I did sleep with Pat, but it meant nothing to me except to remind me how much I love you and value our relationship; Metts, 1994). Indirect support for this speculation is found in a study of sexual harassment in the workplace. Using hypothetical scenarios, Dunn and Cody (2000) found that when the accused man used justifications that accepted responsibility for his actions and appealed to a misunderstanding stemming from miscommunication and mistaken intentions, he was rated as more likeable, more dedicated to his job, and more competent than when using excuses, especially the biological imperative.

The several studies reviewed here suggest the need to exercise caution when slotting account types onto a mitigation-aggravation continuum. In fact, Sheer and Weigold (1995) questioned the utility of categorizing accounts and propose an alternative approach to the assessment of offerings. They present an “accountability matrix” consisting of three elements—prescriptions, identity, and event—and the degree of linkage among them. When the linkages are strong among all three elements, an actor is “maximally accountable.” But other linkages are possible. The first linkage is the *prescription–event link*. When the laws, rules, and imperatives that prescribe appropriate behavior for a given event are clear, this link is strong. When the laws, rules, and imperatives that prescribe behavior are unclear, ambiguous, or in conflict, this link is weak. Actors will sometimes target this link in an effort to weaken it: “I didn’t realize that we had such a rule in our relationship (department, office, etc.); you were never clear about what you expected.” The *prescription–identity link* refers to the degree to which individuals perceive themselves or are perceived by others to be obligated to follow the prescriptions. When the prescriptions apply unequivocally to a person, the link is strong. When there is some degree of ambiguity about whether the prescriptions apply or not, the link is weak. Actors will often attempt to weaken this link as well (e.g., “But I am an athlete, and I have to miss class every Friday when the team is traveling”). Finally, the *identity–event link* refers to the level of motivation and control that the actor is perceived to have over the event. This link is strong when the actor is believed to have committed the act with intent and knowledge of the consequences. This link is weak when there is reason to believe the actor did not intend the effect or could not have foreseen the consequences. Actors attempt to weaken this link by denying intent and knowledge of consequences.

Sheer and Weigold hypothesized that respondents would use offerings that targeted the weak links in scenario descriptions of failure events. The results were consistent with this prediction. When all linkages were strong, respondents simply told a lie. Otherwise, they used apologies and other types of offerings targeted toward the weak links illustrated in the scenarios. This suggests that skillful account providers do not simply produce any offering but, at some level of awareness, try to form offerings that are most plausible (likely to be honored) according to the accountability matrix.

In sum, no particular tactic has been found to restore identity across situations. However, in most situations, offering a concession is likely to be viewed as at least a first step in displaying restoration skill. Like positive politeness, it seems to be the “utility infielder” for accounting. Beyond that, however, what is skillful will be the tactic that best fits the situational contingencies. These same principles apply to using corrective facework in support of others’ efforts to manage a failure event.

**Other-Directed Strategy: Support Redressive Actions.** Observers may also help persons regain face by not calling undue attention to the failure event (e.g., civil inattention, Goffman, 1959), by drawing attention away from the event (diversion), or by minimizing the seriousness of the event when appropriate (e.g., humor). These tactics facilitate a person’s attempt to remain poised when they are “out of face.” Observers may neutralize the transgressor’s chagrin or shame through expressing empathy (“I know how you feel; I have done the same thing”) and may help remediate the situation through offers of support and advice tentatively given (“Maybe if you apologized to her”; Cupach & Metts, 1994).

**Other-Directed Strategy: Obligate Redressive Actions.** It is sometimes necessary to obligate redressive actions from another person because the identity on which the social order depends is not, for whatever reason, considered authentic or adequate. One way to obligate redressive action from another person is to induce intentional embarrassment so that he or she loses face, at least temporarily. Gross and Stone (1964) suggested that an embarrassed person is “incapable of continued role performance” (p. 13), and this is precisely why intentional embarrassment is sometimes the best approach to “purify” or “redefine” social identities before interaction can continue. As Bradford and Petronio (1998) argued, when using intentional embarrassment, the perpetrator sacrifices a concern for social appropriateness to accomplish the discrediting goal more efficiently. Although the perpetrator risks the chance of receiving the same treatment in the future, there are occasions when that risk appears to be justified.

A second way to obligate redressive action is to issue a reproach or challenge that initiates the remedial interchange. A reproach can be produced in ways that are more or less face threatening, and by implication, more or less skillful. For example, questions (rather than accusations), projected excuses (“You must have had trouble finding a parking space”), and projected concessions (“I suspect you already feel bad about this, but . . .”) are typically more mitigating than confrontational and accusatory formulations (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985).

As might be expected, when a remedial interchange is initiated by confrontational reproaches, the entire exchange is likely to be problematic. For example, during child custody mediation sessions, Manusov, Cody, Donohue, and Zappa (1994) noted that reproaches tended to be in the form of rebukes rather than questions and to elicit aggravating accounts, which in turn were not often honored. Although the sessions in which agreement was reached had more accounts than those where agreement was not reached, the authors believe that the pattern of mediator interruption after aggravating reproaches in the nonagreement sessions may have contributed to this unexpected finding.

Even if higher status permits the use of more aggravating reproaches, the consequences may be more negative than desired. In a study of employees’ descriptions of an episode in which they had been reproached by a manager for some type of poor performance in the workplace, Carson and Cupach (2000) found that as reproaches became more aggravating (i.e., polite, bald on record, aggravating, very aggravating), employees’ perceptions of interactional fairness, assessments of manager’s communication competence, and overall satisfaction with the episode decreased and feelings of anger increased. The authors speculated that because the use of aggressive reproach tactics contributed to negative evaluations of the manager and to employee discomfort, the use of aggressive reproaches in the workplace may affect the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships and may encourage employees “to complain to others and potentially spread discontent” (p. 229).

## Summary

The three metagoals discussed to this point, (a) demonstrate social competence, (b) protect impression integrity, and (c) restore impression integrity, have been presented as desired outcomes accomplished within the norms and constraints of social interaction. Unfortunately, space limitations preclude a discussion of how these goals are accomplished outside of face-to-face interactions, for example, when public figures, industries, and corporations use media as a means to prevent anticipated

image damage or to reconstruct images following an incident, but, we believe that the same principles apply. We also believe that the principles guiding the fourth metagoal, impression construction, are applicable across a range of circumstances, particularly those for which an impression has not previously been constituted but is expected to be the primary goal of the occasion. We turn now to the strategies and tactics used to accomplish that goal.

## **Impression Construction Metagoal**

When discussing modesty, Averill (1986) made an astute observation: "The trick . . . is to be proud without being boastful, arrogant, pompous or conceited; but also without donning a false mask of humility. There are heuristics for pride; and from every indication, they are as difficult to master as the heuristics for chess" (p. 107).

The dilemma Averill identifies is particularly evident in those situations where evaluation potential is high and distribution of rewards is based on evidence of merit (Green, 1994). The means by which people display or communicate evidence of merit is the question that underlies research relevant to the impression construction metagoal. Although it is safe to say that people will attempt to achieve this goal by selecting a self-presentation strategy that will elicit desired attributions, each of the self-presentation strategies (self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, supplication, and intimidation) provides certain benefits and incurs potential costs. Thus, being skillful in meeting the impression construction metagoal depends on two factors: the ability to enact an appropriate self-presentational strategy while reserving enough cognitive resources to manage other features in the environment. We illustrate this premise below by highlighting contexts in which selecting a self-presentational strategy and supporting the selection of others are both salient: employment interviews and organizational performance.

**Employment Interviews.** A number of studies have focused on the context of job interviews as an impression management arena because, in most cases, little prior knowledge of the applicant's competence has been provided. To prove to the interviewer that one is capable, an applicant must "package" relevant qualities in a presentational form that is maximally efficient but not self-aggrandizing (Frink & Ferris, 1998). Most research in this area converges on various tactics from the self-promotion strategy as most likely to be skillful, for example, entitlements (verbally taking credit for some positive event), enhancements (focusing attention on some positive or admirable traits that the interviewer claims to have), and focused self-promotion (references to the applicant's knowledge, skills, and experience as it relates to the position; Delery & Kacmar, 1998). Furthermore, Ralston and Kirkwood (1999) reminded us that these tactics will be most effective when the interviewer moderates impression support by using information-seeking tactics that distinguish nonauthentic ("playacting") presentations from legitimate self-assessments. These authors suggested that a skillful interviewer will ask questions that require applicants to demonstrate, rather than simply assert, their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Although we will return to the issue of gender differences in the next section of this chapter, a study by Powers and Zuroff (1988) is relevant here because it demonstrates that the use of self-promotion tactics may be a "double-edged sword" for women. When women used them, evaluations of their competence and hirability substantially increased, but their social attraction ratings decreased. At first glance, this may appear

to be a small tradeoff because job offers would (logically) go to the more hirable and competent person. However, if all things are equal, a man whose social attraction (likeability) is not influenced by his attempts to demonstrate his qualifications may be selected over a woman who is perceived to be less socially attractive (likeable). In addition, Powers and Zuroff suggest that normative pressure may discourage women from using self-promotion tactics and thereby limit their ability to engage in a diverse repertoire of impression management tactics.

When impressions matter most, cognitive attention may become so focused on impression construction that attention to environmental information is short-circuited. Research by Nordstrom, Hall, and Bartels (1998) illuminates this problem and expands its implications to the interviewer as well. They stated that “a person may become so immersed in his or her own self-regulatory activities that the ability to draw accurate inferences about social partners is limited because of the lack of necessary cognitive resources” (p. 477). In their study of interviewers and interviewees, Nordstrom et al. found that the amount of cognitive load the interaction participants were placed under (e.g., formulating questions and answers; revising answers while trying to appear knowledgeable, competent, and poised) affected their ability to function in interview situations, particularly their ability to make accurate perceptions of the other person. Thus, while both interviewers and interviewee are focused on the management of impressions, the interviewer may fail to accomplish the goal of making discerning judgments about actual competence, and the interviewee may fail to reveal abilities in his or her arsenal that would be appropriate to the organization (Ralston & Kirkwood, 1989).

**Organizational Performance.** Once a person has obtained a job, the impression management tactics that he or she might use will necessarily be constrained by the fact that workers and supervisors have firsthand knowledge of his or her knowledge, skill, and work ethic. If a person is performing well, he or she needs to little to strategically bolster an established impression. Much like the skills of demonstrating social competence discussed previously, skills that simply maintain a positive impression and keep identity management issues in the background are all that are needed. When performance has not been satisfactory, however, an employee must move more strategically toward repairing or constructing an impression of competence. A skillful employee will use tactics that address presumed areas of weakness. According to Bolino (1999), for example, people who are interested in presenting themselves as committed to the organization, especially if that aspect of their employment identity has been questioned, will use exemplifiers such as arriving to work early and leaving late. If one’s talents or knowledge seems to be in question, self-promotion tactics that facilitate opportunities to showcase one’s abilities will be used, for example, volunteering for special assignments, asking to be appointed to special projects, or helping coworkers. Finally, although there is a thin line between self-handicapping and supplication, when a person’s employment identity seems to be marked by overconfidence, arrogance, or apparent disregard for others, the use of supplication can be used to appear modest and self-effacing and to show regard for the talents of coworkers.

Two impression management techniques that are perhaps more constrained by the status-power structures of organizations are intimidation and ingratiation. As Rosenfeld et al. (1995) observed, the supervisor’s control of “subordinate’s salary, performance evaluations, and promotions often creates an atmosphere of intimidation” (p. 52). Although a supervisor may want to be liked, it is not essential to his

or her job performance. On the other hand, in cases in which employees have little power and access to resources may depend on supervisors' largesse, being liked is an important goal and tends to encourage ingratiation. Ironically, employees who use ingratiation tend to be rated high on interpersonal competence but lower on task competence compared with employees who use ingratiation less (Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991).

## Summary

Our discussion to this point has illustrated the cognitive and communicative resources available to persons who pursue impression management goals, organized here under the general headings of metagoals. We have considered the strategies and related tactics that allow persons to enact general social competence as well as to meet the more problematic goals of protecting both one's own and others' impression integrity and restoring them when threatened or damaged. Finally, we examined the strategies and tactics that enable a person to construct impressions in situations where impressions are highly salient. We turn now to a brief discussion of how personality variables and gender exert influences on impression management processes and thus become relevant to skills training.

# INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

## Personality Variables

There is no doubt that individuals differ in their impression management skills, whether as a result of dispositional willingness to engage in the process, or as a result of differential abilities to enact successful tactics. Instruments that assess impression management competence tend to reflect one or both of these conditions.

Willingness to engage in the process of impression management depends on several factors: awareness that such impressions matter, feelings that one can be efficacious when engaging in management processes, willingness to risk failure in one's attempts, and so forth. A number of measures tap one or more of these dimensions, and studies have employed these measures to determine the relative contribution of various constructs to impression management outcomes. Effective skills training should be able to target these various aspects of how individuals construe and perform in social or professional contexts.

**Awareness.** Measures of generalized sensitivity to and regard for one's public identity (e.g., social awareness, public self-consciousness, and autonomy orientation) indicate that people differ in the extent to which they find others' opinions relevant to their goals and actions. High scores on these various measures of "other awareness" and "external orientation" are positively correlated with behavioral measures of mitigating facework and complexity of accounts in problematic situations (Hodgins et al., 1996; Sheldon, 1996), as well as with the tendency to blush during embarrassing situations. One's own dispositional tendency to feel embarrassed (embarrassability) is also highly correlated with the extent to which one feels empathic embarrassment for another person caught in a predicament (Miller, 1987), and dispositional empathy is correlated with impression management efforts on behalf of other people (Leary, 1995; Sheldon, 1996).

Self-awareness is the ability to monitor and evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of one's own behavioral cues in a given situation. Vorauer and Miller (1997) described this awareness as self-reflexive knowledge about how we are "coming off" to others. They proposed that some persons are unaware of how they appear to others because they are (a) unaware of the nonverbal signals (smiling, frowning, leaning, etc.) they are sending, and (b) they are blinded by their own self-knowledge and thus unable to consider that their overt signals might be inconsistent with their internal self-perception. In two studies testing these assumptions, Vorauer and Miller found that persons low in self-esteem were not only unaware of their own nonverbal behaviors but also unaware that their behaviors actually matched the target's self-presentation (e.g., positivity). This latter finding is consistent with other self-esteem research showing that low-self-esteem communicators are not rated by others any less competent as a conversational partner than high-esteem communicators, but that they describe themselves as less capable of enacting appropriate communication (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, p. 69). Indeed, when faced with cues of social evaluation, persons with low self-esteem reduce their effort, whereas individuals with high self-esteem become even more self-assertive (Schlenker et al., 1990). These findings suggest that persons with low self-esteem have a commensurate level of low perceived self-efficacy, a key element in social anxiety.

**Social Anxiety.** Although people believe that impressions are important in a particular situation and are highly motivated to manage their presentation, they may not have confidence in their ability to accomplish this goal. According to Leary and Kowalski (1995), the combination of high impression salience and low perceived efficacy gives rise to social anxiety. Furthermore, research suggests that some people feel anxious across almost all situations where other persons are present (trait anxiety), whereas some people feel anxious only in certain situations (state anxiety). (We discuss training efforts to reduce the very common performance anxiety known as public speaking anxiety (PSA) shortly.) When social evaluation is highly salient but perceived efficacy is low, the resulting anxiety leads people to enact self-presentational strategies that will inoculate them against anticipated failure. Low self-esteem and high social anxiety individuals often employ self-handicapping and "sandbagging" tactics to avoid asserting an impression that might later be threatened (Gibson & Sachau, 2000).

**Self-Monitoring.** Snyder's (1974) self-monitoring scale has been used successfully as a predictor of breadth, flexibility, and enactment of behavioral skills associated with impression management behavior, particularly when social situations are complicated or problematic (e.g., Hewes et al., 1990; Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Snyder, 1987).

In a study of compliance-gaining situations, for example, Ifert and Roloff (1997) found that when type of obstacle was manipulated (e.g., unwilling or unable to comply), individuals scoring high on both dimensions of self-monitoring—sensitivity to the expression of others and ability to modify self-presentation—were better able to adapt their plan. Specifically, when the obstacle was unwillingness to comply, persons high in both dimensions of self-monitoring not only employed facework tactics to mitigate face threat but also generated additional influence messages. In contrast, persons low in these dimensions seemed to use facework as a mechanism "to politely signal disengagement from the compliance attempt" without making further efforts to gain compliance (p. 64). This pattern may reflect a more microlevel manifestation of self-handicapping tactics.

## Gender Differences

The research on gender differences in impression management practices is extensive and diverse. When attention is centered on leadership, that is, those men and women who have risen to positions of power and authority in professional domains, meta-analyses suggest that men and women exhibit similar communication styles (e.g., Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Wilkins & Anderson, 1991). On the other hand, studies of workplace interactions reveal communication differences consistent with gender role expectations for men and women. These studies suggest that women and men absorb cultural expectations for gender specific behaviors that encourage female modesty and male assertiveness and then enact impression management tactics consistent with these expectations (Ferrari, 1991). Women use more modest and relationship-oriented self-presentational strategies (e.g., ingratiation) than do men (Chafetz, 1990; Fairhurst, 1993) and use less assertive and fewer self-promoting strategies than men, but men use more self-promotion tactics than do women (Gould & Slone, 1982). Women also are more likely to receive mitigating accounts than are men, at least in the workplace. In a study of recalled instances of managers refusing a request, Tata (1998) found that more mitigating accounts (concessions and excuses) were received from female managers than from male managers and that more mitigating accounts were given to female employees than to male employees. In addition, evaluations of female managers who used aggravating accounts were less favorable than for male managers who used aggravating accounts, but evaluations did not differ when accounts were mitigating. Apparently, female managers are not expected to violate cultural norms of politeness, and when they do so, they are perceived negatively.

Research on social and personal interactions indicates a similar deferential pattern in women's impression management tactics. Women respond to others who are presented as vulnerable (e.g., having received a low grade point average) by minimizing self-promotion in their impression management, whereas men do not adjust their presentations to vulnerable others but do become more boastful when talking with a successful other (Brown, Uebelacker, & Heatherington, 1998; Heatherington, Burns, & Gustafson, 1998). Dolgin and Minowa (1997) found that women disclosed negative information about themselves to their close friends ("show their blemishes"), whereas men were more likely to "put their best foot forward" and "brag even when talking to their close male friends" (p. 376). Women offer more mitigating face redress to others than do men and more often employ face-saving strategies that threaten their own face to show regard for the relationship and the face of the other person (Hodgins et al., 1996). Even during ordinary conversation when the primary goal of interactants is to demonstrate social competence, men used more disruptive or disconcerting questions that challenged a speaker's narrative and requested details that are irrelevant to the story, whereas women provided more overtly supportive feedback and responses that facilitated elaboration of the narrator's story (Holmes & Stubbe, 1997).

Taken together, these findings suggest that women face a more acute dilemma in managing their impressions compared with men. They are expected to be skillful, gracious, and face preserving; they are expected to be modest in self-presentation and to ingratiate. These are also aspects of a powerless communication style, and unfortunately, when a more powerful and self-promotive style is exhibited, women are seen to be competent but often less likeable (Gardner, Van Eck Peluchette, & Clinebell, 1994). A useful direction for training is to educate supervisors and

employees in the factors that influence attributions based on manifest impressions. We turn now to a more detailed discussion of skill training options.

## SKILL TRAINING

If nothing else is obvious at this point, the enormous scope and complexity of impression management practices in everyday life should be. Given its role in the enjoyment of ordinary conversation, in the strategic construction of professional identities and everything in between, attention to how people can be educated and trained to do it better is essential. Fortunately, scholars and practitioners are becoming increasingly aware of this need. Although writers may not always use the terminology employed by theorists cited in this chapter, the implications for impression management skill training are evident with a bit of translation. We have divided this section into two areas: The first represents implications for interpretive skills, the second implications for communication practices.

### Interpretive Skills: Educating Practitioners

We noted previously that, at the very least, skillful impression management requires a person to recognize that impression management is more or less salient during any given situation. Two key elements to this type of competence is recognizing situational cues regarding status differences, levels of formality, and the like, as well as recognizing when other persons are likely to be evaluating one's competence, demeanor, character, blameworthiness, and so forth. A person who is skillful in this area would experience levels of arousal that correspond to increasingly formal and evaluative contexts and be able to use arousal as a motivational resource to focus attention on planning and action. A person who is less skillful would feel no increased level of arousal that might motivate concerted effort to manage impressions, or, at the other extreme, would feel such intense arousal that despite high motivation to perform well (or perhaps because of excessive motivation to perform well) would have impaired cognitive abilities to plan behaviors or to execute them well. We address both of these concerns: educating social actors to increase impression awareness and educating social actors in how to control excessive awareness.

***Educating to Increase Impression Awareness.*** What might be done to enhance interpretive abilities for those who are simply not aware of or attentive to impression management cues? Providing information about the principles of situated impression management is necessary. For those who might be aware of the basic principles of impression management, but remain unconvinced that it is worth their time or effort, a convincing argument for the personal and professional advantages of skills in impression management is necessary. Educational articles in professional and trade journals tend to target both of these needs.

One of the most explicit articulations of impression management theory for managers is offered by Gardner (1992), aptly titled, "Lessons in Organizational Dramaturgy: The Art of Impression Management." Gardner defined dramaturgy, impression management, and each of the key components: the actor, the audience, the stage, the script, the performance, and the "reviews" (consequences or outcomes). Through case study examples, he illustrated each component as they might affect and be affected by ingratiation, self-promotion, intimidation, exemplification, and supplication. He offered guidelines for organizational audiences, such as, "Be aware

of your personal characteristics and the situational features (e.g., status, power and novelty) that make certain types of impression management strategies more likely," and "Minimize personal, situational, and organizational features that foster undesirable performances" (e.g., when task performance is ambiguous and resources are scarce, superiors are likely to encounter ingratiation as a means to secure resources) (p. 44). Gardner closed with guidelines for organizational actors, such as, "Be aware of your impression management behavior and the image you project," "Size up your audience and the situation," "Carefully choose a desired image and present yourself accordingly," but recognize the dangers of the strategy you have chosen, and never let a desired impression override your personal identity and integrity (p. 45).

With a similar intention to ground practice in theoretical understanding, Spiers (1998) addressed the nursing profession. She argued that

Face work theory provides a means of understanding the context of interaction and the ways in which a nurse and client choose speech patterns based on perceptions of face needs, face threats, and contextual features of power, culture, and social distance. . . . Nurses are often effective in practice due to their intuitive understanding of face work, but this is not explicitly recognized in current research and education. (p. 25)

Spiers continued with a thorough presentation of facework theory, politeness theory, politeness strategies, the dilemmas of competing face goals, and embarrassment. In short, she presented a fully developed explanation of facework theory for those nurses who do not have an intuitive understanding of it and then built a convincing case for the relevance of this material to the nursing profession.

Finally, instruction in how to receive the impression management efforts of others has been advanced (Ralston & Kirkwood, 1999), particularly when gender role expectations and violations of these expectations may influence attributions (Rudman, 1998). To the extent that men and women, as social actors, are judged differently when displaying the same behaviors, and to the extent that men and women, as observers or evaluators, judge the same behavior differently, education focused on these attributional processes are necessary. In response to this need, Kacmar and Carlson (1994) used impression management theory and research to identify positive and negative outcomes associated with other-focused and self-focused tactics that women often use.

***Educating to Control Excessive Impression Awareness.*** The second concern is how to educate persons who are so acutely sensitive to evaluation potential and impression salience that they effectively shut down processing and performance abilities. In these cases, the interpretive goal is to reframe anxiety-producing events so that they are less fearsome. This is typically done through a combination of anxiety assessment, systematic desensitization, and practice in producing the behaviors that are associated with skillful management of impressions (Gambrill, 1995; Hopf & Ayres, 1992; Leary & Kowalski, 1995; McCroskey, 1972).

In addition, a particularly effective approach to reframing is to encourage anxious individuals to "demystify" the anxiety-producing situation. This approach has met considerable success in reducing public speaking anxiety. For example, Harvey, Clark, Ehlers, and Rapee (2000) found that college students reported less anxiety after actually seeing themselves giving a speech on videotape; however, this effect was significantly increased when students were cognitively prepared in how to view themselves (i.e., to "objectify" their performance and evaluate how they would look to a stranger, not how they would feel).

Motley and Malloy (1994) compared the effects of two treatment conditions and a control and placebo condition of reported public speaking anxiety. The first treatment condition was systematic desensitization conducted with audiotapes. The second treatment condition (communication-orientation motivation, COM) involved the reading of a booklet presenting an alternative view of public speaking (i.e., it is not a novel and unfamiliar situation, but comparable to ordinary conversation; it does not require unusually formal, artificial, or unfamiliar behaviors; the audience is not consciously scrutinizing the speaker for violation of delivery rules; success does not depend on flawless delivery, and failure is not the likely outcome; p. 52). Motley and Malloy found that although systematic desensitization did significantly reduce self-reported public speaking anxiety (compared with the placebo and control conditions), information that reframed the situation (COM) was significantly more likely than systematic desensitization to reduce self-reported public speaking anxiety. Thus, it appears that cognitive reframing of anxiety producing events is a useful approach in reducing anxiety.

## Communicative Resources: Enacting Impression Management Goals

Despite the call for skill training based on impression management theory that is evident in the professional writings reviewed at the outset of this section, few articles respond explicitly to the call. There are, of course, training programs on social or communication skills designed for special targets. For example, young adults who are apprehensive about dating are instructed in how they might facilitate engaging conversation, and then dates are arranged so that these skills can be practiced (MacDonald, Lindquist, Kramer, McGrath, & Rhyne, 1975). And at-risk female juvenile offenders exhibit significant improvement in their social skills following instruction and practice in cooperative groups (Rutherford, Mathur, & Quinn, 1998). Our point here is not that efforts to improve impression management skill are not available, but rather that they are not systematically derived from theoretical premises. Although the target skills are reasonable (conversational questions designed to involve others, positive comments to or about others, and positive self-references), they are not connected to the principles of impression management that they instantiate (i.e., positive face regard for others and self). Without the fuller understanding of why these skills are desirable in social activities and how they function, it is less likely that persons who receive training will generalize skills across contexts such as the classroom, the family, and professional interactions.

Likewise, despite the mounting evidence in the medical profession that satisfaction for doctors and patients is higher, health outcomes more positive, and malpractice actions lower when doctors are skilled in communication (Meryn, 1998), suggestions for training and communication practices are not guided by theoretical principles. For example, surveys indicate that patients are more likely to sue when they feel ignored, deserted, misunderstood, or devalued (Lefevre, Waters, & Budetti, 2000), so doctors are advised to refrain from displaying impatience, to ask questions frequently during a consultation, to listen actively, to show sympathy and support when delivering bad or sad news, and not to criticize a patient or family who become “overemotional” (Fallowfield, 1993; Jason, 2000; Meryn, 1998). In essence, doctors are asked to moderate their autonomy needs (negative face) and give attention to the validation needs (positive face) of the patient (see Fallowfield, 1993; Jason, 2000; Meryn, 1998). An understanding of the underlying principles of politeness theory would do much to provide background and appreciation for the functional utility of these tactics.

Even more distant from theoretical underpinnings are the many articles in trade and professional journals that offer “advice” and “tips” for better communication in various occupational contexts. Again, the terms *politeness*, *facework*, and *self-presentation* are seldom used (at least not in the technical sense), but these concepts are clearly invoked. We illustrate with selected examples, sorting them loosely by the link between the metagoals we identified in Fig. 9.1 and the goal as stated in the chapter.

**To Be a Competent Communicator.** The goal of being a competent communicator across a variety of contexts is commonly advanced in professional and trade journal articles. It echoes one of the metagoal, demonstrate social competence, in that it is characterized by instruction in how to conduct conversations in such a way that face concerns do not surface. As is illustrated by the “tips for small talk” and “tips for good listening” we list below, readers are encouraged to employ the tactics of positive face support by showing interest and establishing common ground and to avoid threats to both type of face by avoiding contentious or personal topics, rebuttals, and interruptions. In short, these tips emphasize conventional polite discourse. Although many people have developed interaction scripts that include these tactics, the fact that so much professional attention is given to them and the fact that employers continue to ask for more training in this area suggests that they are not implemented habitually by all adults. Following are several tips taken from articles on small talk and good listening (Lanier, 1998; Salopek, 1999; Usheroff, 2000).

- Ask open-ended questions (e.g., “How did you get started in your business?”).
- Give verbal cues of interest and support. Comments like “oh,” “uh-huh,” and “give me an example” encourage people to keep talking.
- Don’t be a conversation killer. The “monopolizer,” “FBI agent,” and “doesn’t play the game” are a few conversational approaches guaranteed to kill a dialogue.
- Avoid contentious topics such as religion, politics, and gender issues, and avoid personal questions such as age, weight, and background.
- Allow silence. Don’t depend on rebuttal to fill the space.
- Monitor your body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal signals to make sure they don’t seem negative.
- Listen between the words, searching for feelings as well as for content in what people are saying.
- Give signals that you’re listening. Use phrases that are neutral in wording and tone, such as “uh-huh,” “really?” and “go on.”
- Hear people out and minimize interruptions.
- Learn to ask nonaggressive questions. Instead of asking “why?” say, “tell me how”
- Understand that listening doesn’t mean agreeing. Validate and acknowledge the speaker’s point of view, even if you disagree.

**To Make Facilitators and Trainers More Effective.** The goal of enhancing the impact of a trainer is similar to the metagoal of protect impression integrity, enacted through the preventive facework strategy. Although the training context shares features with the construct impression metagoal, we find it more analogous to protecting impression integrity because of the nature of potential face threats inherent in training sessions. First, at least some level of competence relevant to the person’s legitimacy as

a trainer has probably been established before the event. He or she should therefore focus attention on maintaining the integrity of that identity. Second, the employees in attendance are likely to have considerable autonomy and some level of authority in their positions but are expected take instruction (directives) from a trainer and are later held accountable for using this advice. Third, although at some level the opportunity to improve job performance is appreciated, the training session itself is fraught with potential threats to negative and positive face, primarily of the participant, but also for the trainer. Following is a list of examples of tips for trainers (Cusimano, 1996) with the implied preventive tactic in parentheses.

- Focus on learners, setting aside your ego. The purpose of training is to change behavior, not to make the presenter look good. (*Avoid explicit self-promotion tactics and privilege others' face concerns over self's.*)
- Be a coach, not an authority figure or expert. (*Avoid explicit self-promotion and intimidation.*) The idea is to guide learners to insight and understanding, not have all the answers. (*Practice negative politeness.*) If learners see you as an authority figure, they may not be honest, and they may try to look good rather than learn. (*Don't encourage self-promotion and ingratiation.*)
- Keep on track; stay organized. (*Use exemplification.*)
- Maintain a positive atmosphere. (*Use ingratiation.*) Ignore errors and praise success. (*Practice positive politeness.*)
- Be an effective questioner and listener. The goal must always be to maneuver participants into finding the right answer for themselves. (*Use indirectness when constraining negative face.*) Giving answers is a last resort. The most powerful words in the trainer's armory are, "I don't know. What do you think?" (*Be willing to risk own positive face to enhance positive face of others.*)
- Encourage participation (*enhance positive face*); build trust. It's critical that participants practice the skills they're learning. That can be difficult because many people fear performing and being embarrassed. (*Recognize social anxiety and embarrassability.*)

**To Improve Performance Reprimands.** Clearly, the task of reprimanding an employee for poor performance is a face-threatening situation. Criticism threatens both the positive and negative face of an employee and obligates redressive action. Thus, advice in this regard is relevant to helping the supervisor meet the corrective goal without additional damage to the identity of the employee. As indicated in parentheses, the tips for managers are embedded within the corrective facework tradition (Blanchard, 1992).

- Never reprimand or punish a person just learning a task—you'll immobilize them. (*Fit the reproach to the identity relevant cues, i.e., should have known better or not.*)
- Tell people beforehand that you are going to let them know how they are doing. (*Frame the reproach as part of the evaluation process, not uniquely linked to a specific event.*)
- Reaffirm that you think well of them, but not of their performance in this situation. Your intent is to get them back on course, not to try to make them feel bad. Remind them how much you value them. Realize that when the reprimand is over, it's over. (*Reconfirm positive face.*)

**Constructing Good Impressions.** Finally, the goal of constructing a good first impression and sustaining a favorable impression over time is akin to the metagoal of impression construction. Most of the hints and tips in the trade journals involve nonverbal tactics to enact the exemplification and self-promotion strategies. This is a reasonable focus given that nonverbal behavior and physical appearance play a significant role in attributions and impression formation (DePaulo, 1992; Patterson, 1994). People who blink frequently are rated as more nervous and less intelligent than those who rarely blink (Omori & Miyata, 1996), and men with a full head of hair are rated as more dominant, dynamic, and masculine than men who are bald (Butler, Pryor, & Grieder, 1998). Many aspects of a person's physical appearance and nonverbal behavior cannot be controlled; however, those that can have been identified by writers offering advice on how to be skillful in impression construction (although, again, these suggestions are more intuitive than theoretical). We list several tips for "looking good," "communicating personal power," and letting "your light shine" (Godfrey, 1993; Haddock, 1995; Michelsen, 1993). Most tips for self-promotion and demonstrating professional demeanor are targeted to women, perhaps because status and power are not as readily assigned to the impressions that women project.

- Stand tall and walk proudly.
- When meeting others, make direct eye contact and use a firm but friendly handshake.
- Take a deep breath to project a firm voice, avoid slang, jargon, and vocal hesitations.
- Use only body movements and gestures necessary to make your point but not more.
- When the stakes are high or it's a client you really want, it can be difficult to mask your anxiety. If you are anxious, it will come out in one way or another. Take deep breaths, remember what you know and find a way to connect with your calm inner core.
- What we wear instantly communicates something about who we are. If a graphic-arts professional walked into your office in a dowdy brown suit, you would probably think, "*boring*." Your best bet is to dress how you wish to be remembered: with assurance, some spark of originality, and in a way that makes you feel comfortable and confident.
- Mat and frame awards and certificates and display them in your office. If you prefer to use a binder hold these materials and testimonial letters, keep them in clear sheet protectors.

Our intent for this section on enacting impression management strategies skillfully was to acknowledge that professional and trade journals offer advice to practitioners and to emphasize that the advice is reasonable. We reiterate, however, that unless advice is couched in a conceptual framework that explains why it works, integration and generalization will be less likely.

## CONCLUSION

We began this chapter with a synthesis of the various perspectives on impression management and reviewed the research relevant to the frequency of use and the effectiveness of impression management skills. We then described the cognitive and behavioral resources that enable people to accomplish the metagoal of demonstrating general social competence and meeting the three metagoals of maintaining identity

integrity, restoring identity integrity when lost or damaged, and constructing an impression when the situation requires conscious attention to public identity. We reviewed the options available to social actors for managing the contingencies operating in each of these goal contexts and identified several dispositional and gender-related factors that exert influence on more broadly operating impression management principles. Finally, we described two approaches to skills training: those that attempt to educate people to become more aware (or to control excessive awareness) of the important role of impression management in social and professional activities and those that offer specific advice on tactics for manifesting positive impressions.

We hope this chapter has illustrated the pervasive and fundamental role of impression management in social and professional dynamics. Although it is not at all uncommon for a person to wake up on Monday morning and announce with some degree of conviction, "I'm tired of being out of shape; today I am going to start working out," it is very uncommon for a person to wake up on Monday morning and announce, "I am tired of being inept at social interaction and tired of being perceived as less capable than I am; today I am going to start practicing skillful impression management techniques." And yet, for those who have not mastered the art of presenting self to others and enhancing the presentations proffered by others, training and practice are just as important as it is to those who intend to get in better physical condition. If this chapter provides greater understanding of the impression management process and motivates increased scholarly and practical attention to the skills involved, it has met its goal.

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PART

# III

FUNCTION-FOCUSED COMMUNICATION SKILLS



CHAPTER

# 10

## INFORMING AND EXPLAINING SKILLS: THEORY AND RESEARCH ON INFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION

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Poor informative and explanatory skills are costly. In 1999, failure to communicate the difference between pounds and newtons cost NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) the \$125 million Mars Climate Orbiter mission. When the spacecraft was entering the Martian atmosphere, Lockheed Martin engineers sent the orbiter's final navigation information to JPL in Pasadena using the English measurement "pounds" of force. But JPL had programmed its computers to calculate orbital navigation parameters and thruster firings using the metric "newtons" of force. The JPL group assumed the spacecraft's orbiting instructions had been calculated using the metric system. Neither group saw this problem, and inaccurate trajectory commands were sent to the spacecraft.

As a consequence of this informative communication error, the Mars Climate Orbiter, rather than achieving its proper orbit around the Red Planet, flew too close to the planet's surface and disintegrated in the Martian atmosphere (NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 1999; Perlman, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

Back on Earth, informative and explanatory communication skills have profound effects on the quality of daily life—for good and for ill. In this information era, 5 of the 10 fastest growing careers are computer related, and the typical large business is "information-based" (Andrews & Herschel, 1996). In classrooms, explanatory textbook passages having certain research-identified features help students learn, whereas textbook passages lacking these features are less likely to increase learning (e.g., Mautone & Mayer, 2001; Mayer & Chandler, 2001). Good informing and explaining in medical contexts is linked to increased use of recommended screening procedures for cancer and other diseases (e.g., Davis, Berkel, Arnold, Nandy, Jackson, & Murphy, 1996; Wright, 1997; Yancey, Tanjasiri, Klein, & Tunder, 1995). In

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<sup>1</sup>The *San Francisco Chronicle* headline, available in Perlman (1999), gives the wrong name for the spacecraft that disintegrated. The spacecraft that disintegrated was the Mars Climate Orbiter; its sister craft was the Mars Polar Lander (Hardin, 1999).

addition, informative and explanatory communication is ubiquitous throughout Web sites, newspapers, popular science magazines, television documentaries, “infomercials,” cooking shows, and many other mass media settings. The success of search engines such as [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and educational television channels such as the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and even the Food Network are testimony to the popularity of informative and explanatory communication.

But just as good informative and explanatory communication is appreciated, the effects of poor informing and explaining are feared. At the workplace, poor informative and explanatory communication skills lead to frustration between shift employees, lost revenue, and misunderstood employee benefit provisions (e.g., Employee benefits, n.d.; Newman, 1998). Poor informative and explanatory communication has been linked to military disasters as in “friendly fire” incidents, transfusing patients with the wrong blood type (Institute of Medicine, 2000), and deadly delays in responding to “911” emergency calls (Srisavasdi, 2001; Witkin, 1996). Studies of Material Data Safety Sheets—information about hazardous chemicals posted near sites such as swimming pools—found that literate workers only understood 60% of the information posted for their protection (Sattler, Lippy, & Jordon, 1997). Furthermore, the existence of new communication technologies, such as the Internet, has not led inevitably to uniformly excellent informative and explanatory communication efforts. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that nearly 100 million U.S. citizens use the Internet to find health information, and 70% say the information they find influences their health decisions (Berland, Elliott, & Morales, 2001). But physicians were not pleased when they analyzed the informative and explanatory messages patients were getting from the Internet. In their judgment, information intended for lay audiences was often difficult to access, difficult to understand, and incomplete. Other studies of health information available through the Internet have come to similar conclusions (e.g., Jadad & Gagliardi, 1998; Lindberg & Humphreys, 1998). Even more disturbing is the news that informative communication among medical professionals often goes awry. For example, the Massachusetts State Board of Registration in Pharmacy estimates that 2.4 million prescriptions are filled improperly each year in the state (Institute of Medicine, 2000).

Despite the importance, prevalence, and satisfaction that good informative and explanatory communication brings, as well as the high costs of poor informing and explaining, these fundamental communication skills are not well understood. Inadequate conceptions of these essential communication skills may be one reason that poor informative and explanatory messages are frequent. To address these problems, this chapter summarizes and extends past efforts by the author to develop research-supported theories of these discursive forms (e.g., Rowan, 1988, 1990, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; for textbook presentations of this work, see Daly & Engleberg, 2001; Osborne & Osborne, 2000). Specifically, this chapter (a) explains why common notions of informing and explaining sometimes hinder, rather than help, communicators, (b) defines informative and explanatory communication by emphasizing the distinctive goals of these discursive types, and (c) delineates a theory of informative and explanatory communication that can guide research and education.

## **PROBLEMS WITH ANCIENT AND MODERN VIEWS OF INFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION**

Theories of effective communication have existed since at least the fourth century B.C.E., but for several reasons, most have focused on persuasive communication,

particularly on strategies for gaining agreement or winning disputes. There have been relatively few theoretical accounts of informative communication (see Kinneavy, 1971, for notable exceptions, e.g., Bar-Hillel, 1964; Carnap, 1962). Today extensive research exists on how to help audiences understand complex ideas, but this large body of work, principally from education, does not typically inform textbook and handbook accounts designed to help people produce oral and written informative communication. A brief look at the history of scholarly thought on effective informing shows why many accounts of these fundamental communication skills are not as helpful as they could be. It also identifies key concepts from traditional accounts of rhetoric that are usefully integrated into a contemporary theory of informative and explanatory communication.

## The Absence of Theories of Informative Communication in Ancient Times

Informative communication was not discussed by most Greek and Roman rhetoricians. Referring to Greeks and Romans living from the fourth century B.C.E. through the fourth century of this era, I. A. Richards maintained that the “ancients were little concerned with informative discourse because little informative communication was to be found in the ancient world” (Olbricht, 1968, summarizing Richards, 1936). Richards’s statement makes little sense if one defines informative communication, as this chapter does, as efforts to create awareness or deepen understanding. Such communication efforts are inevitable in the daily tasks of household and work management, that is, people routinely give directions. Parents and tutors often try to explain when children ask why the sky is blue or why people die.

But if one defines informative communication as discourse about matters that are not in dispute, then according to many scholars, informing is simply not the province of rhetoric. In his classic treatise, *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle (trans. 1954) defined rhetoric as the art of finding the available means of persuasion. Persuasion is not needed in contexts where nothing is in dispute; consequently, by this reasoning, informative communication either does not exist (if one assumes all matters are in dispute) or does exist but is not part of rhetoric.

A second reason one finds little about informative communication in the writings of ancient rhetoricians is that people in ancient Greece and Rome had different views about sharing practical information. Today, if one wants a new recipe for Beef Wellington, a reasonable step would be to search cookbooks and the Internet for recipes. But the notions that practical knowledge of this sort exists and is widely available are relatively contemporary. Cookbooks begin appearing around the 15th century, not too long after the invention of movable type. It may be that contemporary notions of effective informative communication, of the sort one would hope for from a cookbook, developed with the increasing prevalence of printed text.

In contrast, the pre-printing press communication activities of the ancient Greeks and Romans were principally oral rather than written. As Kennedy (1963) explained:

The political system, for example, operated through the direct speech of the citizens among themselves and to their magistrates.... Writing was used to record a vote, a law, a resolution, but rarely to achieve it in the first place. (p. 4)

Often, according to Olbricht (1968), knowledge of practical arts was not verbalized. Instead, it was learned in apprentice fashion. Even when craft knowledge was articulated, cultures of that era often thought that such important secrets should not be shared with outsiders. For example, as Olbricht explained. “The making of glass

emerged as an art in Egypt in the second millennium B.C.E. Manufacturing was limited to certain families, and outsiders were prevented from learning the techniques involved. Later, medieval Venice became known for its excellent glass . . . (so) city fathers passed laws forbidding the glassworkers from leaving the city or teaching their secrets to outsiders" (p. 5). The idea that one would or should share, and share clearly, the secrets of an essential craft with anyone willing to purchase a book of such knowledge, or today with anyone who can access the World Wide Web, is probably a modern one.

And yet, some 20th-century communication scholars have insisted that there is no such thing as informative communication (e.g., Berlo, 1960; Nadeau, Jablonski, & Gardner, 1993). Perhaps one reason for this resistance to the notion of informative communication is that when contemporary theories of informative communication emerged in the 1700s, philosophic notions of the time blurred the distinction between the content of "expository" discourse, which generally refers to any nonfiction, and the goal of effectively creating awareness or deepening understanding about some aspect of reality for some targeted audience. Yet another confusion is the belief that to inform, one simply needs to organize a message. A look at some of the informative communication theories presented since the 1700s shows how these confusing beliefs, still evident in many composition and public speaking texts, developed.

## Problems in Modern Views of Informative Communication

One of the first modern scholars to offer a theoretical account of informative discourse (or, what was then called exposition), was George Campbell. Campbell (1988/1776) discussed exposition because he believed that those seeking to persuade first had to establish understanding in the minds of their audience using the techniques of "exposition," which means "to set forth, disclose, unmask, or explain in detail" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary 1981, p. 401). This definition of exposition suggests Campbell's view of the informative communication task. In Campbell's view, subject matter exists, ready-made. The effective communicator selects the correct organizational format for its presentation to an audience, a format that is logical for the subject and that will naturally appeal to people's minds. In this view, there is relatively little thinking, strategy, or art associated with this approach to exposition because the subject matter one presents already exists. This conception of the informative communication task may have been encouraged by the widespread existence of print material in this era. Additionally, it is supported by the philosophies of 18th-century scholars such as John Locke and David Hume. Campbell drew from these philosophies for the notion that human minds operate by certain universal patterns such as definition, narration, causality, and spatial order. From this idea, he reasoned that the key to effective exposition was simply to put one's subject matter into one of these organizational formats or containers.

Classical Greek and Roman rhetoricians had also discussed at length the notions of definition, causal ordering, and other reasoning patterns, but they presented these ideas as matters of "invention," or what today is called research and inquiry, rather than solely as matters of arrangement and presentation. Unfortunately, 18th- and 19th-century rhetorics as well as many 20th-century textbooks lost the notion of using these reasoning patterns to question one's own understanding of a topic. Today these patterns are presented solely as organizational or arrangement aids. For example, to use them as lines of inquiry or ways to learn a topic, one would, in preparing for a lecture on why helicopters fly, use the pattern "definition" and ask oneself, "what

is flight?" and then perhaps use the patterns of narration or causality to think about what causes flight or lift.

As many students who have taken composition or public speaking classes know, the "patterns of exposition" or "modes of discourse" became bases for organizing one's speech or essay, not for doing research. This organizational emphasis is reflected in best-selling composition textbooks published throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Berlin, 1984, 1987; Johnson, 1991). The "Forms of Support" and "Informative Speaking" chapters in many public speaking textbooks have their roots in textbooks such as Alexander Bain's *Composition and Rhetoric* (1866, cited by Connors, 1981), which taught expositional patterns such as narration, description, and definition. The popularity of this approach to teaching expository writing and informative speaking has caused informative communication to become equated in many people's minds with these organizational or support patterns.

**Why It Is Wrong to Equate Informing With Organization.** The problem with this approach to thinking about and teaching informative communication is not the teaching of patterns such as definition, causality, and the like. Instead, the problem is this: No one thinks that tasks such as explaining "why people die" to a small child are mainly organizational challenges. No scholar asked to share her research with scholars in another discipline would see the task mainly as an organizational one. There are no ready-made accounts of subject matter that one simply inserts into the appropriate organizational framework to ensure comprehension of complex topics. Informing and explaining are strategically demanding processes. To perform them well, people need more help than current pedagogies often provide (Rowan, 1995).

**Contemporary Beliefs About Informative Communication Focus on Readability.** Another common belief about informative communication holds that using short, familiar words and short sentences will render all informative communication effective. This notion comes from research on "readability" (e.g., Kantor, Anderson, & Armbuster, 1983; Klare, 1963; Mazur, 2000; Shuy & Larkin, 1978). But although there is merit in using simple language when possible, assuming that a textbook lesson, a set of instructions, or an informative briefing will be understood solely because of the use simple words and short sentences is problematic.

The limitations of this approach become evident when one thinks of several ways in which complex subjects can be confusing. For instance, instructions are often difficult to follow because they have no diagrams, or the diagrams they offer are puzzling. Furthermore, some ideas are difficult to understand for reasons that have nothing to do with word or sentence length. The idea that the Earth is weightless is difficult to understand not because it uses complex words but because it is counterintuitive. Similarly, the notion that natural foods contain natural pesticides has few difficult words in it. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand because it violates intuitions about the character of "natural" entities.

Yet readability, or belief in the power of using simple words and short sentences to make all communication clear, is so compelling that in 1998 President William Clinton issued a presidential memo mandating that all government departments and agencies use "plain language" in letters, forms, notices, and instructions (Clinton, 1998). The plain language mandate is quite sophisticated in many ways, and it calls for much more than the use of computerized readability indices as tools for assessing government messages to citizens. However, the key suggestions given federal

employees for improving their written informative communication with citizens are to use four stylistic choices: (a) “common, everyday words, except for necessary technical terms; (b) ‘you’ and other pronouns; (c) the active voice; and (d) short sentences” (Clinton, 1998; Mazur, 2000).

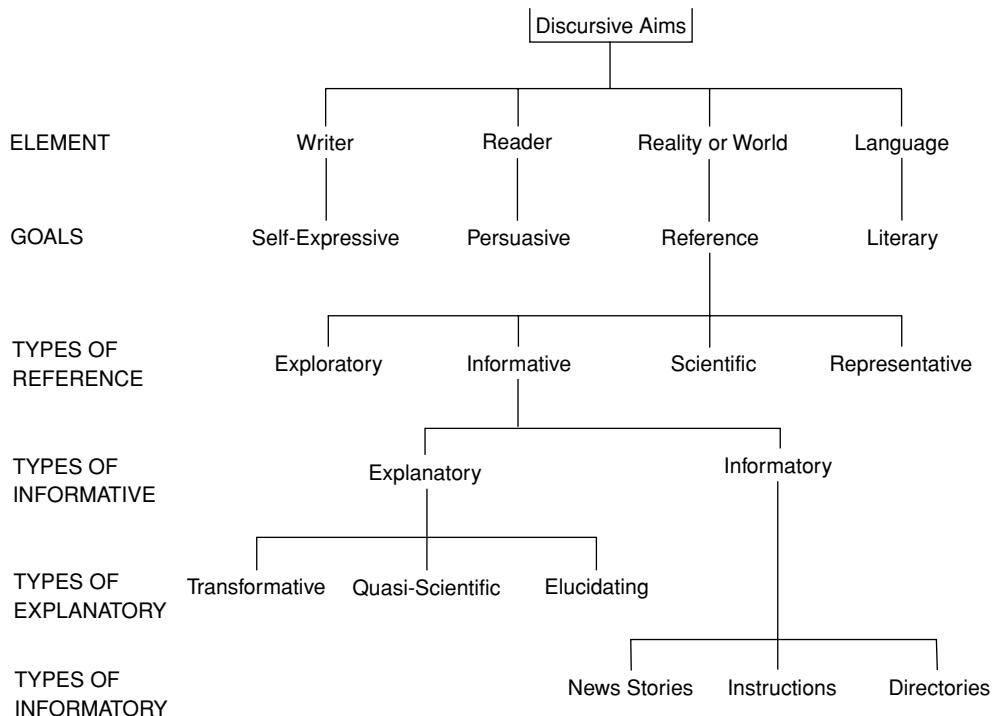
In general, this advice is sound. But its focus on word choice and sentence length, apart from the goal or type of communication being analyzed, can create problems. Mandating the use of common words and short sentences to improve government communication is somewhat like mandating the use of gasoline in all vehicles. The mandate focuses on one component of informative communication messages, that being sentences and word choice, a component that may or may not be critical to the effectiveness of every message. It’s not hard to envision a context in which a well-worded set of instructions remains difficult to understand because of poor graphics or failure to alert intended readers to a common misstep. Furthermore, words that seem “short” and “simple” to one group of people are often confusing to others. In 1989, a China Airlines flight crashed into a mountain shortly after takeoff. Some of the pilot’s last words recorded on the flight data recorder were, “What does ‘pull up’ mean?” The computerized feedback system had used the English phrase “pull up” instead of the official phrase “climb” when a plane needs to gain altitude quickly. “Pull up” is an idiomatic English phrase that made sense when the cockpit contained aileron and rudder control levers one could pull; in 1989, there were no longer any such levers, only dials and switches (Thrush, 2001). In this case, short, familiar English words were not “plain” for the intended audience. As this example and many others illustrate, the plain language mandate and communication textbooks teaching informative communication would be more helpful if these sources (a) identified major informative communication goals, such as giving instructions and explaining complexities, (b) depicted common ways in which people inadvertently veer away from these goals, and (c) presented research-supported tactics for effective informing and explaining-as-teaching.

## Toward a Goal-Centered Analysis of Informative Communication

If one is interested in studying the effectiveness of a message, then one must define that message’s goals. During the 20th century, a number of scholars have offered theories of language use or goals (e.g., Austin, 1962; Grice, 1989; Searle, 1969). These theories of language use guide scholarship on informative and explanatory communication in several linguistic and social science domains such as second-language acquisition (e.g., Yule, 1997), technical communication (e.g., Farkas, 1999), science education (e.g., Hewson & Hewson, 1984), and developmental psychology (e.g., Sonnenschein, 1984). In these research domains, there is a focus on what makes an informative message effective, regardless of medium. That is, regardless of whether it focuses on written or oral messages, face-to-face, or technology-mediated referential communication tasks, these lines of work reveal the thinking involved in making requests, giving instructions, teaching, tutoring, reporting news, and offering online help—all of which are instances of informative communication.

The main obstacle to using this array of work is that it is scattered throughout dozens of academic journals in a variety of academic disciplines. What’s needed is a way of packaging these literatures so that their implications for the design of informative communication and explanatory messages can be easily accessed.

James Kinneavy’s (1971) theory of the “aims” of discourse provides just such an initial package. His theory classifies communication in terms of human goals for



**FIG. 10.1. A theory of informative and explanatory discourse based upon Kinneavy's (1971) theory of discursive aims.**

its use (see Fig. 10.1). The theory of informative and explanatory communication presented here is built from Kinneavy's work. It assists communicators in thinking about their tasks precisely and in anticipating the subgoals a particular task may involve. By focusing on goals and effectiveness in achieving them, rather than on single components of messages such as organization or words, this theory helps communication scholars see their work in relation to that of other scholars doing parallel tasks in differing research traditions.

Kinneavy's (1971) analysis of discursive aims provides one of the fullest contemporary analyses of "reference" discourse, the genus to which informative and explanatory discourse belong. Moreover, Kinneavy's theory is consistent with a number of other analyses offered by major theorists in a variety of scholarly domains (e.g., Aristotle, in his study of rhetoric, poetics, and dialectic, trans. 1941 Jakobson, 1967, in linguistics; McGuire, 1984, and Rogers & Storey, 1987, in communication).

## A THEORY OF INFORMATIVE AND EXPLANATORY COMMUNICATION

### The Major Types of Communication

Kinneavy used the notion that all communicative situations have four fundamental elements as a loose heuristic for suggesting the basic aims or types of communication. Although all four elements affect all communication efforts, when encoder (communicator) is the element of focus, self-expressive discourse results (Kinneavy, 1971, pp. 393–450). Personal journals, diaries, and how-are-you-feeling conversations

between friends are examples of discourse animated by the desire to express the self. When decoder (audience) is the element of focus, persuasive discourse results (pp. 211–306). Advertisements, sales presentations, and campaign brochures are examples of persuasive discourse, produced to gain action or agreement from audiences. When reality (a dimension of “world”) is the element of focus, reference discourse is produced (pp. 73–210). A report of an experimental study, news about a traffic accident, directions for assembling household items, a scholarly lecture on the latest interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and the small “balloons” helping computer users to complete tasks are all instances of reference discourse, that is, communication designed principally to represent some aspect of reality. And when code (language) is the element of most interest, literary discourse occurs (pp. 307–392). Stories, jokes, and poetry are all literary discourse, produced to induce contemplation or enjoyment of some “language object.” Using the communication heuristic again, Kinneavy identified three types of reference discourse: scientific, exploratory, and informative. Following his logic, a fourth type can also be identified: representative discourse.

## The Four Types of Reference Discourse

**Scientific Discourse.** Scientific discourse is primarily shaped by the goal of representing reality and secondarily by the goal of furnishing proof for some claim. This reference discourse subtype is suggested by the “reality” element of the communication heuristic. For Kinneavy, the term *scientific discourse* does not refer exclusively to discourse from the natural sciences. Instead, he viewed literary criticism, history, psychology, and biochemistry all as scientific discourse as long as the aim of the author is to prove some factual claim about reality to an audience of appropriate experts.

**Exploratory Discourse.** Exploratory discourse is primarily designed to represent reality and secondarily influenced by the goal of representing or raising questions about some accepted interpretation of data and research. Exploratory discourse, then, is suggested by the “communicator” element of the communication heuristic. It is more affected by encoder speculation than are scientific and informative discourse. For example, an essay by Trachtman (1983) questioning the wisdom of using government monies to communicate university research through the mass media is exploratory, given that publicizing university research is a standard practice throughout much of the world. Similarly, a class session in a graduate seminar that questions conventional wisdom on some topic would be exploratory discourse. Or a televised panel discussion exploring whether mandatory schooling for children is necessary would be another instance. Some of the most important communication in academic fields—“paradigm shifting theories”—is often exploratory. This genre, however important, is somewhat rare.

**Representative Discourse.** Departing from Kinneavy’s work, but following his line of reasoning, we can identify a type of reference discourse suggested by the language element of the heuristic, “representative discourse.” Representative discourse primarily aims to represent reality and secondarily is shaped by the goal of restating the meaning of existing texts. Oral or written summaries, abstracts, and translations are examples of this discursive form.

**Informative Discourse.** Lastly, according to Kinneavy, informative discourse is primarily designed to represent reality and secondarily shaped by the goal of making

EXPLANATORY DISCOURSE (efforts to deepen understanding)	INFORMATORY DISCOURSE (efforts to create awareness)
EXAMPLES	EXAMPLES
Textbooks	Instructions
Briefings	Recipes
Lectures	Online help
Glossaries	Indexes
Dictionary definition of "stock"	Stock quotes
Encyclopedia entry on "baseball"	Baseball scores
Explanatory news features	Brief news stories

**FIG. 10.2. Examples of explanatory and informatory discourse.**

some claim accessible to lay audiences. It is suggested by the “audience” element of the communication heuristic (see Fig. 10.1). Like scientific discourse, its essential goal is representation of reality; unlike scientific discourse, informative texts are somewhat more influenced by lay audiences’ needs for information relevant to daily life. Thus, rather than representing reality by proving a claim, informative discourse represents reality by rendering it accessible to the interested.

Informative communication occurs when journalists inform audiences about new trends, recent crimes, and local weddings; when scientists specializing in one field share their findings with colleagues in another; when family members inform one another about their daily schedules; and when the Microsoft “paper clip assistant” offers context-based assistance to computer users. In each case, informative communication involves either creating awareness about or deepening understanding of subject matter. For example, using Kinneavy’s reference discourse classification scheme, a study appearing in the journal *Biology of Reproduction* presenting proof that a set of scientists have successfully cloned pigs whose body parts will not be rejected in human transplants is an instance of scientific discourse (Park et al., 2002). The *Newsweek* account of this research, which stresses the value genetically engineered pigs may have for the 75,000 Americans on waiting lists for transplanted organs, is an instance of informative discourse (e.g., Begley, 2002).

## Types of Informative Discourse

Kinneavy makes no further subdivisions of the reference discourse aim beyond scientific, exploratory, and informative. However, the goals that generate the sharing of procedural directions for formatting a document in Microsoft Word and the goals that generate an account of how online help is created by software developers seem distinct, albeit related. The more precisely these informative discourse types can be specified, the more communicators are helped in thinking about their principal goals. Therefore, in my work, I propose further divisions of Kinneavy’s category, informative (e.g., Rowan, 1988, 1995, 1999). I see at least two types of informative communication. *Informatory* discourse primarily aims at representing reality by increasing an audience’s *awareness* of some phenomenon. *Explanatory* discourse, on the other hand, primarily aims at representing reality by enhancing or deepening an audience’s *understanding* of some phenomenon (see Fig. 10.2).

For example, instructions on how to shift bicycle gears constitute an instance of informatory discourse. In contrast, an account of how the gears are constructed or why bicycles stay upright when pedaled would be an instance of explanatory discourse. Similarly, an announcement about the day on which Chanukah begins is an instance of informatory discourse; a brief lecture explaining why Chanukah

is a minor holiday for Jews, rather than a major one, is an instance of explanatory discourse. Informative discourse assumes an audience has some understanding of the topic at hand, be that bicycle gears or Jewish traditions, and wants an update or awareness of some not-yet-located set of information; explanatory discourse assumes an audience has some awareness of the topic but insufficient understanding and attempts to deepen their understanding.

## INFORMATORY DISCOURSE

As Fig. 10.1 shows, there are at least three types of informative communication: news, instructions, and directories. Each is concerned with enhancing an audience's awareness of information; each assumes that the audience already has some understanding of the topic in question and is principally interested in the latest information (news), the steps necessary in getting from a current state to a desired state on some task (instructions) or in navigating a document, Web site, structure, or roadway (directories). Because of space limitations, this chapter sketches theory and research only on the first two types, news and instructions.

### News

News consists of messages alerting audiences to unpredictable or difficult-to-obtain but interesting information. As a classic account has it, “man bites dog” is news, whereas “dog bites man” is not news. News-conveying messages are those that assume an audience is familiar with some topic or situation and is interested in an update, a progress report, unpredictable recent events, or previously unknown information about that topic or situation. News, however, is not simply new information about any topic; rather, news concerns topics presumed to have relevance for some audience. A newspaper brings readers news of *their* school district’s supervisor, *their* annexation issues, and *their* local sports. Similarly, other instances of news messages such as invoices or bills, annual reports, and “when-will-you-be-home” conversations all assume that the audience for the message is familiar with the topic, situation, or person in question and is principally wanting awareness of, for example, the amount of this month’s electric bill rather than some other month’s. Typically, informative messages conveying news do not devote text to in-depth explanations of, for example, what the term *kilowatt* means. News messages are dominated by the goal of creating awareness of additional information.

**Effective News-Conveying Messages.** Drawing from information theorists such as Bar-Hillel (1964), Kinneavy (1971) said the value of news rests in the extent to which it offers “surprise value,” factuality, and comprehensiveness. “Surprise value” is the ratio of new or unpredicted information to known information about some topic. “Factuality” is the extent to which a message accurately represents the slice of reality it presents, and “comprehensiveness” is the thoroughness of that representation.

In news, surprise value, factuality, and comprehensiveness all matter, but, as Kinneavy argued, surprise value is the most important of the three qualities. (By way of contrast, these three qualities also characterize scientific or scholarly discourse, but in that domain, factuality is the principal concern.) Consequently, the news in an invoice contains sufficient “factuality” and “comprehensiveness” to support its key point that a certain amount is owed and possibly a summary of bills paid over the prior year, but no more. However, what is typically most visually prominent in the

invoice is its news—the amount owed this month. Similarly, a news story in a local paper will report the latest U.S. census news concerning the nation's richest counties based on per capita income but will not provide the “factuality” or evidentiary base for its claims that one would find in the professional literature of demographers. Both the invoice and the news story are designed in ways that allow them to be easily skimmed; utility customers want to locate the news of their payment amount quickly; newspaper readers want to skim news stories, not study each paragraph intently. Thus, the motivation generating these examples of news, that of creating awareness of the surprising or new (i.e., timely) information about some aspect of reality, dictates both the presence and the absence of information in these messages, as well as the message's layout and organization. Both the bill and the news story are organized using the “inverted pyramid” organizational form, which puts most important information first, rather than telling a story from beginning to end (e.g., Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 1999).

In addition to finding news in the mass media and in one's mailbox, people routinely share and receive news from each other. Among friends and family members, news reports provide unpredictable or difficult-to-obtain information. Here's an example of news reported by one friend to another in a phone conversation about a third friend's bad luck:

**Person A:** Did you hear what happened to Tom? He had the *seats* from his car stolen.

**Person B:** The *seats* stolen? You're kidding.

**Person A:** Yeah. He was going out to his car Friday, getting ready for a good weekend, and he saw they were gone.

**Person B:** I guess he has insurance. Maybe there's a black market for those kinds of seats.

In this illustration, the most important or most surprising information is given first in the conversation; this organizational structure is the same “inverted pyramid” approach that mass media news stories and invoices use. Relevance or impact on the audience is evident in that the news item is about a mutual friend's bad luck, not that of some unknown party. Factuality and comprehensiveness, or the evidence supporting this report of a crime, may lie in the three friends' knowledge of one another's dependability for truth about such matters.

**Effectiveness in Gathering and Sharing News.** News gathering, sorting, and communicating is both a profession and an interpersonal communication skill. The skills associated with professional news gathering and sharing are thoughtfully characterized in histories of U.S. journalism (e.g., Emery, Roberts, & Emery, 1999) and in sociological accounts chronicling the development of norms among journalists (e.g., Schudson, 2001). Computer scientists are developing ways of automating some dimensions of the news gathering and dissemination process (e.g., Gruhl & Bender, 2000).

One way to characterize skill in discerning, selecting, and communicating news might be to use Kinneavy's (1971) analysis. In Kinneavy's view, there are three major skills associated with gathering and sharing news: (a) skills associated with knowing what sorts of information is apt to have both surprise value and relevance to a target audience, (b) skills in ascertaining the factuality of that information, and (c) skills in providing the news report with sufficient comprehensiveness so that the intended audience can place the news report in proper context. In professional contexts,

these skills are honed through decades of work by journalists. In addition, marketing specialists devote considerable time to determining the sorts of information, graphic displays, and advertising that draw the attention of large numbers of people (e.g., Chakrapani, 2000).

One line of research that has explored the effectiveness and skill of news communicators is that of mass media reporting of science news. Most science news stories are reports to the public of published, peer-reviewed research. Consequently, it is possible to compare and contrast both the scientific “news” that a research paper presents and the version of that news disseminated to larger audiences through press releases by scientific journals, universities, and academic associations as well as the coverage of such news in the mainstream media. Typically, there are few criticisms of the “surprise value” of such news; people generally find mass media science news interesting, and the mass media are frequently effective in gaining an audience’s attention. In fact, several studies have found that the mass media are often the principal source of information about science for adults (e.g., National Science Board, 1998). Studies show that the mass media are an important source of information even for news one might expect to receive from physicians, such as new findings concerning deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS (Rogers, 1999, citing a survey by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1996).

There is criticism of the accuracy or “factuality” and comprehensiveness of science news reporting, however. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of studies explored the accuracy of science news. Dunwoody (1986a, 1986b) summarized this research. In general, these studies show that although scientists tend to be critical of the accuracy or factuality of science news, they often found coverage of their own research to be generally accurate (e.g., Broberg, 1978; Dunwoody, 1982; Tankard & Ryan, 1974; Tichenor, Olien, Harrison, & Donohue, 1970). The errors that were found in mass media versions of science news tended to be errors of omission or lack of comprehensiveness. Recent research in mass media coverage of science news shows that there is not as much explanatory content—or efforts to help contextualize content—as readers would like (e.g., Rogers, 1999; also see Long, 1995). It may be that the norms of news reporting and the skills required for good news gathering and sharing are fairly effective when the story in question is one that people are apt to understand such as a thunderstorm causing damage or a team winning a game. These norms may not be as effective in creating awareness of complex and unfamiliar news.

In interpersonal communication contexts, friends and family members find that some individuals are better at sharing news and in providing “informational support” than are other friends. Interestingly, studies show that although people often become aware of health risk information through mass media exposure, they make decisions about such risks based on interpersonal communication (e.g., Dunwoody & Neuwirth, 1991). Individuals who can be relied on for “informational support,” such as information about health decisions, gossip, helpful new technologies, or the quickest ways to “get things done” are valued by their friends (e.g., Burleson, Albrecht, & Sarason, 1994; Burleson & Samter, 1990).

## Instructions and Referential Communication Skills

A substantial body of research exists on the informative communication skill of “giving instructions.” Drawing from Farkas (1999), this discursive goal is usefully defined as messages aimed at moving listeners (or readers) from their current state of knowledge about some task (e.g., wishing they could prepare Beef Wellington) to a desired

state of knowledge (e.g., having successfully prepared, served, and eaten a classic Beef Wellington). Instruction giving is called *referential communication*<sup>2</sup> in some academic literatures such as developmental psychology, linguistics, and second-language acquisition, “demonstration speaking” in public speaking textbooks, and “procedural discourse” in the field of technical communication. Examples of this discursive form include written or oral instructions on constructing a spreadsheet, online help, recipes, how-to speeches, instructions for assembling household items, and “Dummies” books (e.g., Gookin, 1999).

Research on effectiveness in giving instructions may be organized into what is known currently about these skills among young children, nonnative speakers, and adults engaged in tasks such as giving directions to a nearby town or giving guidance to specialists such as auto mechanics and physicians on the nature of some maintenance problem.

### ***Effectiveness in Instruction Giving and Referential Communication Among Children.***

Beginning with the work of Piaget (1959), developmental psychologists have produced a wealth of research demonstrating that, in general, the referential skills of young children (aged 4 to 5 years) are distinctly less effective than those of older children (aged 7 to 8 years). Typically, the explanation for this phenomenon is that young children are more “egocentric” or focused on their own view of a task and less aware of the listener’s perspective than are older children. For example, many studies assessing referential communication in children require the child to describe verbally one item from an array of similar items so that listeners can identify the intended entity. The item array might be flowers, hats, or animals of differing colors or sizes. In these studies, an effective referential or instructional message is one that unambiguously distinguishes the target item. In general, young children are less aware that a message fails to differentiate one item from a set of similar others than are older children. As Yule (1997) explained, “For instance, if the message contains the word flower, it is judged by younger children to be effective for identifying the red flower, even when there is also a blue flower in the item set” (p. 21).

The usual interpretation of this finding is that younger children require only that the message be consistent with its referent (i.e., that there’s at least one entity in their eye sight that they think “counts” as an instance of a flower). Because they know which flower they intend with their statement, their message is sufficient, regardless of its lack of helpfulness to a listener trying to discern their meaning. This egocentrism in the young child reduces their capacity to appreciate the listener’s dilemmas or confusions.

The egocentric mindset of the young child manifests itself in a variety of referential communication contexts. One vivid account of egocentric referential communication in a 4-year-old is this telephone conversation between the child and his grandfather:

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<sup>2</sup>Referential communication or *reference discourse*, as Kinneavy (1971) called it, is discussed in two ways in this chapter. The principal meaning of this phrase is the one Kinneavy gave it, where reference discourse is a family of communication genres. Reference discourse includes all communication designed chiefly to represent some aspect of reality, such as news stories, oral directions to someone’s home, research reports, and textbook passages.

A second meaning of the term *reference* is one linguists use to refer to the range of ways communicators clarify their intent to identify some entity, such as a mutual acquaintance, whom two speakers are discussing. For instance, in the utterance, “My uncle had heart surgery, but he’s doing okay,” the pronoun “he” refers to the term *uncle*. The word uncle has a referent—the individual being discussed. Linguists (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976) study devices for accomplishing reference in this second sense.

**Grandfather** (*speaking on the telephone*): How old are you?

**Child:** Dis many (*holds up four fingers*).

**Grandfather:** Huh?

**Child:** Dis many (*again holds up four fingers*).

**Grandfather:** How many is that?

**Child:** Four. I'm gonna change ears okay?

**Grandfather:** Okay. Was one of your ears getting tired?

**Child:** Yeah. This one (*points to left ear*). (Berk, 2000, p. 388)

### ***Effectiveness in Instruction Giving and Referential Communication Among Adult Nonnative-Speakers.***

Researchers studying second-language acquisition have documented the struggles involved when native and nonnative speakers attempt to understand one another's intended meanings. Some scholars believe that the plight of a nonnative speaker asking the location of a men's room when visiting a foreign country is similar in fundamental ways to the challenges that beset the young child attempting to tell his parent which toy he wants from a high shelf (e.g., Glucksberg, Krauss, & Higgins, 1975). That is, the English-speaking adult visiting a non-English speaking country who simply shouts the words "men's room" more loudly when noncomprehending speakers of Russian fail to understand his meaning is similar to the 4-year-old who keeps asking an adult for "truck" from a high toy shelf that contains several toy trucks, some large and some small. The adult is not beset with precisely the same cognitive egocentrism of the child, but he may be overwhelmed by the number of communication unknowns he faces in the same way the child is overwhelmed by his situation. This sense of having a task be beyond one's resources may explain the adult's apparently "egocentric" behavior of continually shouting an unintelligible phrase to speakers of another language.

One key finding concerning referential communication patterns among native and nonnative speakers is that quests for referential clarity challenge adults because such quests are "face-threatening" (Yule, 1997, p. 15; also see Goldsmith, 1994; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996; Varonis & Gass, 1985). English-speaking adults communicate "belongingness" or identification with others through the use of inexact phrases such as "you know," "it's like," or "that sort of thing" in conversations among themselves (for discussions of "mallspeak" among teenagers, see Mehren, 1999). Communicators risk embarrassing a speaker if they repeatedly ask, "What?" "What did you say?" As a consequence, when adults require a high degree of precision in communicating with one another about, for example, directions to one another's homes or guidance in doing a science experiment, their need to avoid threatening one another's "face" may inhibit their effectiveness at referential communication. Yule (1997) presented a vivid illustration of this point in a transcript of a conversation between a nonnative English speaker and a native speaker:

**Nonnative speaker:** They fuck us on the meaning.

**Native speaker:** They what?

**Nonnative speaker:** They fock us.

**Native speaker:** Oh, focus?

**Nonnative speaker:** Yeah, they . . . (Yule, 1997, p. 83)

Continually requesting clarification (and avoiding laughter) in such exchanges requires patience and belief in the importance of exactly sharing one another's meanings.

**Research on Instruction Giving Among Native Speakers.** Despite the importance of giving instructions in daily adult life, there is relatively little research that either describes instruction giving among adults or offers a research-supported analysis of effective instruction giving. Two prominent lines of work that do offer such information are Farkas' (1999) analysis of online help and instructional text and Wright and Hull's (1990) study of adults giving verbal instructions.

Farkas (1999) offered a set of text features that characterize effective instructions. He developed a model of the key components in “procedural discourse.” In his model, procedural discourse involves four “system states” (p. 42):

1. Desired state: The goal that is presented to the user.
2. Prerequisite state: The state that is a condition for moving toward the desired state. This is often specified at the beginning of the procedure so that the user can align his or her current state with the prerequisite state.
3. Interim states. States we enter as we move toward our goal. These are milestones and subgoals. We create or reach these states through our actions.
4. Unwanted states. States we wish to avoid. These stem from errors, system malfunctions, and conflicts with interrelated systems. (Farkas, 1999, pp. 42–43)

Farkas examined the ways in which effective procedural discourse in a variety of domains helps the user navigate these four states. For example, he argued that instructions as varied as directions on how to climb Mount Ranier, how to operate a waste-recycling plant, or how to set the margins in a word-processed document each need some manifestation of these four steps. Farkas (1999) particularly looked at the “streamlined” instructions one sees in online help screens and on the key parts of household appliances. A typical instance of streamlined instructions would be this set stenciled on a vacuum cleaner:

Clean Filter Daily

\*Stop motor

\*Rap on front filter housing with fist to shake dust from filter to rear cover

\*Remove rear cover, empty, and replace (Farkas, 1999, p. 45)

Farkas noted that this set of instructions is typical of “streamlined” texts designed to be skimmed by the vacuum or computer user. The brevity of these steps and the simple bulleted list of steps assists users by helping them keep track of steps they have or have not taken in a procedure; the skimmability of the text helps users complete these tasks quickly.

As Farkas noted, streamlined instructions are ineffective in contexts where users have many decisions to make or must be taught to recognize a variety of interim states before they can take a step in a procedure. He called instructions that assist an array of complex decisions prior to each step in a procedure “text-rich” procedural discourse. For example, medical instructions are apt to be text rich. The procedures involved in treating frostbitten skin do not lend themselves to the streamlined format because readers may need assistance making many decisions before taking a step. They must know how to identify skin that is frostbitten, how frostbitten skin will look in individuals with differing skin color, how to treat the patient as the skin moves from a frozen state to a thawing state, and what important missteps to avoid that could cause undue pain or injury to the patient.

Farkas' (1999) four-component analysis of effective instructions should be further researched. His model of effective instructions might be used as a basis for teaching "how-to" or demonstration speaking in public speaking classes. Typically, instruction in this discourse form encourages speakers to have a topic that interests their audience and to select an organizational framework of some sort, so that their information is presented in, for example, chronological or spatial order. For the most part, though, speakers are not encouraged to ensure that their audiences can actually enact the steps they have taught in their demonstration speeches. Some research suggests that children's deficiencies in referential communication improve when they are given feedback on the inadequacies of a message (Peterson, Danner, & Flavell, 1972; Sonnenschein, 1984). It may be that adults would be more effective at giving one another instructions if pedagogy on instructional speaking explicitly encouraged speakers not simply to present a demonstration speech but also to ensure that audience members could perform at least some of the steps demonstrated by the speaker. Such training might enhance adults' instruction giving capacities.

Everyday experience suggests that such training would be useful. Anyone who has asked for directions to a nearby town knows that direction givers vary a great deal in their ability to give such instructions clearly. At least one study supports the claim that adults, even when motivated, are often ineffective in giving instructions. Wright and Hull (1990) asked adults to instruct a typist via telephone on how to make changes to a manuscript. These researchers found that only about 30% of those giving instructions included a preview of the types of changes needed.

**Needed Research on Instruction Giving.** Another sort of instruction giving that deserves continued study is that of nonspecialists' efforts to describe maintenance and repair needs to experts. Automobile owners struggle to describe problems with their cars, and patients struggle to characterize aches and pains to their physicians. There are Web sites and popular discussions of how to render these communication efforts more effective (e.g., for advice on communicating with mechanics, see [www.aaa.com/automotive/newauto/communicate](http://www.aaa.com/automotive/newauto/communicate)); research on doctor-patient communication is extensive (e.g., Greene, Adelman, & Majerovitz, 1996; Jones & Phillips, 1988). Scholars interested in studying these communication efforts further might do so by drawing from Farkas' (1999) model of effective instructions and the experimental design used by Wright and Hull (1990). Furthermore, the findings of Greene, Sassi, Malek-Madani, and Edwards (1997; see also Greene's chapter in this volume) suggest that massive amounts of practice and feedback on such communication efforts would dramatically enhance nonspecialists' instruction-giving skills. One could study, for example, how quickly drivers learn to preview their key points in talking to mechanics, or communication researchers could study how soon drivers learn to avoid egocentric accounts of the problems on the "left side" and "right side" of their cars instead of the more informative "driver's side" and "passenger side." One could study this instruction-giving skill under feedback and no-feedback conditions (e.g., when repair service managers ask what customers intend and when they do not). It would also be interesting to study instruction-giving skills among teachers, particularly in the context of classroom management research (e.g., Rodriguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996).

Another domain where instruction-giving is studied is that of written instructions for assembling household appliances. The field of technical communication explores documentation of this sort (e.g., Rainey, 1999). Written instructions for equipment assembly could be analyzed for the extent to which they do or do not alert the users to common missteps, a key step in Farkas' (1999) model of effective instructions.

For example, instructions on constructing model airplanes may recommend that the airplane assembler “apply glue” to secure two airplane parts. After having watched people assemble model airplanes and seeing that people frequently use too much glue, one technical writer changed this instruction to “use a toothpick to dab spots of glue” at key places on the airplane model. Usability testing provides methods for improving technical documentation in this way (e.g., Rubin, 1994).

One other challenge in instruction giving concerns cultural differences in expectations about effective instructions. Some research suggests that instructions for assembling household products or using cell phones should be designed for the cultural expectations of differing groups such as German versus Chinese customers (e.g., Honold, 1999; Qiuye, 2000). For example, Qiuye (2000) found that graphics in U.S. manuals explaining how to assemble a fan illustrated steps for the fan’s assembly whereas the graphics in a Chinese manual for the same fan depicted the product’s features. It is possible that these differences reflect cultural preferences.

In sum, there is a good deal of research on effective news-bearing messages and instructions. For the most part, however, this research is scattered across an array of scholarly disciplines. Efforts to identify key points in these literatures, such as this chapter, can assist scholars in studying the characteristics that make these discourse forms effective and the ways in which communicators’ skills in these domains can be improved.

## EXPLANATORY DISCOURSE

Explanatory communication deepens understanding of subject matter (Martin, 1970). In contrast to informative discourse that assumes some understanding of a topic and a desire for greater awareness, in explanatory messages, one assumes an audience already has some awareness of a topic and would like a deeper understanding (see Fig. 10.2). Instances of explanatory discourse include an astronomer’s radio account of why the sky turned “blood red” on the day Jesus Christ was crucified (the crucifixion occurred during an eclipse), Web page accounts of how spacecraft usually burn up on reentering a planet’s atmosphere, and textbook passages depicting the distinctions between the musical genres of blues and jazz.

In a series of papers, I have offered a way of classifying major types of explanatory discourse by identifying common sources of confusion and selecting research-supported steps for overcoming these anticipated difficulties (Rowan, 1988, 1991, 1995, 1999a, 1999b). In brief, this framework says that there are three principal obstacles to understanding difficult ideas, including difficulties in (a) distinguishing essential from associated meanings of terms (e.g., the intended meaning of the term “chemical” when used by a chemist versus associated meanings of this term); (b) difficulties in visualizing complex, unseen, or unfamiliar phenomena (e.g., the periodic table of elements; how a rotting tree feeds a forest); and (c) obstacles in understanding ideas that seem counterintuitive to lay audiences, such as the fact that one may be ill without feeling bad, that abstract art may be more difficult than portraiture, or that natural foods such as potatoes contain naturally present pesticides (National Research Council, 1996). Although there is no substitute for directly testing audiences’ understanding of a subject, research has disclosed ways of formally identifying aspects of complex subject matter likely to confuse many people. This section of the chapter summarizes this work and illustrates effective and ineffective instances of explaining.

Scholars in several fields have studied text features effective at overcoming each of the three main obstacles to understanding complex ideas. I refer to people’s efforts

to overcome each of these difficulties as a certain type of explanation: *elucidating explanations*, which establish the meaning and use of terms; *quasi-scientific explanations*, which help audiences envision complex structures and processes, and *transformative explanations*, which help people understand counterintuitive or implausible ideas.

## Effective Elucidating Explanations

Elucidating explanations are designed to help people understand the meaning and use of a term. The name *elucidating* is used because this sort of discourse clarifies meanings. Frequently, when people clarify a confusing term, they do so by offering a substituted word or phrase, by giving an example, or by defining their term (Yule, 1997, pp. 80–81). Research shows that each of these steps is apt to be effective or ineffective to the extent that it helps an audience distinguish a concept's essential or intended meaning as opposed to associated meanings. Therefore, good elucidating explanations focus attention on this distinction. Specifically, good elucidating explanations contain (a) a definition that lists each of the concept's essential features, (b) an array of varied examples, (c) a discussion of nonexamples or instances likely to be mistaken for examples, and (d) opportunities to practice distinguishing examples from nonexamples (Merrill & Tennyson, 1977; Tennyson & Cocchiarella, 1986).

**Step 1. Define Concepts by Their Essential, not Associated, Meanings.** Good explainers often communicate familiar but often misunderstood notions by explaining what these notions do not mean as well as what they do mean. For instance, textbook authors are often aware that despite the familiar nature of a key term such as *chemistry*, *grammar*, *religion*, or *science*, there is a high likelihood that students in a class will not have the same notions of the concept's meaning as their instructor does. Consequently, they often begin their books with chapters discussing common but erroneous notions of core terms as a way of alerting students to the author's view of the concept's core meaning. For example, Sharon Crowley, author of *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (1994), presents this explanation of her key concept, *rhetoric*:

When Americans hear the word *rhetoric* they tend to think of politicians' attempts to deceive them. . . . But that is not the way rhetoricians defined their art in ancient Athens and Rome. In ancient times, people used *rhetoric* to make decisions, solve disputes, and to mediate public discussion of major issues. . . . As Aristotle put it in a famous definition, *rhetoric* is the “power of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatsoever.” (Crowley, 1994, pp. 1–2, 9, citing *Rhetoric* I ii 1355a)

Crowley's discussion says that what is essential in *rhetoric* is its focus on strategies for persuasion, not the truth or goodness of the idea some audience is asked to accept. Her discussion of *rhetoric* begins by noting an associated but not essential meaning—that *rhetoric* involves deception—and then presents Aristotle's view that *rhetoric* involves all possible persuasive strategies for gaining agreement.

There are often several essential meanings associated with an important concept. For example, the definition of “biotechnology” on Purdue University’s School of Agriculture Web site lists three qualities present in all instances of biotechnology. It says:

*Bio-tech-nol-o-gy, noun* (1941): A collective term for a variety of scientific techniques that use living cells or components of cells to improve crops, animals, or microorganisms. (Biotechnology backgrounder, n.d.)

That is, biotechnology involves (a) scientific techniques, (b) use of cells or components of cells, and (c) improvement of plants, animals, and microorganisms. This definition does an excellent job of focusing attention on the manipulation of cells or cell components as a key feature of biotechnology. One might quibble, though, with whether “improve” is an essential feature of biotechnology’s meaning. Certainly, biotechnology techniques yield beneficial products. For example, cheeses, once produced with an enzyme from the stomachs of slaughtered calves, can now be produced with the same enzyme obtained through biotechnology (Tally, 2000). But biotechnology’s improvement of target entities may be a frequent though not essential or inevitable meaning of this term. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (n.d.) Web site offers a more neutral version. It says, “Agricultural biotechnology is a collection of scientific techniques, including genetic engineering, that are used to create, improve, or modify plants, animals, or microorganisms.”

***Step 2. When Defining a Confusing Concept, Present an Array of Varied Examples.***

Intuition tells communicators to give an example of a confusing concept, but research suggests that the best elucidating explanations offer several examples that instantiate the concept’s essential meaning in differing ways (Merrill & Tennyson, 1977, pp. 31–45). This effort to illustrate a concept’s essential features in multiple guises minimizes the likelihood that a random feature of some single example will be interpreted as essential. An effective elucidating explanation, a textbook account of Wide Area Networks, does a good job of giving an array of instances illustrating several tasks performed through wide area networks. It says the following:

As the names implies, Wide Area Networks (WANs) generally cover large physical areas, and can span huge areas. They typically are more sophisticated than Local Area Networks (LANs), and may include one or many types of computers, including mainframe computers. A WAN consists of multiple LANs, and the computers may be connected through public utilities, such as a telephone company or a television cable provider. . . . Examples of common uses for wide area networks include:

- Making a credit card purchase
- Visiting a bank automated teller machine
- Using a grocery “club” card for instant discounts on purchases
- Collaboration across distances through the Internet. (Witmer, 2000, pp. 10–11)

Had this author listed only one instance of a WAN, readers might wrongly infer that WANs supported only credit card purchases, for example, and could not support other functions such as Internet collaboration. Similarly, good elucidating explanations of agricultural biotechnology list a variety of examples of this phenomenon such as cheese production, bread making (which involves the one-celled fungus, yeast), and creation of transgenic animals (e.g., fish made larger through insertion of a gene for growth in their DNA). By listing an array of examples, one helps learners see the full array of essential features of some concept and helps deter misconceptions such as thinking wrongly that biotechnology includes only modifications of plants.

**Step 3. Effective Elucidating Explanations Sometimes Discuss “Nonexamples.”** Research shows that considering ways in which an apparent example does not have this status helps audiences see important distinctions (Merrill & Tennyson, 1977; Tennyson, Woolley, & Merrill, 1972). Often in explanations of two related terms, each concept functions as a kind of “nonexample” of the other. For instance, to explain weather and climate, one author wrote: “Climate is defined as a time average of weather data (for instance, monthly, seasonal, annual, or decadal averages of hourly or daily observations of variables such as temperature, wind, or total precipitation” (O’Lenic, 1999, p. 40). Another instance of defining two related but distinct terms and showing that one concept is a “nonexample” of the other can be seen in this explanation of the difference between the Internet and the World Wide Web. In this case, the author’s point is that the World Wide Web is one part of a larger entity, the Internet:

The Internet, sometimes simply called “the Net,” is a worldwide system of computer networks—a network of networks in which users at any one computer can, if they have permission, get information from any other computer. . . .

The most widely used part of the Internet is the World Wide Web (often abbreviated “WWW” or called “the Web”). Its outstanding feature is hypertext, a method of instant cross-referencing. (Witmer, 2000, pp. 112–113)

Frequently, discussion of a nonexample draws attention to a concept’s essential meanings. For instance, a discussion of agricultural biotechnology might include the point that selecting animals for breeding on their own through sexual intercourse is not an instance of biotechnology because such efforts do not involve direct human manipulation of cells or cell components. A discussion of dietary fiber might note that pot roast does not count as dietary fiber, despite its tough, fibrous texture. Often nonexamples have features that surprise audiences, reminding them to think precisely about concepts’ essential rather than associated meanings.

**Step 4. Effective Elucidating Explanations Encourage Learners to Practice.** One final feature of effective elucidating explanations is that they offer learners an opportunity to practice using key concepts (Merrill & Tennyson, 1977). This features is most easily created in contexts such as workbooks or online instruction. To some extent, though, a good communicator can simulate practice opportunities by repeatedly showing an audience whether a concept does or does not apply in a given context. Good instructors follow this practice in early class sessions in which they encourage students to think, for example, about what “counts” as “communication,” “religion,” or whatever key concept the course will explore.

## Effective Quasi-Scientific Explanations

The second type of explanatory discourse has little to do with words and their associations. Instead, the difficulty focused on by this type of explanation concerns picturing the complex. To the uninitiated, accounts of many phenomena often seem a mass of bewildering details. For instance, patients may wonder how antibiotics distinguish “bad” versus “good” bacteria; people watching weather news may be confused about why El Niño events occur. Similarly, students encountering textbook material are daunted by dense, multipage accounts of how the human eye works

or the major types of Indo-European languages. In each case, these audiences are struggling to envision some complex structure or process. In contrast, research shows that experts in these subjects are apt to think about them as manifestations of a few fundamental principles in the natural sciences, social sciences, or linguistics (e.g., Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Patel & Groen, 1991; Mayer, 1992, especially chapter 13; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1991). Having such “simplified” understandings helps experts apply their knowledge of these subjects in useful ways.

Quasi-scientific explanations are so named because they assist novices in acquiring “mental models” or “quasi-scientific” accounts of complex topics. I use the term *quasi-scientific explanation* because science attempts to represent or picture aspects of reality to the satisfaction of scientists; similarly, quasi-scientific explanations make specialists’ models of reality accessible to nonspecialists.

**Functions and Features of Effective Quasi-Scientific Explanations.** A considerable number of studies show that good quasi-scientific explanations assist learners in functioning as experts do when experts think about a topic in their domain of expertise (Mautone & Mayer, 2001; Mayer, 1983, 1989). Specifically, good quasi-scientific explanations assist people in (a) selecting relevant aspects of complex material (i.e., with previews such as “the three main points”), (b) organizing that information into a coherent account of how or why something works (e.g., a causal chain), and (c) integrating newly learned information with already understood notions (e.g., helping people make connections between the way their hand feels when stretched outside a car traveling 40 miles per hour (mph) and the force “lift,” that helps airplanes fly).

**Feature No. 1: Effective Quasi-Scientific Explanations Sketch the Complex.** Specifically, some of the verbal and visual aids that help people in selecting, organizing, and integrating activities are titles, previews, headings, bullet points, topic sentences; figurative language such as organizing analogies (e.g., “Wetlands are nature’s kidneys: They filter impurities”); and graphic aids (drawings, models, animation). Overall, explanations enhanced by these features are better understood and applied than explanations without them (e.g., Gentner, 1988; Gilbert & Osborne, 1980; Loman & Mayer, 1983; Mautone & Mayer, 2001; Mayer, 1983, 1989, 1992; Mayer & Anderson, 1992; Mayer, Bove, Bryman, Mars, & Tapangco, 1996; McDaniel & Donnelly, 1996; Rukavina & Daneman, 1996).

For example, studies show that one powerful way to assist learners in attending to essential information, rather than distracting detail, is to give them a simplified image of that phenomena through an analogy or with diagrams (e.g., Gentner, 1988; Gilbert & Osborne, 1980; Mayer et al., 1996). A recent magazine article explaining weather patterns illustrates nicely this use of analogy:

The atmosphere and the ocean are partners in a dance. But who leads? Which initiates the eastward surge of warm water that ends La Nina and starts El Nino? Though intimately coupled, the ocean and the atmosphere do not form a perfectly symmetrical pair. Whereas the atmosphere is quick and agile and responds nimbly to hints from the ocean, the ocean is ponderous and cumbersome and takes a long time to adjust to a change in the winds. The atmosphere responds to altered sea surface temperature patterns within a matter of days or weeks; the ocean has far more inertia and takes months to reach a new equilibrium. (Philander, 1999, p. 13)

With this analogy of the ocean and the atmosphere to dancer partners, the author, a geosciences professor, helps lay readers envision interrelationships among forces such as trade winds, atmospheric pressure, sea-surface temperatures, and ocean currents. Research has shown that this sort of analogy is not simply a decorative addition to text (e.g., Fahnestock, 1999); instead, it is likely to help people master key dimensions of climatology. People reading this passage may be more apt to understand the notion that research in oceanography, meteorology, and climatology is becoming increasingly intertwined than would those who read an assertion of this increased interconnection but did not have access to the dancers analogy.

**Feature No. 2: Effective Quasi-Scientific Explanations Assist People in Seeing Relationships Among Key Components in a Model.** In addition to helping people acquire a general model of some structure or process, good quasi-scientific explanations can also help them refine their understanding. Consider this account of how airplanes achieve lift:

Imagine yourself sitting in the passenger seat of an automobile traveling at 40 mph. Then, think about how it feels to stick your flattened hand out the window of the car. (DON'T try this when near passing cars.) Now imagine making your outstretched hand parallel to the road. Next, slowly adjust the angle of your hand so that your palm is leaning into the oncoming wind. Your hand lifts upward, right?

The force you feel moving your hand upward is part of the set of forces that allows huge airplanes to fly.

This account of lift is inspired by the explanations in Wolke's (2000) *What Einstein Told His Barber*. As Wolke wrote:

[Just like your angled hand] airplane wings are not parallel to the ground; they are made to be tilted slightly upward in front—usually about 4 degrees when the plane is in level flight. That makes more pressure on the bottom surface [of the wing] than on the top, thereby pushing the wind upward and contributing to lift. (Wolke, 2000, p. 21)

Wolke goes on to explain that:

Newton's Third Law of Motion says that for every action there must be an equal and opposite reaction. So if the plane's wing is being pushed or lifted up, then by gosh something else is being pushed down. It is. The air. The wing must be whooshing a stream of air downward with a force equal to the lift it is getting. (Wolke, 2000, pp. 19–20)

In this explanation, learners are first assisted in getting a general notion of lift by the recollection of how their hand feels when coasting on air currents created by an automobile traveling at a fair speed. Additionally, by focusing attention on one feature of this process, the angle of the hand, and the way in which the angled hand experiences more lift than does a hand parallel to the ground, readers' attention is drawn to key connections between hand (or wing) angle and lift. Research on effective quasi-scientific explanations shows that emphasizing key connections with verbal signals such as the words "because" or "just as" increases the likelihood that readers understand these passages (e.g., Loman & Mayer, 1983). This point is important because, in some cases, linking words and phrases such as "just as" or "because" are excised

from children's textbooks in a misguided efforts to make such passages "more clear" by mandating short sentences (e.g., on the limitations of readability research, see Davison, 1984). Indiscriminant sentence shortening can harm the understandability of an explanation, particularly when an audience is struggling to understand key connections among component processes.

**Effective Quasi-Scientific Explanations Help People Apply New Knowledge.** One of the most interesting and consistent findings on effective quasi-scientific explanations is that enhancing people's abilities to envision a complex structure or process does not simply enhance comprehension; it also improves people's ability to use their newfound knowledge in solving problems. Several decades of work by scholars such as Mayer (e.g., Mayer, 1983, 1989; Mayer et al., 1996; McDaniel & Donnelly, 1996) have established this finding. For instance, in recent work, Mayer and his associates (e.g., Mautone & Mayer, 2001; also see Mayer & Anderson, 1992; Mayer & Chandler, 2001) have found that the textual "signaling" features that help readers mentally model complex phenomena in written materials are also effective in multimedia contexts. Mautone and Mayer (2001) conducted three experiments in which randomized groups of college students were given materials explaining how airplanes achieve lift. In each experiment, the treatment group received a "signaled" account of how airplanes achieve lift and the control group received an unsignalled version. The signaled print version contained a paragraph previewing three key points, headings, and italicized key words; the computer-narrated version contained audible announcements of these headings. In all other ways, the signaled and unsignalled materials were the same.

The results of these three experiments showed that students exposed to signalled text outperformed their counterparts on tests of knowledge use. That is, those receiving the signaled text were better able to write answers to application questions such as how an airplane wing could be redesigned to achieve greater lift. Mautone and Mayer (2001) interpreted these findings as support for the idea that text signals assist people in selecting relevant information from a text passage, organizing the information into a coherent account, and integrating that information with their existing knowledge.

**A Caveat on Simplification: Some Notions Designed to Assist Lay Audiences Are Wrong.** Unfortunately, even good explainers sometimes fail to ensure accuracy in their effort to simplify the complex. Despite the value of Mayer's extensive work on explanatory effectiveness, at least one of his explanatory passages can be critiqued for inaccuracy. Mautone and Mayer's (2001) explanation of lift is a frequent but inaccurate account often found in children's textbooks and even in airplane mechanic flight manuals (Wolke, 2000, p. 18). Because this inaccurate account of lift has become so widespread, there is now a series of NASA Web sites discussing correct and incorrect accounts of flight (Benson, 2000, 2002a, 2002b). The sites offer users a computerized flight simulator so that they can see animated video illustrations of lift under a variety of conditions.

The main way in which some popular accounts of lift err is to focus attention on a subset of the processes occurring in flight rather than the whole process (see fig. 10.3). Here's a brief version of NASA's quasi-scientific account of lift:

Lift is a force.

Force = mass X acceleration

Force = mass X change in velocity with time



**Lift is a force.**

**Force = mass X acceleration**

**Force = mass X change in velocity with time**

**Velocity has both magnitude (speed) and direction**

**Changing either speed or direction of a flow generates a force.**

**Lift is a force generated by turning a moving fluid.**

**FIG. 10.3.** This image is presented on a NASA Web site explaining the correct theory of lift. To visit the site, go to [www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/K-12/airplane/right2.html](http://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/K-12/airplane/right2.html)

Velocity has both magnitude (speed) and direction

Changing either the speed or direction of a flow generates a force . . .

Lift is a force generated by turning a moving fluid . . .

Lift can be generated by a wide variety of objects, including airplane wings, rotating cylinders, spinning balls, and flat plates. Lift is the force that holds aircraft in the air. . . .

#### *Lift Generated in a Moving Fluid*

For a body immersed in a moving fluid [i.e., rushing air], the fluid will remain in contact with the surface of the body. If the body is shaped, moved, or inclined in such a way as to produce a net deflection (or turning) of the flow, the local velocity is changed in magnitude, direction, or both. . . . Any part of the solid body can deflect a flow. Parts facing the oncoming flow are said to be windward, and parts facing away from the flow are said to be leeward. Both windward and leeward parts can deflect a flow. Ignoring the leeward deflection leads to a popular incorrect theory of lift. (Benson, 2000)

This account of flight recalls familiar experiences such as seeing cake batter move around the beaters in a mixer or thinking about the operation of sails on sailboats. It is saying that one can explain lift partly with the “hand-out-the-car-window” account, but that a more accurate explanation draws attention to what’s happening to *both* the windward and the leeward side of the hand. As Wolke (2000) explained:

[T]he top-of-the-wing air is actually being thrust down by the wing’s [curved] shape. And according to Newton’s Third Law, the wing is therefore thrust upward with an equal amount of force. . . . Even a small plane like a Cessna 172 is pumping three to five tons of air downward every second. (p. 20)

Accuracy matters in all forms of informative and explanatory discourse.

## Effective Transformative Explanations

The third type of explanation is called transformative. Transformative explanations help audiences understand ideas that are difficult to comprehend because they are counterintuitive. That is, some scientific notions can be expressed with simple words and are easy to envision, but they are still profoundly difficult to understand. For instance, people struggle to understand how forest fires could possibly be good for forests, how the Earth could be weightless, or why all humans routinely emit radiation from their bodies. In these cases, powerful lay theories are the principal source of confusion. That is, people have their own theories—articulated or not—that say fire burns their bodies, so it must also burn, and therefore be harmful to, trees; that the Earth is too large to be weightless, and human bodies are not typically viewed as sources of radiation. Research in science education shows that, like scientists, people are reluctant to give up their tacit theories until given good reasons to do so. Consequently, to help audiences recognize, test, and overcome lay theories, one must use a form of text I call *transformative explanation*. Transformative explanations are so named because they assist audiences in recognizing implicit lay theories, understanding their strengths and limitations, and in understanding the reasons for scientists' endorsements of other accounts.

Scholars have explored lay theorizing in detail, for it particularly blocks mastery of Newtonian principles and scientific accounts of familiar phenomena such as household safety (e.g., use of cleaning products, handling of ladders around power lines), disease management, and nutrition (e.g., Alvermann, Smith, & Readance, 1985; Anderson & Smith, 1984; diSessa, 1982; Guzetti, Snyder, Glass, & Games, 1993; Hewson & Hewson, 1983, 1984; Richards, 1996). Fortunately, it is possible to predict the contexts in which lay theories are most likely to develop. People develop lay theories about familiar and important aspects of experience. They do not have lay theories about phenomena that do not have personal import. New findings about why some galaxies have spiral “arms” are not the sort of topics about which people form lay theories.

Instead, lay theories form about the most familiar aspects of life and are difficult to overcome for several reasons. First, although these theories are often tacit or unspoken, they seem “obvious” to those who possess them and therefore are difficult to change (e.g., Rowan, 1991). For example, even individuals who have studied physics are still apt to be surprised by the scientifically correct statement, “the Earth is weightless.” Their surprise may result from the clash between their implicit lay theory of “weight” that says “heaviness” is associated with size. People may reason that the Earth is large; therefore, it must weigh quite a bit. Physicists know that what we typically call weight is defined in physics as the pull of gravity on an object, and that the Earth is in free fall as it orbits the Sun. Objects in free fall are “weightless”; therefore, the Earth, as an object in free fall, is weightless.

This example may seem to have few real-world consequences, but in fact many lay theories guide people’s thought and actions, often with disastrous results. For example, the solid construction of automobiles may lull people into thinking that the forces acting on them as their cars travel at 40 mph are the same as those acting on them as they sit at their kitchen tables. Drivers are sometimes shocked at the force with which they are thrown forward in their seats when they brake suddenly. In part, their surprise may come from the fact that they do not realize that the factors affecting a person hurtling along at 40 mph are similar to those acting on a person falling from a three-story building (Allman, 1985). Furthermore, lay theories are

often reinforced by everyday language, so there may be a tendency to grow comfortable with their apparent accuracy. A radio commercial for fresh chicken says that chicken from a certain company has “no hormones,” a statement that makes little sense because all plant and animal cells contain hormones. Nevertheless, continual repetition of such an assertion may lull people into an erroneous lay view that says all hormones are humanly produced and in wanting to purchase “hormone-free” chicken.

**The Four Essential Features of Effective Transformative Explanations.** Given the obdurateness of lay notions, and the extent to which they are often apparently supported by daily experiences and everyday language, communicators must take certain steps to overcome them. In brief, effective explanations of counterintuitive ideas surprise audiences by helping them see that they have a lay theory and then causing them to become dissatisfied with it, before they present the more accepted theory. Specifically, researchers have identified several message features that help audiences recognize and reflect on lay theories. In general, good transformative explanations treat audiences like scientists: Scientists do not give up their theories until they receive compelling reasons to do so. Similarly, people do not give up lay notions simply because someone says they are wrong. Good transformative explanations help audiences overcome lay theories when they (a) state the lay theory, (b) acknowledge its apparent merit, (c) create dissatisfaction with it, and (d) show how a more orthodox notion better explains the phenomenon in question (Alvermann et al., 1985; Anderson & Smith, 1984; Guzzetti et al., 1993; Hewson & Hewson, 1983, 1984; Kuhn, 1989; Schommer, 1990; Shymansky & Kyle, 1988).

**Examples of Transformative Explanations.** An example of transformative explanation is available in a news release from the National Institute on Aging (Lewis, 2000). The news release does a good job of stating the mistaken lay theory that illness due to exposure to the elements can only occur in the outdoors.

When Jack Frost Howls, Take Cover—Even Indoors:  
Hypothermia for Older People

Chilly air and blustery winds can be deadly cold, especially for older people who are at higher risk for hypothermia than are younger adults.

Hypothermia is below-normal body temperature, typically 96 degrees Fahrenheit or lower.

[Step 4: Explain the Orthodox Science] Surprisingly, hypothermia can threaten the health of older people in cool indoor temperatures such as 60 degrees Fahrenheit. As people age, they may lose their natural ability to keep warm in the cold, and inactivity, illness, and certain medications make it even more difficult.

[Steps 1 and 2: State the Lay Theory and Acknowledge the Lay View's Apparent Reasonableness] “Usually we think of hypothermia as something that happens to people outdoors,” says Dr. Terrie Wetle, deputy director of the National Institute on Aging (NIA). “It is important to know that some older people may have a dangerous drop in body temperature inside their own home.”

[Step 4: Explain the Orthodox Science] According to Dr. Wetle, elderly poor people are at increased risk for hypothermia because they may keep indoor temperatures low to save on heating costs. (Lewis, 2000)

This news release is effective at getting attention because its headline draws immediate attention to the discrepancy between the lay theory that says cold, outdoor

climates are the only factors that could cause dangerously low body temperatures in humans and the expert view that says elderly individuals can be at risk for hypothermia in their own homes. Analyzing the release as a transformative explanation shows that it is effective in enacting three of the four steps necessary for good transformative explanation. However, the third step is missing. That step involves creating dissatisfaction with the lay view by helping an audience remember personal experiences that call the lay theory into question. Research shows that this step is particularly important because it uses the psychological power of showing people an inconsistency between personal experiences they have forgotten and their lay view (Hewson & Hewson, 1983; Rowan, 1991).

One way of creating dissatisfaction with the lay view might be to remind readers of their personal discomfort when they experience cold showers or must sit without warm clothes in an overly air-conditioned or drafty room. Although such experiences are usually simply uncomfortable rather than life threatening, considering them may remind readers that body temperature is a function of multiple factors, not just ambient temperature. Readers might also be reminded of information of the sort presented on a Web page for Southern California hikers titled “Idyllwild Hiking Dangers”:

[*Step 1: State the Lay Theory*] Hypothermia in Southern California? Don’t laugh, the dangers are real.

[*Step 4: State the Orthodox Science*] The fact of the matter is that hypothermia can strike even on a sunny slightly cool day. Hypothermia is not just getting a slight chill and doing some jumping jacks to warm yourself up. Hypothermia is more, and can be more serious.

Hypothermia is a sudden loss of the core temperature of your body to below 96 degrees F. [*Steps 1 and 2: State the Lay Theory and Acknowledge Its Apparent Reasonableness*] Although this is just a little over two degrees temperature drop, the effects can be very devastating to the body. Continued cooling of the body can disrupt major body organs and cause serious trouble.

[*Step 4: State the Orthodox Science*] Keeping yourself prepared in the mountains can be the difference between life and death. Heat loss is caused by conduction, convection, evaporation, and radiation. We lose heat through our heads, so wear a hat. We lose it through exposure to water, so bring a rain coat. . . . Shivering, stiff hands, sore feet are all normal parts of being cold. These are all signs of impending hypothermia. (Idyllwild hiking dangers, n.d.)

This second explanation of hypothermia begins well by calling attention to a lay theory. The text also offers an initial explanation of the factors associated with hypothermia. Additionally, a second lay theory is presented. In paragraph three, the writer acknowledges that a temperature difference of two degrees may not seem important and then notes that a two-degree temperature drop can have devastating effects on the body. An opportunity to use the “third step” in transformative explanation, that of creating dissatisfaction with a lay theory, may occur here. That is, an audience could be encouraged to become dissatisfied with this lay notion by being reminded that they know a two-degree difference in the opposite direction is a sign of fever and serious illness in adults.

A weakness in this second account of hypothermia is that it still does not include the crucial third step of creating dissatisfaction with the lay theory that says that it is impossible to suffer from hypothermia in a sunny climate. One way to take that step would be to present a scenario of this sort, which discusses familiar or plausible conditions inconsistent with the lay notion:

[Step 3: Create Dissatisfaction with the Lay Theory] A healthy 35-year-old man goes running up the foothills of Idyllwild, California. He wears a T-shirt and shorts because the temperature that day at sea level is in 65 degrees F. A group of his friends follow behind him wearing pants and jackets.

An hour later, his friends come upon the runner. He is sitting down on the trail. His complexion is pale and he says he is dizzy. One of his friends says the runner is suffering from hypothermia, or a sudden loss of core body temperature.

How can this happen? [STEP 4: Explain the Orthodox Science] According to health officials, heavy exertion (such as running), wet clothes, and wind exposure can easily lead to hypothermia, even in 60 degree F weather for a healthy person. Body temperature in mammals is maintained by both the heat energy individuals generate within their bodies and the environmental conditions they experience. Wind and wetness lead to heat loss.

This scenario reminds lay audiences of information they may know from past personal experience and may help them to abandon their lay theories. Additionally, the final paragraph of this account makes the science of hypothermia vivid. It is based on materials in an award-winning Web site on hypothermia, which includes diagrams of an exhausted runner sitting on a rock (Weinberg, n.d.; Weinberg, 1993). Arrows depict the ways the exhausted individual is losing heat from wetness and wind. Vivid text and good diagrams such as these make the fourth step in this transformative explanation—that of explaining the orthodox science—effective. Frequently, this step is best taken by presenting a good quasi-scientific explanation, which helps lay audiences envision complex processes.

Transformative explanations are powerful tools for helping people reflect on their lay theories and see discrepancies between their intuitive notions and specialists' explanations of the same phenomenon. Scholars in science education have amassed a large amount of evidence showing that transformative explanations are more effective in helping people reconsider lay theories and understand counter intuitive scientific notions than are quasi-scientific explanations (e.g., diSessa, 1982; Hewson & Hewson, 1983, 1984; Shymansky & Kyle, 1988). For the most part, though, people who make their living explaining complex science to nonspecialists are unfamiliar with this research. To some extent, this situation is changing as research on all three types of explanation-as-teaching is being shared through communication textbooks (e.g., Daly & Engleborg, 2001; Osborne & Osborne, 2000). Additionally, some scholars are using content-analysis techniques to identify explanatory passages in science news (e.g., Long, 1995). For the most part, however, there is a good deal of research needed to describe the explanatory discourse being generated by teachers, journalists, and public relations officers. Communication scholars can assist these professionals in recognizing what they are already doing well as they inform and explain and what they might do to make their efforts even more effective.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### Limits of the Typological Theory

Like any theoretical framework, my typological theory of informative and explanatory communication has strengths and limitations. One interesting criticism is that many of the examples of informative and explanatory communication presented in this

chapter could easily be placed in another section. For instance, one could, instead of offering an elucidating explanation of agricultural biotechnology, give instructions on how to produce a transgenic plant or animal. Similarly, instead of presenting an account of how airplanes achieve lift as a quasi-scientific explanation one could argue compellingly that the idea of large heavy objects such as planes flying is highly counterintuitive and might be best explained as a transformative explanation.

This sort of criticism illustrates the usefulness and limitations of a classificatory theory of the sort presented here. In this theory, types of informative and explanatory communication are identified on the basis of inferences about the communicator's probable goals and the audience's probable needs (see Rowan, 1988, pp. 29–30). These inferences need to be checked in any particular case. The goal of this theoretical framework is to illuminate frequent informative and explanatory communication goals, common obstacles to these goals, and the wealth of research available on meeting these goals. Classifying communication challenges in certain ways should be viewed as a process of illuminating or thinking about the particular challenge, not as a process of imprisoning an explanation in some “box” for all time.

## **Furthering Research on Informative and Explanatory Skills**

Communication scholars can discuss persuasive communication skills in considerable detail (e.g., O'Keefe, 2002); however, because many 20th-century communication scholars believed that informative communication did not exist (e.g., Berlo, 1960), we have far less to say about informative and explanatory communication. To address this problem, I have reviewed scholarship on effective informing and explaining, but there are many questions this chapter does not answer. Why, for example, are some communicators better at producing elucidating, quasi-scientific, and transformative explanations than others? What individual differences underlie the ability to “naturally” produce effective informative and explanatory messages? A second question pertains to methods for identifying more and less effective instances of informing and explaining. Long (1995) provided a way of identifying elucidating explanations in mass media science news, but much more work is needed to develop appropriate methods. For example, communication scholars might follow Long's (1995) approach and identify types of more and less effective explanations in the lectures, textbooks, or Web pages of excellent professors. A third question concerns the effects or outcomes of more and less effective explanatory efforts. The field of communication offers extensive and helpful research on the ways in which professors build good working relationships with students and the associations between these relationships and learning outcomes (e.g., Frymier & Houser, 2000; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987). It would be interesting to learn whether professors' informative and explanatory skills are distinctively associated with students' mastery of complex subject matter.

Further study should also explore the way in which this theory assists communicators in *learning as well as communicating* complex subject matter. This type of research is the sort composition scholars encourage in research on the teaching of writing (e.g., Bean, 1996; Hillocks, 1986, 1995). For instance, someone writing about the possibility of life on Mars may realize that she does not understand her topic. Despite this fact, assume she works for a public relations agency hired by NASA to communicate this information to interested lay audiences. This individual could prepare for her task by using the theory presented here. That is, she could use the taxonomy of informing and explaining in Fig. 10.1 as a set of questions for checking her own understanding of this subject matter. For example, does she understand the

essential meaning of the word “life”? Can she locate a good elucidating explanation of “life” that scholars in appropriate fields find acceptable? Does she know why there is an association between the presence of water detected on Mars and the presence of life? Is water by itself the key to this tantalizing possibility, or are there other essential factors? Is the whole question of how life comes to exist best presented as an elucidating, quasi-scientific, or transformative explanation—or perhaps all three? And, important for NASA, what is the latest news about evidence of life on Mars from the scholarly communities that have expertise in this domain? As this line of questioning shows, the features of effective informative and explanatory communication may be used as lines of inquiry for communicators trying to master complex subject matter as well as lines of inquiry for communicators trying to determine how best to share news and explain complexities.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that many current accounts of effective informing skill and explaining-as-teaching often focus on parts of this skill, rather than the skill as a whole. That is, conventional notions of effective informing often focus on the importance of using simple words and short sentences, ensuring accuracy, including visuals, and selecting effective organizational patterns. Additionally, many textbooks and handbooks discussing technical communication, informative communication, or expository writing, do an excellent job of sharing traditional wisdom and contemporary insights but fail to share the wealth of research now available on discourse features that help communicators inform and teach. Consequently, there is a need for a theory of informative communication that is informed by contemporary research and that assists communicators in thinking about these fundamental tasks.

To address this need, I have presented such a theory in this chapter, defining informative communication as discourse designed to create awareness of new information or to deepen understanding of not-yet-comprehended material. Based on Kinneavy’s (1971) work, this theory integrates research from disparate fields and presents this work in a coherent package. Communication scholars and practitioners can use this theory to study how people inform and explain in everyday contexts. In an era in which near-infinite space for discourse has been created through the Internet and the World Wide Web, now is an especially exciting time to study both real-world and virtual-world efforts to inform and to teach.

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CHAPTER

# 11

## ARGUING SKILL

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*Argument* has been variously defined by different scholars, each having a slightly different end in mind (e.g., Brockriede & Ehninger, 1960; Hample, 1985a; Jackson & Jacobs, 1980; D. O'Keefe, 1977; Toulmin, 1958; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984; Willard, 1976). Without intending it as a definition that competes in any way with others, here I wish to say that an argument is the face-to-face exchange of messages, especially those conveying reasons, in contemplation of actual or potential disagreement. This is a definition of convenience, designed to focus our attention on the interpersonal arguments that dominate our personal lives. Still, it might be useful to notice how this definition connects with what I think are the two discussions that remain in conceptual control of argumentation studies.

One of these is D. O'Keefe's (1977), in which he was at pains to distinguish two everyday senses of the word *argument*. The first of these is argument<sub>1</sub> (normally oralized as "argument one"). This is the sense in which we say that a person *makes* an argument. Thus, an editorialist makes an argument<sub>1</sub>. Arguments<sub>1</sub> tend to be textual, relatively objectifiable products that can be studied at length and are therefore convenient for textbooks on argumentation, logic, and informal logic. Prototypically, they are made by a single person working alone. Argument<sub>2</sub> is the second sense of the word, and here it is natural to say that two people *have* an argument<sub>2</sub>, perhaps about what movie to see or whose turn it is to clean the kitchen. Arguments<sub>2</sub> are as ephemeral and transient as any other interpersonal exchange and are normally studied only by means of transcription, recording, or some other kind of textualization process. Throughout this chapter, I mainly have interpersonal argument in mind and so most directly discuss argument<sub>2</sub>. Nonetheless, both argument<sub>1</sub> and argument<sub>2</sub> have some features in common, notably the use of reasons and those reasons' connections to conclusions, and so the scholarly traditions that concern themselves with stable argument products remain relevant.

O'Keefe's discussion has been extended by the suggestion that there is a third thing, argument<sub>0</sub> (Hample, 1985a). Argument<sub>0</sub> refers to the cognitive experience of arguing, the thinking that goes on for argument production and reception to occur. Thus, the cognitive contents that exist when a person mulls over what to say or puzzles over the meaning of another person's discourse are arguments<sub>0</sub>. Arguing skill is displayed

(or not) in arguments<sub>1</sub> and arguments<sub>2</sub> but has a basis in the originating arguments<sub>0</sub> and looks forward to the receptive arguments<sub>0</sub>. None of these three things seems to have any conceptual priority (Hamble, 1988). Both argument<sub>1</sub> and argument<sub>2</sub> require argument<sub>0</sub>, argument<sub>0</sub> generally has one of the two public products in view, argument<sub>1</sub> often tries to anticipate the reader's experience in interacting with the text, and argument<sub>2</sub> may aim at the generation of an interactionally cooperative argument<sub>1</sub>. My focus is mainly on argument<sub>2</sub> simply because I think that interpersonal exchanges are the most common and most personally consequential sorts of arguments, and therefore the ones at which it is most important for people to be competent.

The other key conceptual work is Wenzel's (1979, 1980, 1990, 1999). Wenzel does not talk about kinds of arguments; rather, he considers the critical stances that one may take in analyzing arguments of any kind. He discusses three such orientations. The first he calls *logical*, although he does not quite mean what a formal logician means by this term. The critic's concern here is the validity or, better, the soundness of an argument. The second stance is *rhetorical*, and here the critic studies the persuasive effectiveness of an argument. Finally, the critic may take a *dialectical* or procedural stance, to consider the interactional means by which the argument is produced. This last perspective opens the analysis to considerations of fairness, deception, oppression, availability of argumentative resources, and so forth.

All these stances are in play in this chapter, although the least emphasis will be placed on what Wenzel called rhetorical considerations. A competent argument is one that satisfies the best logical and procedural standards and therefore deserves to be effective. Whether such an argument actually succeeds is the province of persuasion studies. Although this issue is certainly relevant to argumentation, the dual realities of space limitations and easy availability of high-quality persuasion books (e.g., Allen & Preiss, 1998; D. O'Keefe, 2002; Stiff, 1994), as well as Dillard and Marshall's chapter on persuasion in this volume, justify leaving this complex topic aside. Wenzel's logical stance is important, because this is where we can evaluate the soundness of an arguer's productions. But most relevant is the dialectical viewpoint, because this is the one that examines how the people interact and also instructs us to examine the fairness and openness of the encounter (see Hamble, 2000a).

## SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

Several entirely distinct chapters could be written under this one's title, and so I think I need to mention what I have excluded and why. Readers' initial expectation might be that this would be a chapter about logic, for surely no other scholarly approach has so long and distinguished a history of concern for propositions and their support as does formal logic (e.g., Kretzmann, Kenny, & Pinborg, 1982). For much of its history, argumentation has been closely connected with logic, sharing many key theorists (Aristotle and Whately come immediately to mind). Argumentation textbooks from the first part of the 20th century commonly contain chapters that simply summarize basic concepts from logic, such as syllogisms, formal fallacies, and material fallacies. Logic has always had its detractors, however. When the traditional criticism of distortive formality was leveled again by both Toulmin (1958) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), and endorsed by Brockriede and Ehninger (1960), argumentation scholars decided to adopt the more ambitious aim of studying how people actually argue instead of undertaking what they increasingly saw as the Procrustean task of pressing ordinary language into the unyielding iron frame of formal logic. Here, too, I focus on people and their actual behavior,

rather than the algebra of inference. Logic is certainly relevant to human argumentation (see Hamble, 1986), but it does not serve us here well as a primary frame of analysis.

A second possible but unchosen chapter under this title might concern itself with informal logic, which is distinguished from formal logic in two ways: its interest in actual human arguments as found in talk and writings and its general preference for the study of material fallacies (the journal *Informal Logic* is the ideal resource for readers who wish to pursue these topics). Here, I have two hesitations. First, many informal logicians see their primary task as the formalization of the material fallacies. This does not offer any more help in understanding how people actually argue than the main body of formal logic and is susceptible to the same reservations about formalizing and distorting ordinary discourse. Second, even those informal logicians who want to study actual arguments *in vivo* focus almost exclusively on the texts. They have little to say about the people who argue—how they feel, what they think, why they think it. These sorts of things are the ones I see as more central to the chapter I've chosen to write. Some informal logicians are exceptions to both these reservations (e.g., Gilbert, 1997), and I make use of their insights.

Yet a third approach might have been to explore the empirical realities of logic in use. To what degree do people follow the rules of logic? What fallacies are most seductive? Do all cultures make use of the same essential logic? Useful books on these topics include Cole and Means (1981), Evans (1982), Falmagne (1975), Hamill (1990), and Wason and Johnson-Laird (1972). These are interesting issues, frankly more tempting than those usually raised in the formal and informal logic approaches. Nonetheless, they are still anchored by logical form, still insistent on “translating” ordinary language into formal terms, and still more interested in syllogism problems than face-to-face conversation. So once again, I've chosen to turn aside.

One final possible route I have not taken is to focus mainly on the explicit research on argumentative competence. The problem here is that this topic has simply not been a major priority for the research community. I am aware of two relevant research programs and briefly summarize them here.

The first is Trapp's (Trapp, 1986a; Trapp, Yingling, & Wanner, 1987) development of self-report scales for own and other's assessments of an arguer's effectiveness and social appropriateness. Trapp et al. reported several interesting findings. For example, people identified as competent arguers are also rated as being more effective and more appropriate than those identified as incompetent. Effectiveness scores are positively associated with ratings of relational competence and communication satisfaction. Appropriateness scores are also positively associated (adjusting for Trapp et al.'s scoring direction) with relational competence and communication satisfaction. Finally, effectiveness and appropriateness are themselves directly correlated. Using Trapp's scales, Hamble and Dallinger (1987a) report that those who rate themselves as highly effective arguers are more likely to be focused on task standards for arguing (e.g., effectiveness) and less likely to use person-centered criteria (e.g., harm to other's face) for editing their own arguments. The opposite pattern appears for people who rate themselves as unusually appropriate in their arguing. In these investigations, the Trapp scales were reliable and had clear factor structures. Overall, these results are sensible and should encourage further work.

The second tradition of explicit studies on arguing competence examines small group behaviors. Gouran (2000) and Meyers and Brashers (1999) make the case that argument quality is often central to a group's prospects for good decision making. Meyers, Brashers, Bradford, and Wachtel (2000), and Wachtel, Meyers, and Brashers

(1999) conducted empirical work consistent with that general position. Using the same data set, which consists of transcripts and behavioral codes for group members engaged in a decision-making task, arguers were identified as competent or incompetent by reference to whether their arguments were effective in moving the group toward the arguer's original position (Meyers et al., 2000; Wachtel et al., 1999). Competent arguers were more consistent in their positions throughout the discussion, gave more reasons, were more active in seeking consensus, and produced fewer disagreeing intrusions than less competent arguers. Although this work concerns only arguing effectiveness (omitting social appropriateness), these conclusions are still helpful in describing how arguers should conduct themselves.

There is simply too little work explicitly focused on arguing competence to form the kernel of this chapter, however. The work is too sparse, too precisely focused on details of small group discussion, and too rarely replicated. Perhaps publication of this volume will stimulate additional work.

Instead of any of the possible choices just mentioned, I therefore want to discuss ordinary interpersonal interactions in which people give, or should give, reasons of some sort. Normally, reasons are presented to resolve an actual or anticipated disagreement (Jackson & Jacobs, 1980). They may also be produced as a sort of identity display, as when a Christian gives reasons for belief in the Trinity to other committed Christians. But even there, the reasons given are presumably the ones that are expected to be persuasive to one of more hesitant faith.

Many argumentative interactions proceed more or less as we would wish, with good reasons given and acknowledged. If this were always so, there would be no more use for this chapter than one on proper breathing during communication. But the fact is that sometimes we experience disagreement without reasoning, as when small children or enraged adults simply exchange demands. Sometimes reasons are present but fail elementary tests of textual coherence or connection to the other person. Sometimes reasons are given, answered, and then simply repeated. All of these are examples of incompetence, and people can learn to do better.

## ARGUMENTATIVE COMPETENCE

The usual standards for communicative competence are effectiveness and social appropriateness (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). These certainly apply to arguing, and specific scales for assessing argument effectiveness and appropriateness have been developed, as mentioned previously (Trapp, 1986a; Trapp et al., 1987). Perhaps argument scholars' limited attention to these two factors has been due to the argumentation community's longtime commitment to another standard, soundness. This is similar to what Rakos (1997), in a related context, calls the "technical criterion" for evaluation. A sound argument passes both structural and moral tests (Ehninger, 1970; Wallace, 1963; Weaver, 1953). A good argument, says Wallace, not only presents pointed reasons, but also proceeds from good motives toward good ends. All these competence standards might be summarized by saying that *the arguer's fundamental obligation is to say true, moral things effectively, appropriately, and with structural soundness*.

Truth and morality are famously elusive concepts, and this is not the place to work out a coherent epistemology or ethics. Weaver (1953) addressed these standards by saying that the arguer must privately engage in the best dialectic of which he or she is capable and convey its conclusions in his or her public argument. Another approach is that of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), who said that arguers should orient

to the “universal audience,” a hypothetical group of intelligent subject-matter experts who cannot be misled by omissions or rhetorical flourishes or tempted by personal prejudice. A third set of useful insights is due to Habermas (see Burleson & Kline, 1979), who describes the “ideal speech situation,” which outlines what is required for a fair and open discussion. In any event, we are entitled to say that an argument is incompetent if it does not meet reasonable standards of substantive soundness, truth, and morality.

In keeping track of these requirements, we must pay attention to two things: the textual elements and the interpersonal experience of arguing. The substantive features of an argument include logical adequacy, structural soundness (Toulmin, 1958), quality of one’s evidence, defensibility of one’s values (Sproule, 1980), and so forth. But the experience of arguing face-to-face also involves emotion and immediacy. A theme of this chapter is that the second thing can interfere with properly accomplishing the first. Rather than regarding personal feelings as an epiphenomenon of arguing to be discarded by serious analysts, as a logician might (see Gilbert, 1997), I consider that interactional feelings and relational negotiations are part and parcel of interpersonal argument.

## FRAMES FOR ARGUING

In trying to understand why some people are better at arguing than others, and what may be done to help those who are less skilled, I think that the most fundamental question to answer is, *What do people think they are doing when they are arguing?* In exploring this question, I want to look at the various frames for arguing that ordinary actors have, and how those understandings constrain people’s behaviors. When people argue badly, and especially when the incompetence constitutes social inappropriateness, the problem is likely to be that they have misframed what they are doing. I review empirical evidence on how people understand their arguments<sup>2</sup> and explore the consequences of those frames as well as the prospects for changing some of them.

In looking at various ways of framing interpersonal arguing, I categorize them according to certain issues and consider the empirical implications of holding each view. Each categorization constitutes a different approximation of what arguing is. My personal sense is that these are in some sort of order of increasing delicacy, but I have no evidence of that. In particular, I would not want to give the reader the impression that these are in developmental order or that they constitute some sort of implicit phase theory of argumentative sophistication.

### First Phenomenal Approximation: The Primary Goal

This first approximation is the one most clearly connected to people’s immediate thoughts while they are arguing. When a person is actually engaged in a face-to-face argument, what is his or her primary reason for doing so?

For the most part, I suppose that arguing is no more than a means to some life goal (Hamble, 1991). One might argue for an increase in salary, and if we were to ask such a person, “What are you doing?” he or she would likely reply, “Trying to get a raise.” This seems obvious, but it leads to an important point: Most arguments are oriented toward people’s general goals, not toward specific communication-related goals. Just about anything that can motivate human action can motivate arguing. This essential instrumentality means that the character of arguing will typically not be in

the forefront of arguers' thoughts and perceptions: They will focus on getting a raise, or whatever they see the issue as being. Arguing, no matter how complex the activity, no matter what relational implications it has, will often be taken for granted by the arguers. So normally, arguers will have little conscious, reflective awareness of how they are arguing or what they are doing structurally. For most people, most of the time, the primary goal in arguing is simply to resolve some issue.

Other goals can also be primary, however, and these tend to be more related to standard communication concerns. One goal that is particularly problematic is that of establishing dominance over the other person. Western cultures are much imbued with competitive orientations—to games, to negotiations, to relationships. Many of the common metaphors applied to conflict and arguing refer literally to war, competitive contests, or pain (Seiffert & Brown, 2000). Our most formalized species of argumentation, interscholastic debating and the judicial system, clearly represent this win–loss mentality (but see Komter, 1998, for an analysis of an alternative Western judicial system). The urge to win can overwhelm the motivations to be right, to be moral, or to respect the other party's needs. Dominance displays may be met with reciprocal aggressiveness, or with withdrawal. Both of these are implicated in serious interpersonal problems (Folger, Poole, & Stuttman, 1997; Gottman, 1998; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Although resolving an issue can be a purely intellectual exercise, the introduction of dominance and power into interaction creates a second layer of complexity, involving personal identity and relational status. The commonness of dominance urges and power issues means that arguers may orient to them, even when they are never expressed (e.g., Cloven & Roloff, 1993).

Self-presentation is a related goal that, in certain cases, may also be the primary reason for arguing (Goffman, 1959). Sometimes a person will work through an argument in genuine detail, even though no interpersonal disagreement appears or is anticipated. Because public argument is an ideal means for showing off our thinking at its best, it is a useful way to display our commitments, our feelings, and our perceptiveness. Think of a student writing an essay answer in which he or she tries to present the professor's view, for example. Thus, we can use arguments to project our positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lim & Bowers, 1991). Here, then, we meet a third general reason for arguing. Resolving an issue is the first and largest category of motivation; dominating another person or relationship is a second urge; and displaying and defining personal identity is the third.

A fourth is to play. Some people—high argumentatives (Infante, 1988) or competitive debaters—regard arguing as recreation. They poke at other people's claims or take extreme positions themselves, just to see what happens. Talk-radio shows are sometimes forums for arguments seen as entertainment (Hutchby, 1996). When arguing from this motivational stance, the arguers may lack the personal commitments that are implied in the other motivations. They don't truly care how the issue is resolved, they don't see themselves as being relationally domineering, and they do not always consider that what they say reflects on who they are or seem to be.

Arguments proceeding from these different motivations may still look alike. Textbooks on argumentation and critical thinking tend to presume the issue-resolution frame and give advice that is oriented only to that goal. This view probably represents the first approximation of people's intellectualized reflections on arguing, and standard instruction therefore reinforces it. But when people argue for other reasons, the relational level of meaning (Watzlawick et al., 1967) should be the chief consideration, and advice on fallacies is entirely beside the point. To join the issue in argumentative detail when the issue really isn't the issue may be irrelevant or

counterproductive. No harm is done when the argument is playful, but risks are high when the argument is really a foil for identity or relational negotiations.

Recognition of these frames in oneself and others is important. Competent arguers must be able to perceive the other's reasons for arguing and reply accordingly. Skillful arguers must also be clear about their own reasons for arguing, knowing when they are trying to resolve the putative issue and when they are simply picking a fight. I do not mean to imply that it is wrong to argue to assert dominance, for power relations are, perhaps regrettably, fundamental to relational life. All four of these frames are legitimate ones, but they place different restrictions on both arguers.

## **Second Phenomenal Approximation: Connecting With the Other's Goals**

The next level of analysis of people's frames for arguing is to consider how—or whether—they try to coordinate their own goals with those of the other arguer. Many arguers never approach these considerations. Barbara O'Keefe (1988) identified a group of people she called "expressives," who understand the primary function of communication to be saying whatever they think, without adjustment. Hart and Burks (1972) studied a similar kind of person, labeled "noble selves," who, on principle, decline to adapt their utterances to their interlocutors. We might refer to both expressives and noble selves as "blurters." Such people, by choice or personality predisposition (e.g., Snyder, 1974; Swap & Rubin, 1983), simply do not make much effort to connect their own goals with anyone else's. Only by accident will such people argue appropriately, and they place great demands on their partners' tolerance.

But other people do frame their arguing behaviors with some reference to the other person (Drake & Donohue, 1996; Hamble, 2000b; Hamble & Dallinger, 1987b, 1990). The basic question here is whether such people connect with others' needs in a competitive or cooperative way. Does the arguer see his or her own goals as conjoining or conflicting with the goals of the interlocutor? This issue is especially relevant when the argument is initiated either to resolve an issue or to negotiate a relational definition (or both at once). Consider several of the possible ways goals can be connected.

First, and most obviously, in an issue-resolution argument, the participants may take either competitive (win–lose) or cooperative (win–win) stances. I expand on this choice later, but for here I observe that the first option leads to eristic argumentation (Aristotle [1984], *Topics*, I.1, 100a25–101a17; *Sophistical Refutations*, II, 165a34–165b9; Hamble, 2000a), and the second to coalescent arguing (Gilbert, 1997).

Eristic arguing is a verbal fight, which may or may not be regulated in a well-mannered way. An attorney cross-examining a hostile witness is a prototypical example. In this sort of encounter, the object is implicitly either to appeal to a third party for judgment (e.g., a jury) or to smash the opponent into abject dissolution. This sort of interaction admits the possibility of excellent arguments<sup>1</sup>, but creates a considerable likelihood of inappropriate behavior, having social costs. Although the two parties' goals are connected, they are not integrated. A truly mutual conclusion is not a genuine possibility, even if some decision is actually obtained.

Coalescent arguing, in contrast, acknowledges the other's goals in a more constructive manner (Gilbert, 1997; also see Mallin & Anderson, 2000; Stewart & Zediker, 2000). A married couple quietly trying to plan their financial future together might be an example of this. Both arguers' goals (immediate vs. long-range financial comfort, the wish to work, the wish to stay at home with one's children, professional ambitions, etc.) become the property (and argumentative resources) of both people

and are valued by both people simultaneously. People try to conjoin their goals, rather than promoting one's own at the expense of the other's. Sound arguments<sub>1</sub> are no more or less likely in coalescent arguing than in eristic, but the potential for appropriate behavior is much higher here. As Deutch (1998) has remarked, one of the most fundamental facts about conflict is that the arguers will probably still have to live with one another when the argument is done. Coalescent arguers act as though they understand this.

The same sort of competitive and cooperative connections are also possible in dominance displays. If the interaction remains framed as one of relative power, the main available replies are competitive: counterattack, in which the respondent tries to win, thus denying the first arguer's status, or submission, in which the interlocutor accepts a loss through concession, confirming the other's higher status. However, the arguers' goals may be conjoined by reframing the relational issue, perhaps as one of personal worth or as some other sort of identity display. Here, the respondent can accept the initial argument as a testimony to the initiator's acumen. Two people can be smart at the same time, and if this frame is mutually acceptable, both parties can engage happily in endless dominance displays without ever impugning the other person's status. I have observed several competitive debate teams, and several scholarly collaborations, that could be characterized in this way. As in the case of issue-resolution arguments, the basic framing question is competition versus collaboration, and the results are eristic or coalescent, with their different implications for socially appropriate behavior.

Perhaps the most interesting goal-connection phenomena occur when issue resolution and dominance are simultaneously on the table. Here we have not only the usual competition and cooperation framing possibilities, but also the choice of which issue, the substantive or the relational, will be treated as the real one. Once a face threat appears in a dispute, the interaction trajectory irresistably orients to it (Folger, Poole, & Stuttmann, 1997, ch. 5). Coser (1956) distinguished between *realistic* and *unrealistic conflict*, meaning by the latter term an argument that is only apparently about resolving an issue, and really about someone's identity or feelings. Collins and Guetzkow (1964) long ago determined that group task discussions that involve intense emotions are less likely to result in good issue resolutions. So the message from the research on this point is unequivocal: The identity issues need to be the immediate frame, if the argument is to move forward. Deft arguers will attend to face needs, assuage hurt feelings, and depersonalize the argument. Only once the identity work has been successfully accomplished can the arguers move on to a consideration of the apparent substantive issue. Less skilled arguers, in contrast, will stubbornly try to "keep on point," thus missing it entirely.

### **Third Phenomenonal Approximation: Reflecting on the Experience of Arguing**

People can and often do develop some conscious awareness of what it is to argue. They reflect on their experience and try to understand both their own behavior and that of others. They may even abstract their impressions and intellectualize the process of arguing. The material discussed in connection with the first two phenomenal approximations of arguing might, of course, be part of these reflective understandings. People can have primary goals, however and can connect somehow to other people's goals without intellectualization. Here I wish to examine the explicit evidence concerning naive actors' reported understandings of argument. I focus on what is cognitively and affectively connected to the word *argument*.

Research makes it clear that we must actually engage naive actors in the determinations of what they count as argument because many examples that seem prototypical to researchers are not always seen in that way by ordinary respondents (Martin & Scheerhorn, 1985; Trapp, 1986b). Trapp (1986b, p. 31) suggested that many people are reluctant to apply the label argument if a more positive one is available. He reported evidence that actualized and unresolved disagreement both appear necessary for people to use the term argument. The incompatibility of the arguers' goals must also be stark for respondents to categorize a transcript as an argument. Statements made with respect to unexpressed or merely anticipated disagreement are not immediately seen as arguments, nor are disagreements that the parties manage to resolve.

Benoit and Benoit (1990, pp. 56–58) also indicated that people see argument as a negative word, with something such as *discussion* preferred as a descriptor of relatively pleasant encounters, even when reasons are exchanged in the face of actual or potential disagreement. These conclusions are based in part on Benoit (1982), an exploratory study of how undergraduates apply certain communication terms. Subsamples were asked to recall either an argument or a discussion they had recently experienced and to supply descriptions of the episode. Analysis of the "argument" data indicate that these elements were repeatedly present in the vignettes: overt disagreement, loud and negative voices, irrational emotional displays, closed-mindedness by both parties, and negative relational consequences. The data from the "discussion" materials provide an interesting contrast. Discussions, according to Benoit's students, involve expression and genuine exchange of views, successfully take on a problem-solving function, and are essentially cooperative. *Argument*, then, seems to point immediately to eristic confrontation, whereas *discussion* appears to index coalescent arguing (cf. Stewart & Zediker, 2000).

These results have immediate implications for improving argumentative competence. The very word argument may seem to be a genuine liability for an instructor because it conjures the image of competition (Benoit, 1982), unilateral manipulation (Benoit, 1982; see Johnstone, 1982), and punishing emotions (Martin & Scheerhorn, 1985). As Martin and Scheerhorn (1985, p. 718) put it, "what seems most critical in the naive theories of everyday actors is not reasoned discourse, but hostility laden discourse." Abandoning the term in favor of something more palatable, such as discussion, might well be a useful short-term strategy. But in the long run, the reality is that argument is a common word, one with a rich heritage and a deep literature. People need to be educated as to what the word means and to what other (i.e., nonpejorative) frames are available for it. This needs to be an early instructional task, which can be supplemented by discussion of the phenomenal approximations of the term summarized in this section.

But we need to return to the question of what naive actors think an argument is, when they are asked to reflect on the word. Trapp (1986b) was actually a critique of some earlier qualitative work, and Jackson, Jacobs, Burrell, and Allen (1986) rose to its defense, in a rather elaborately designed series of studies. They compared people's categorizations of the same stimuli Trapp used (*argument*, *not argument*, or *not sure*) to their ratings of each transcript on several features: whether disagreement was present, whether both parties expressed disagreement, whether the disagreement was resolved, and whether the parties had incompatible goals. Jackson et al. reported evidence that whether the disagreement was resolved is not critical to people's labeling of a passage as an argument, but both disagreement and goal incompatibility do appear to be necessary if the judgment of argument is to be applied. They explained some of Trapp's respondents' failures to label passages as arguments

by reference to what would seem to be a minor distinction: Even when students declined to say that a passage was an argument, they were often willing to say that it *contained* an argument. This suggests that students are more reluctant to use the word for arguments<sub>2</sub>, even when they can see that arguments<sub>1</sub> are present. Students were not particularly sensitive to the presence of reasons, however, because adding or deleting them from the stimuli had no appreciable effect on people's willingness to call the encounter an argument. This result might be explained by the further finding that naive actors' judgments of argument cogency are strongly influenced by their agreement and involvement with the arguments (Wolski, Polcar, Dunbar, & Jacobs, 2000), rather than merely by an intellectual assessment of argument quality. People do not seem to be as sensitive to reasoning as we might prefer. In contrast, Jackson et al. found that when expressions of disagreement were made more or less extreme, categorizations do change: Aggravated disagreement is more readily labeled an argument, and mitigated expression of disagreement lowers the chance of being categorized in that way.

Based on the literature just reviewed, then, these are the features that ordinary actors connect to the term argument: the presence of disagreement, especially when it is loud and irrationally emotional; a clear incompatibility between the arguers' goals; and a closed-minded pursuit of victory by one or both parties. Although people show some sensitivity to the presence and exchange of reasons, this is a much less important factor. Little evidence points to any importance of whether the arguers come to a mutual conclusion.

People also connect the term argument to negative relational consequences, and this leads us to the last series of studies to be surveyed here. These concern the connection between argument and violence. Scholars (e.g., Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) commonly see argument as an alternative to violence, but ordinary actors seem to think otherwise. Benoit and Hample (1998) were somewhat surprised to see some evidence of this in their qualitative analysis of argument diaries. They suspected, based on respondents' descriptions, that people seemed to regard arguing as a first step to violence or perhaps as a verbal expression of violence.

Hample, Dean, Johnson, Kopp, and Ngoitz (1997) studied people's memory organization packets (MOPs) for interpersonal conflicts and found further traces of violence. A MOP contains and connects the various lines of action the person regards as possible in performing an action. Thus, a MOP for ordering food in a restaurant might hold action slots for entering, obtaining a menu, and so on. In their study of interpersonal conflicts, Hample, Dean, et al. found that fully 42% of their sample included a line of action that was coded as physical violence. Other varieties of aggression were also well represented: name calling (9% of the sample), angry looks (14%), yelling (63%), obscenities (9%), threats (5%), criticism (10%), feelings of anger (27%), and throwing objects (5%). This study focused on "interpersonal conflict" rather than argument, but the results are still suggestive: Although people do not expect all these things actually to occur in a conflict (nor would they necessarily endorse them), they do maintain cognitive slots for them in their fullest understandings of what can happen during an interpersonal argument.

These results led Hample and Benoit to pursue the relation between arguing and violence in two quantitative studies. Hample, Benoit, Houston, Purifoy, VanHyfte, and Wardell (1999) collected some additional diary accounts and coded them according to whether (a) the diarist described a personally destructive event and (b) the argument being reported was explicit (as opposed to, for instance, disagreements being expressed indirectly or being suppressed). They found that destructiveness

**TABLE 11.1**  
Leading Contrasts in the Argument Frames of Ordinary Actors and Argumentation Scholars

<i>Ordinary Actors</i>	versus	<i>Argumentation Scholars</i>
Competition	versus	Cooperation
Aggression	versus	Assertiveness
Uncontrolled emotionality	versus	Reason giving
Violence	versus	Pacifism
Dominance	versus	Issue resolution
Personally punishing	versus	Personally satisfying
Relationally damaging	versus	Relationally developmental
Eristic	versus	Coalescent

and explicitness are clearly associated:  $r = .80$ . This extraordinarily high correlation means that when an argument's presence is unmistakable, people think that some sort of negative outcomes (violence, despair, anger, relational damage) are virtually inevitable. Hample and Benoit (1999) wondered if this result appeared because students, having been instructed to report arguments, somehow chose only extreme cases to include in their diaries. Therefore, the researchers constructed vignettes themselves, basing them on actual diary entries, but systematically manipulating the explicitness and destructiveness of the scenarios. They then asked respondents to rate the vignettes for destructiveness and explicitness. This should, of course, have reduced the correlation to zero, because the two variables were manipulated orthogonally. Nonetheless,  $r$  is about .50 in that report. The most plausible interpretation of this result is that people's understanding of argument is such that, when it is unmistakeably present, the encounter is regarded as inherently destructive.

Taken all together, these results display a remarkably sharp contrast between the frames of ordinary people and those of argumentation scholars. Some of the most fundamental oppositions are displayed in Table 11.1. The pejorative frames, when they appear (and, happily, at least some people do not share them), suggest expectations that may make reasonable dialectic nearly impossible.

I wish, too, to emphasize, as I have elsewhere (Hample, 1999), that these frames may not be in error. People who see arguments as punishing may well have personal histories that justify that perception. Argumentative behaviors, especially the aggressive ones, are clearly reciprocal (Hample, Dallinger, & Fofano, 1995; Hample, Dallinger, & Nelson, 1995). People's aggressive moves are adequately predicted by the aggressiveness of their interlocutor's actions, and only weakly associated with several likely individual difference measures. Once aggression begins, it continues. And the negative frames that many people have will presumably lead them to initiate hurtful episodes or to act in anticipation of them. The frames are self-perpetuating and generate their own personal evidence of validity.

## Consequences of the Frames and Prospects for Changing Them

Having examined the argument frames that social actors have or encounter, it is useful to consider some research that offers hope of altering people's frames, and thereby improving their arguing competence. Three topics in particular merit separate treatment: argumentativeness and verbal aggression, teaching school children to handle conflict, and climate.

**Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggression.** Dominic Infante is due the credit for having generated thorough research programs on argumentativeness and verbal aggression (see Wigley, 1995). He has developed self-report measures for both (Infante & Rancer, 1982; Infante & Wigley, 1986; also see Blickle, 1995, and Blickle, Habasch, & Senft, 1998, for psychometric analyses of the scales using German respondents), and a substantial empirical literature has developed concerning these two individual difference variables. This body of work was reviewed by Infante and Rancer (1996), and Infante (1988) also wrote a brief but useful textbook focusing on these two predispositions.

Argumentativeness and verbal aggression are variant styles of aggressive behavior. An argumentative person attacks the other's position and defends his or her own, offering reasons for these moves ("No, that's not how it happened"). A verbally aggressive person, in contrast, attacks the other's self, expressing personal hostility and other negative identity and relational messages ("Only an unfeeling jerk would say something like that"). Argumentativeness is a positive personality trait, and verbal aggressiveness a negative one. Infante and Rancer's (1996) review summarizes the consequences of each predisposition. High argumentatives believe that arguments are enjoyable, are a useful source of information, and reduce conflicts. Argumentativeness is positively associated with relational satisfaction, personal credibility, and enhanced parent-child communication and leads to constructive issue resolution in organizational life. Arguing with high argumentatives is more satisfying than arguing with low argumentatives. In contrast, verbally aggressive people underestimate the degree of hurt they cause with their aggression. Verbal aggression reduces relational satisfaction, is implicated in family violence, lowers personal credibility, reduces the quality of parent-child communication and causes employees to lose loyalty and respect for verbally aggressive supervisors. Clearly, argumentativeness is what we want to promote, and verbal aggression is what we want to reduce.

The literature affords several leads as to how we might enhance people's argumentativeness. Ego-involvement in the topic is positively related to people's motivation to argue (Onyekwere, Rubin, & Infante, 1991), which is the key component in argumentativeness. Campo and Boster (1999) studied a group of campus activists and found that argumentativeness increases as level of activism does. Argumentativeness was associated with the production of more complex arguments in that study, supplementing the finding that high argumentatives actually produce more arguments in group discussions (Kazoleas & Kay, 1994). Campo and Boster (1999) also report that this complexity is at least somewhat transferable to other, nonactivist topics. So the first conclusion to draw about interventions is that we must involve people in arguments they care about if we are to increase their argumentativeness.

But precisely how are we to involve them? Infante (1988, 1995) offered pedagogical suggestions for increasing argumentativeness and reducing verbal aggression, but empirical evaluations of those specific proposals are few and only somewhat positive (Kosberg & Rancer, 1991; Rancer, Whitecap, Kosberg, & Avtgis, 1997; see Rancer, 1997, for a review and further intervention suggestions). Perhaps more encouraging is Infante's (1982) report that the more high school training in arguing college students had (e.g., in forensics), the more argumentative they are. Paired with the meta-analytic finding that being on a debate team, taking an argumentation course, and taking a public speaking course all improve critical thinking scores (Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Louden, 1999), Infante's early report suggests that professional instructors are naturally effective in promoting the best skills in students. On the assumption that teachers who have been educated about argumentation do not share the pejorative

frames for arguing, this is a sensible outcome. Modeling and explaining good argumentation skills and attitudes seem to be generally effective.

But before leaving this topic, one important warning might be in order. Throughout the literature on argumentativeness and verbal aggression, I sometimes sense the implicit assumption that improving one of them will also improve the other; that is, if we were to improve people's arguing skills, for instance, their verbal aggressiveness would decline as a sort of corollary to that training. This often-unspoken impression runs counter to the evidence that the two propensities are weakly correlated. Hamilton and Mineo's (2002) meta-analysis shows that the correlation between the two measures is about .16. The correlation is small, but it is positive. The direct association might well be explained by the theoretical assumption that both argumentativeness and verbal aggression instantiate the more general trait of aggressiveness. All this makes the results of Rancer et al. (1997) less surprising. They were successful in raising adolescents' argumentativeness scores but also found an increase in verbal aggression after the training. We cannot expect an argumentativeness program to reduce verbal aggressiveness or verbal aggression interventions to increase argumentativeness. Two programs, or at least two distinct emphases, will be needed if the goal is to enhance people's attitudes and behaviors in both respects. Possibly something like the Rancer et al. program can be conducted in conjunction with conflict assertiveness training (see Rakos, 1997).

**Teaching School Children to Manage Conflict.** Perhaps stimulated by recent worries about violence in elementary and junior and senior high schools, the last decade has seen a surge of interest in teaching children to handle interpersonal conflict at school. This training has often focused, at least in part, on the sort of argument frames discussed in this chapter. Some of the training programs are proprietary, and scholarly evaluations of those interventions can be difficult to locate; however, a group of scholars at the University of Minnesota has conducted an impressive program of study into a straightforwardly applicable approach and has shown that it is effective and feasible.

Johnson and Johnson (1994) outlined a three-step program for teaching adolescents to manage conflict constructively. First, a *cooperative climate* is established throughout the school (Deutsch, 1973, 1994). Grades, for instance, should not be competitive, as when a limited number of As are available, and group work is encouraged.

Second, *academic controversies* are used instructionally. The controversies combine social interdependence and intellectual conflict. Students engage one another on topics on which they disagree, but they do so in a cooperative way, not as a competitive debate. The analytical steps associated with debate are present and so is the advocacy, but here the students are encouraged to be relatively open-minded. They try to come to mutual conclusions, rather than having the teacher or some other third party adjudicate the issue. Johnson and Johnson (1994) outlined a 5-day program for teaching how to conduct intellectual controversy. On Day 1, two dyads, working independently, develop opposing positions. On Day 2, each dyad presents its position to the class. Day 3 sees a four-person discussion, following the teacher's rules about avoiding personal attacks and analyzing the soundness of arguments. On Day 4, the dyads reverse positions, and each presents the other's view. They also begin working together to produce a four-person report on the issue. The last day is devoted to polishing the report and presenting it jointly to the class. The teacher uses grading criteria that are noncompetitive and helps the group reflect on its internal processes.

Johnson and Johnson's (1989) meta-analysis reports that this sort of controversy procedure is superior to debating with respect to student reasoning, analytical creativity, synthesis, content retention, self-esteem, and liking for one's partners. Johnson and Johnson (1994), however, emphasized that these positive outcomes depend on the presence of a cooperative learning environment in the first place.

The third element in the Johnsons' recommendations is *conflict training* and peer mediation. Students are trained to handle their own arguments, and some are also taught how to intervene into other students' everyday conflicts. Students in the Johnsons' Peacemaker program (see Johnson & Johnson, 1995) get half an hour of training per day for 6 weeks, with weekly refresher lessons throughout the rest of the year. Children are drilled in simple procedures for expressing themselves without attacking other's face, and they learn to take the other's perspective, generate possible solutions, and seek an integrative outcome. The point of this training is to teach students to resolve their own conflicts. Mediators are also trained. These students are taught to offer their services in such a way as to make clear that their involvement is both voluntary and neutral. If the offer of mediation is accepted, they lay out simple rules for good dialectic: cooperation, no personal attacks or interruptions, genuine commitment to whatever one says, and so forth. With the mediator's help, the students jointly define the problem, present their positions, explicitly take the other's position for a while, generate possible solutions, and jointly choose one. Johnson and Johnson (1994) reported that studies of peer mediation programs in general indicate that the mediations result in about 90% of the conflicts being permanently resolved, school violence declines, and school principals are involved in student conflicts at less than half the comparison rate. Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Magnuson (1995) showed that the Peacemaker program results in students' greater use of negotiation in their conflicts (as opposed to telling the teacher, for example, or just asking the other person to concede). The second- through fifth-grade children in this study also made more use of constructive conflict management methods, when compared with an untrained control group from the same school. Another study of somewhat older students (sixth- through ninth-graders) shows that the Johnsons' program results in children being able to generate higher joint profits in a negotiating task and ending up with a more positive attitude toward conflict than untrained students (Dudley, Johnson, & Johnson, 1996).

The details of these programs are in line with normal recommendations for managing conflict constructively. A cooperative climate, open-mindedness, good reasoning, assertiveness without verbal aggression, taking the other's perspective, generating more than one possible solution, and a commitment to integrative agreements are perhaps the key elements. Notice how this training targets the pejorative frames for argument discussed throughout this section. The empirical evidence shows that these orientations and practices are clearly teachable and successful.

**Climate.** This chapter has repeatedly seen how a person's individual frame for arguing predisposes him or her toward certain sorts of arguing behaviors. A climate, in contrast, is a shared perspective. For present purposes, one can understand climate to be a sort of corporate arguing frame. An organization, a social group, or a dyadic relationship, for example, can each have an identifiable climate for arguing and conflict management. These climates are emergent, rather than coauthored. They arise out of interaction, and it is the engagement that creates the climate, rather than the individuals considered singly. Climates develop between the people and take on an objectifiable, independent existence of their own (Folger, Poole, & Stuttmann,

1997, ch. 6). All the people in an organization, for instance, may perceive that their workplace is extremely hostile. Even though each person may have a different explanation for the hostility, this is irrelevant to the fact that a shared perception of the essential atmosphere exists. A group's climate can even persist after all the original group members have been replaced.

Research has identified many types of climate, but here I concentrate on only two, following the classic work by Deutsch (1973). A climate may be cooperative, which leads to coalescent arguing, or it may be competitive, which leads to threats and eristic arguing.

In several studies of competition and cooperation, Deutsch (1973, ch. 9) used a trucking simulation in which one, neither, or both of the participants had control over roadgates, giving them the power to block the other's timely deliveries. These manipulations correspond to unilateral threat, no threat, and bilateral threat conditions. Participants were given individualistic instructions (i.e., to maximize their own profit). Results showed that the only circumstance in which anyone "profited" was the no-threat condition. If a power resource existed, it was used and resisted, with negative consequences for both parties. This pattern of results obtained whether or not communication was permitted between the parties. When participants were required to communicate with one another on each trial, the presence of messages improved joint payoffs, but only in the unilateral threat condition:

Here alone, of all the conditions in which gates are present, does performance approach that of the Ss in the no threat condition. In the bilateral threat condition, the competitive motivation present seems too great to be overcome, even by the compulsory communication treatment. . . . [I]n the no threat condition, coordination was sufficiently simple that communication failed to produce any visible effect. (Deutsch, 1973, p. 234)

Deutsch (1973, ch. 10) also showed that teaching people to focus their messages on the search for fair solutions can improve outcomes to some degree.

Most conflicts involve a mix of motives and hold out the possibility of either competitive or cooperative behaviors (Deutsch, 1994). Deutsch's (1973) series of studies shows that experimental situations can be structured to invite competition. The presence of power, whether unilateral or bilateral, invites both its use and the verbal expression of the intention to harm the other. This is a punishing climate, one in which neither party cooperates, pursues joint goals, or even tries to make room for the other's goals while seeking one's own. Aggressive argumentative behaviors tend to be reciprocated (see Hample, 1999), and the result is that people feel angry, resistant, avoidant, and unwilling to compromise (R. Baron, 1988). Cloven and Roloff (1993) showed that the anticipation of an aggressive response by one's relational partner causes a "chilling effect," which means that grievances are unexpressed and presumably left to simmer.

But climates can also be structured so as to invite cooperation, as in the Johnsons' Peacemaker program. Patterson, Hops, and Weiss (1975) undertook the daunting task of trying to improve the conflict behaviors of married couples who either were engaged in prolonged conflict or had one of the partners already committed to an extramarital relationship. Patterson et al. taught them to be specific and nonaversive in describing the other's problematic behaviors; to trade behaviors quid pro quo, so that one partner would agree to cease behavior A if the other promised to stop doing behavior B; and to engage in "love days," characterized by intentional pleasantness and a tripling of positive behaviors toward the other. The first element of this intervention,

of course, corresponds to teaching people to avoid verbal aggression, whereas the second and third induce a cooperative climate, however artificially. Couples were videotaped negotiating with one another before and after the program. After the treatments, couples displayed more facilitative behaviors in conflict, and data indicate that this was a reciprocal effect. Disruptive behaviors became more rare, and reciprocation of these negative moves was less pronounced after the intervention. Couple's self-reports about their home lives indicated more pleasant behaviors after the program than before, and husbands reported fewer displeasing actions from their wives. Follow-ups 1 or 2 years later found that 20% of the couples had divorced, but half were happier and handled conflicts better.

Sherif (1958) reported that conflicting groups can be helped to cooperate by engaging them in the pursuit of shared goals. Sherif created internally cohesive groups of boys (aged about 11 or 12) that were placed in competitive situations so that one group's successes came at the expense of another group. This resulted in negative intergroup relations, characterized by hostility, name calling, and prejudice. Having created this negative climate, Sherif then set out to alter it by giving the groups "superordinate goals," which could only be achieved by intergroup cooperation. In fact, the groups did cooperate to attain the goals. As a result of this experience, intergroup tension and hostility were reduced, and the boys' friendship circles began to extend beyond the home group toward the boys in the other groups. These results are generally consistent with those of Hammock and Richardson (1992), who found that being oriented to the other's needs reduces aggression and increases the frequency of discussion behaviors.

These studies exemplify the possibility of altering hostile, competitive climates to form a more cooperative atmosphere for arguing. Verbal aggressiveness is lessened, and the possibility of constructive argument increases. Arguments can, in fact, be pursued competently in various ways, and in cooperative settings. Legge and Rawlins (1992) reported a qualitative study of roommate conflicts and offered some descriptive detail concerning the way cooperative dyads argue. Instructed to resolve an experimenter-supplied issue, the friends generally approached the conflicts in a productive manner. In fact, they displayed three ways of pursuing a jointly acceptable solution, with little apparent threat or hostility. The first way, the mode of *convenience*, involves overt contention over a topic about which the roommates have essential perceptual agreement (e.g., who did or didn't wash the dishes). The most typical argumentative pattern displayed here is "remediation": one roommate describes an offending action, and the other tries to remedy his or her identity by offering an account for the behavior. This approach, which involves a shared frame of understanding for the behavior in question, permits face repair and encourages tolerance so that the roommates can manage their conflicts congenially. The second mode is *cooperation*. This occurs when the friends might be characterized as simply comparing and contrasting their viewpoints about some issue. Legge and Rawlins called the accompanying argumentative pattern "constructive," perhaps with the first (constructive) speeches in academic debates in mind. Each person speaks freely, without contention from the other, then the other presents his or her position. The arguments end when mutual understanding—not necessarily agreement—is reached. The friends show varying patterns of perceptual agreement or disagreement about the issue, but they do share an understanding about how they are conducting the conversation. The last mode for dispute management is *commitment*. This set of practices requires direct, genuine engagement on the issue. The argumentative pattern for this last mode is termed "refutation," because the other's positions are directly

attacked (as they are in the later speeches of a formal debate). The friends often share the same assessment of particular arguments, although they disagree about the issue as a whole. Recognition of legitimate disagreement is seen as important to the maintenance of the friendship.

The studies reviewed here show the importance of having a shared commitment to cooperation in approaching an argument. Competitive climates lead to eristic interaction, in which one party tries to dominate and defeat the other as completely as possible. But competitive climates can be changed by means of intentionally cooperative action, as in the Patterson et al. intervention, or by the circumstance of having to pursue a goal jointly, as in Sherif's study. Legge and Rawlins showed that cooperative arguments can be quite pointed without sacrificing social appropriateness.

The three issues discussed in this subsection—argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness, teaching children to manage conflict, and climate—all point to paths on which people can learn to argue better. They can learn to engage issues rather than attacking identities or conceding whenever challenged. Aside from being empirically successful, the approaches reviewed here also have in common that they are largely aimed at improving people's arguing frames. The basic lesson would seem to be that if we can improve people's understanding of what they are doing, they will do it better.

## ARGUING IN INTERACTIONS

To this point, this chapter has had an undeniably individualistic orientation. Attention has been focused on people's perceptions, cognitions, and feelings about arguing, and this has inevitably given the material a psychological cast. But interpersonal arguing, our main focus, is clearly an interactive accomplishment. In this section, I wish to take seriously the interactivity involved in face-to-face argument. Fully competent arguing can only occur within the context of competent interaction, and consequently the conclusions of many other chapters in this volume are quite relevant to our specific topic.

The possibility of seeing argument as an interpersonal event came late to the discipline. The study of interpersonal communication began to develop and rise to prominence in the field of communication in the 1960s, and a natural corollary of this new emphasis was the application of interpersonal insights to argumentation. By the late 1970s, argument scholars had begun to give serious attention to face-to-face arguing, most notably in several papers by scholars educated at the University of Illinois (Jackson & Jacobs, 1980; D. O'Keefe, 1977; Willard, 1976). This was a fresh break from the rhetorical tradition. As LeFevre (1987) explained and corrected, rhetorical theory has historically been oriented to the model of a solitary arguer, privately working out acts of genius or mediocrity. Certainly this is also the perspective of formal and informal logic on the rare occasions that people are actually mentioned in the theories. But many real-world arguments are obviously cooperative products, as in the case of a coauthored newspaper editorial.

This does not go far enough in capturing the essential interactivity of argument, however. Competent face-to-face arguments are jointly constructed, with one person absorbing and replying to material supplied by the other. Sometimes one person suggests an idea and the other modifies it to generate a conclusion that is truly emergent and whose authorship is genuinely collaborative. Even the apparently solitary arguer engaged in the production of an argument<sub>1</sub> is not entirely alone. Bitzer

(1959) pointed out long ago that the enthymeme, perhaps the most fundamental construct in the rhetorical theory of argument, implies a close association between rhetor and audience. Ordinary arguments are nearly always incomplete in the strict logical sense and are filled in by the audience. So enthymemes—those logically incomplete but audience-adapted arguments—are produced in conscious or (more often) unconscious anticipation of how their recipients will understand and complete them. Even more generally, we might notice that children learn to think while interacting with others, and this forms the core of their cognitive arguing ability (Damon, 1990). Critical thinking is born and expressed in interpersonal arguments.

Argument is also a fundamental process in conversation. Jackson and Jacobs (1980) explained that conversational arguments are repair mechanisms attached to adjacency pairs. Adjacency pairs are composed of first pair parts (FPPs) and second pair parts (SPPs). For instance, a question is an FPP, and the corresponding SPP is an answer. Some adjacency pairs permit either of two things to be a SPP. One of these is structurally preferred (not unlike being the default option), and the other is dispreferred. For instance, if the FPP is a request, the preferred SPP is a grant and the dispreferred SPP is a refusal. What Jackson and Jacobs showed is that dispreferred SPPs require reasons whereas preferred SPPs do not. The reason is a repair. If one were requested to help a friend, the preferred SPP can be competently produced without elaboration (“Sure”). But the competent dispreferred SPP will be accompanied by a reason (“I can’t help you because I’m busy”) or the reason may appear alone, implying the dispreferred SPP (“Oh, I’m busy”). The point of the reason is to mitigate the technical offense of having produced a dispreferred SPP. Thus, arguments repair structural deficiencies in one’s conversation and often therefore ameliorate face damage to self or other.

Notice two implications of this work: (a) competent arguing is a requirement for, and helps constitute, competent conversation, and (b) competent arguing must take place in the context of competent conversation, and is therefore subject to the same constraints as any other element of conversation. Grice’s (1975) maxims, for instance, are always in play during an argument. To argue too elaborately, or too minimally, or too fictiously, or too obscurely, invites implicature that replaces the surface meaning of the argument. Thus, if one person says “Conservatism has never been important to U.S. political life,” and another person replies, “Yeah, nobody voted for Reagan,” it is the implicature, not the literal meaning, of the second person’s comment that is understood as the argument. Argumentative competence requires that one deftly navigate the requirements of conversation, and these involve both substantive and relational issues.

Consequently, in this section I want to explore the connections between argument and conversation. Three topics seem particularly central. First, the interactional structure needs to be clearly explained. Arguments are moments in larger episodes, and so they inherit competency constraints from the requirements of the whole interaction. Second, the interactional context is important. Every episode occurs in a setting characterized by power, relational histories, climate, and other features that refract the meaning of what is said and have implications for what should count as arguing skill. And third, the experience of engaging in the process of interaction has important influence on the arguing. Competent arguers negotiate their goals, connect their plans to those anticipated from the other, and coconstruct identities and relationships. I will look at each issue in turn.

## Interactional Structure

As Jackson and Jacobs (1980) showed, arguments appear with great frequency in the moments of ordinary conversation. Here, however, I wish to examine entire episodes that are directly aimed at arguing. The primary goal of these episodes is to express, confront, and resolve an explicit disagreement between two people. The main work on this topic is known as pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984, 1992, 1994; van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993; Snoeck Henkemans, 1997). The name conjoins the pragmatics of the speech act tradition with the commitment to dialectic as a model for interpersonal arguing.

Although any face-to-face argument can go off the tracks at any moment, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) suggested that the dialectical structure of an ideal episode can be specified. This permits, among other things, the immediate identification of interpersonal moves that do not advance the argumentative objects of the exchange. The more closely an actual argument resembles the ideal form, the more skilled both arguers are theorized to be. van Eemeren and Grootendorst proposed a four-stage model of dispute resolution and specified the speech acts that belong to each stage (see Table 11.2 for continuing examples). Speech acts that do not match those specified for each stage are essentially irrelevant, and therefore not competent efforts at issue-resolution. (Readers should be aware, however, that issue resolution is the nearly exclusive focus of pragma-dialectics, and actions that pursue social propriety are not well regarded in this research tradition.)

The first of the four stages is confrontation (see Table 11.2). Person A makes a claim, person B expresses doubt about it, A upholds his or her original position, and B renews his or her doubts. This is an essential beginning, for this phase clarifies what is at issue and makes disagreement explicit. Person A only uses assertives (roughly, declarations) at this stage, because his or her only immediate goal is to express a point of view. Person B, in expressing doubt, accomplishes the illocutionary negation of a commissive (roughly, commissives are promises), that is, refuses to promise adherence to A's position. Notice that, for simplicity, we assume that B does not

**TABLE 11.2**  
Summary of van Eemeren and Grootendorst's Dialectical Scheme

Dialectical Stage	Speech Acts	Examples
Confrontation	A asserts claim. B issues illocutionary negative of commissive.	A: College tuition is too high. B: I don't see why you think so.
Opening	B issues directive. A offers commissive. Both undertake joint commissives.	B: Give your proof. A: I will. A&B: We each agree to let the other one speak freely.
Argumentation	A produces a complex speech act of arguing. B issues commissive (or negation of one).	A: Many people leave college with unsupportable debt. B: Oh, I agree with that.
Concluding	A reasserts claim. B issues commissive (or negation of one). Both undertake joint speech acts.	A: So college tuition is too high. B: Now I agree A&B: We agree, so we're done.

propose a constructive counterposition and that the dispute is completely centered on whether A's view should prevail.

The second stage, opening, is so called because here the two parties actually agree to pursue an extended dialectic (see Table 11.2). This stage begins with person B issuing a directive to A, namely, a challenge to support the original point of view. A then issues a commissive, in which he or she accepts the challenge and undertakes to give supporting reasons. This results in a series of *joint* commissives, which bind both A and B equally, regardless of who actually pronounces them (if, indeed, anyone does). These commissives accomplish the mutual decision to discuss the matter, agreements about the roles of A and B in the discussion and the rules they will follow, and an agreement on how A and B will know that the discussion is over.

Naturally, these last things are not often explicit in interpersonal arguments. But the point that van Eemeren and Grootendorst insisted on is that the speakers are both committed to these agreements, whether or not they say so. Thus, one person might object, "Hey, let me talk for a minute," and this takes its force from the agreement that both A and B have equal rights to the floor, even though A and B never formally discussed the length or timing of speaking turns. Scholarly recognition of these joint commissives is an important theoretical contribution, because the mutual commitments help specify standards for competent argumentative conduct. I detail several of these commitments when I finish consideration of the four stages.

Third is the argumentation stage, the only one that van Eemeren and Grootendorst identified as actually containing arguments (see Table 11.2). The other stages contextualize the argumentation and are necessary for the dialectic but do not actually involve the exchange or testing of reasons. Here, person A produces what van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) originally called the "illocutionary act complex of argumentation," and later preferred to term a "complex speech act" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992). I explain the nature of a complex speech act momentarily. For now, it is enough to recognize that full arguments need to be offered and tested in this stage of the discussion. After A argues, person B either performs the commissive of accepting A's central claim or performs the illocutionary negative of a commisive, refusing to agree. Importantly, if B takes this latter tack, he or she may also issue a directive, requesting that A generate an additional complex speech act of argumentation. A and B may cycle through as many of these arguments and replies as they wish. Because of the fairness and equality of the dialectic van Eemeren and Grootendorst described, the arguers themselves will test the arguments for their cogency. The dialectic should, in principle, be self-regulating in regard to the arguers' competence.

In the "concluding" stage (see Table 11.2), person A may repeat the assertion of his or her original position. B may issue an accepting commissive or may persist in withholding agreement. Alternatively, A may perform the illocutionary negative of asserting and withdraw his or her original claim. B would then commit to agreement with the retraction. The ideal dialectic ends with two joint speech acts, in which A and B commit to end the discussion, and assert its results.

Readers mainly familiar with the logical or informal logical approaches to argumentation may be taken aback by this use of speech act theory, but it has several genuine strengths that compensate for its complexity. First of all, every speech act has certain felicity conditions that function exactly like the ancient stases do in forensic disputes (Kline, 1979). The felicity conditions specify what must be so for the speech act to be done competently, and if they are not satisfied, they are resources for rebutting the speech act. For instance, one of the felicity conditions for a directive is that

the issuer must have an appropriate status with regard to the hearer. A toddler giving her mother an order, for instance, violates this felicity condition and has therefore commanded incompetently. In an ideal dialectic, real-world considerations of power and status are to be set aside, and the relationship between A and B is controlled by the dialectic itself. So it is legitimate in the opening stage of a dispute for B to issue the request (i.e., the directive) that A construct a complex speech act of argumentation, but it is not legitimate for A to require B to give reasons for withholding assent. Should A try to do so, B can reply that A lacks the status required for felicitous performance of the directive (e.g., "You're the one who has to make a case, not me"). So the application of speech act theory helps specify the grounds on which an assertive, for instance, may be contested, even if it is not countered by an opposite assertive. This permits microscopic assessments of arguing skill.

But assertives, directives, and so forth are elementary speech acts. Arguing seems to be something larger and more complicated (D. O'Keefe, 1982; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992). An argument is conveyed by a series of statements, not just one. So if one says, "You should read this book; I really liked it," one has made a claim, given a reason, and implied an unexpressed premise (perhaps "you and I like the same sort of book"). The first of these three speech acts is a directive, and the other two are assertives. None are arguments. They only become an argument when they are conjoined. In a complete disagreement episode, the individual argumentations only make sense because they are implicitly connected to the confrontation stage's statement of the initial point of view ("College tuition is too high," in Table 11.2). Thus, an argument is a complex speech act, not an elementary one.

Although the felicity conditions for an argument's individual statements are continuously relevant, an additional set of requirements appears when the whole constellation of speech acts is proposed as an argument. van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 31) specified the felicity conditions for arguing, and these are listed in the paragraphs that follow. As is usual with speech acts, the felicity conditions include both identity (what is it that the speaker is doing?) and correctness (is the speaker doing it properly?) conditions. Each has details, and all the constituent specifications must be met to say that the argument was presented felicitously.

The two identity conditions refer to the recognition that the series of statements *really is an argument* supporting the speaker's position, *p*. These include a very general description of the content and the recognition that the content is collectively supposed to be an argument.

1. *Propositional content condition*: utterances 1, 2, ..., n constitute the elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n, in which a commitment is undertaken to the propositions expressed.
2. *Essential condition*: the performance of the constellation of speech acts that consists of the elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n counts as an attempt by the speaker to justify *p*, that is to convince the listener of the acceptability of his standpoint with respect to *p*.

The two correctness conditions concern themselves with whether the argument has been made in a legitimate way. Certain features of the interpersonal situation must be so for something to be properly presented as an argument, and the fact of arguing entails several inherent responsibilities that the speaker must thereby undertake. An important implication of these last conditions, by the way, is that the

arguer can reasonably be held to these responsibilities whether or not he or she is actually willing to endorse them.

3. *Preparatory conditions:*
  - (a) The speaker believes that the listener does not accept (or at least not automatically or wholly accept) his standpoint with respect to  $p$ .
  - (b) The speaker believes that the listener is prepared to accept the propositions expressed in the elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n.
  - (c) The speaker believes that the listener is prepared to accept the constellation of elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n as an acceptable justification of  $p$ .
4. *Responsibility conditions:*
  - (a) The speaker believes that his standpoint with respect to  $p$  is acceptable.
  - (b) The speaker believes that the propositions expressed in the elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n are acceptable.
  - (c) The speaker believes that the constellation of the elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n is an acceptable justification of  $p$ .

These felicity conditions, taken together, imply the grounds on which an allegation of incompetence can be made. The two identity conditions are oriented to the question of whether it is appropriate to consider that the speaker has even tried to argue. The elementary speech acts may not have been performed felicitously (propositional content condition; e.g., "you can't possibly mean that"), or they may not obviously hang together in such a way as to be recognized as a single complex speech act (essential condition; e.g., "that's completely incoherent"). The two correctness conditions are also argumentative resources, in the same way. The argument is incompetent if the listener already agrees with the speaker's position (preparatory condition a), if the speaker does not believe that the listener is likely to agree to the elementary speech acts forming the argument (preparatory condition b), or if the speaker does not really expect that the listener will grant the connection between the constellation of speech acts and the controversial position (preparatory condition c). Finally, the argument is also incompetent if the speaker is not really committed to the original position (responsibility condition a), if the speaker does not really believe one or more of the elementary speech acts (responsibility condition b), or if the speaker is not sincere in proposing that the constellation actually supports his or her viewpoint (responsibility condition c).

This theory is not entirely consistent with what I have written here. For instance, I have suggested that playful exchanges are arguments even when the arguers are not really committed to their positions. This violates the first responsibility condition, of course. Such an arguer might also violate the other responsibility conditions while trying out a point of view, but I still wish to say that he or she has argued. A person offering an argument for the purpose of identity display might simply ignore the lack of controversy in what he or she says, violating preparatory condition a. What van Eemeren and Grootendorst's work requires us to recognize about these arguments is that they are not wholly legitimate, and their character as practice, play, or identity display is traceable to their intentional violation of various felicity conditions. These arguments are being used for entertainment or self-presentation, not really for issue resolution, the goal van Eemeren and Grootendorst presuppose.

Relatively little empirical research has been done on the pragma-dialectical framework, and what there is has concentrated largely on identifying unexpressed premises and sorts of argument (e.g., van Eemeren, de Grootendorst, & Oostdam,

1994; van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Meuffels, 1994; Garssen, 1994; Jungslager, 1994; Wolski, 2000). The overall description of the four stages and the stages' requisite speech acts has not, to my knowledge, been subjected to empirical test. That, however, is not an indictment of the research program. The framework is in this regard essentially normative. It specifies what must happen for competent argument to occur. Whether these things actually take place is more descriptive of arguers' competence than it is of the theory's validity.

The normative implications are particularly clear in the theory's application to fallacies. Readers will recall that, in the opening stage, arguers jointly commit to various roles and rules for the discussion. These are 10 in number (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992, pp. 208–209). If any is violated, a fallacy results. Space does not permit a full summary of this aspect of the theory, but perhaps some examples will give its flavor. The *ad ignorantiam* fallacy, of course, occurs when a person demands that the other show he or she is wrong, rather than giving constructive reasons to show that he or she is correct. This would occur if the protagonist (person A in Table 11.2) were to demand counterproof, rather than producing his or her own argumentation in favor of his or her position. This violates the second rule: "A party that advances a standpoint is obliged to defend it if the other party asks him to do so." The straw man fallacy involves distorting the other's position and then refuting the distortion. This violates rule 3: "A party's attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party." The argument *ad baculum* attempts to settle a dispute by means of violence or threats. This violates rule 1: "Parties must not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints." van Eemeren and Grootendorst have been successful in showing that the standard fallacies can be understood as violations of the rules for critical discussion. These are implicit commitments by any arguers who are genuinely trying to resolve an issue by reference to reasons. Therefore, they are also argumentative resources available to any arguer who needs to defend his or her position against an illegitimate rebuttal.

Wenzel's dialectical perspective on argument, as we saw earlier in the chapter, directs our attention to the procedures arguers use. When arguers approach the ideal of dialectic, they conduct themselves in accord with the rules for critical discussions and open themselves to the possibility of genuine agreement. When they violate these rules, they wander toward the pole of eristic arguing—and the chance of coalescence dissipates. Notice, by the way, that in a generally well-conducted argument, the arguers' competence is itself at issue. An arguer who violates one of the rules may have this pointed out, and the illegitimate move will need to be withdrawn once its incompetence is highlighted. Arguing is, in principle, potentially self-correcting, and incompetence an emergent realization.

## Interactional Context

Pragma-dialectics helps us to see what the structure of an argumentative episode is, both to extract its essential character and to guide the full reconstruction of actual arguments for analysis (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993; Snoeck Henkemans, 1997). However, real arguments look only a little like the speech act skeleton dissected by van Eemeren and Grootendorst. Actual disputes take place within an interpersonal context, which involves the identities and nonargumentative resources of the arguers, institutional constraints, and the interpersonal relationship between the parties. All of these affect what actually happens. From the purified

viewpoint that arguments are only for resolving issues, these contextual contaminants are seen as leading to fallacies and unsound argument. But when we recall that one of the requirements for fully competent argumentation is that it be socially appropriate, we are encouraged to take a somewhat more permissive view of the interpersonal realities of arguing with another person. As one experienced counselor of my acquaintance likes to tell his clients, "You can be right or you can be married."

People tend to see their interpersonal relationships as momentarily highlighting either dominance or affiliation issues (Dillard, Solomon, & Samp, 1996). The sort of interaction—its primary goal—affects which of the two concerns is more salient. Affiliation is seen as more relevant when an affinity goal is the main interactional objective, such as when self-disclosures are made or when someone is being excluded from a friendship network. But when the goal is related to compliance—when advice is given or someone is trying to change one's views, for example—dominance is the more defining issue. The degree to which the interaction is personally involving intensifies the relevance of either affiliation or dominance in the interactions they frame. Dillard, Solomon, and Anderson (1999) replicated these results and added the finding that both affiliation and dominance are more salient for people who are high in anxiety about relationships. These studies suggest that, even when the primary aim is issue resolution, dominance may be a near-automatic frame for interaction during face-to-face arguments, because of their typical focus on compliance. Dominance will be particularly prominent for highly involving arguments and for participants who are relationally anxious.

Early in the chapter, we noticed that dominance displays are a possible goal for interpersonal arguers. There we noted the standard observation that identity problems can divert the participants or otherwise interfere with issue resolution. The Dillard et al. findings enlarge these points by implying that dominance frames may be nearly inherent to interpersonal arguments, especially the highly engaging ones. Dominance does not have to be an intended goal for it to be perceived as one, and it will have its effects in either case (cf. Cloven & Roloff, 1993). Issue-resolution arguments are so often connected to subterranean relational issues that experienced arguers will often be alert for them and may try to anticipate them. Even when no dominance issue ever surfaces, arguers may well maneuver around one anyway, as they address the apparent issue before them. These considerations make quite clear the importance of carrying coalescent predilections into an argumentative episode.

Dominance displays or perceptions have important consequences for the social appropriateness of interpersonal arguing. Verbal aggressiveness is, of course, a domineering move, and argumentativeness can be. Some people are more sensitive to negative messages and may perceive them when others do not (Benton & Allen, 1996; Downey & Feldman, 1996). The circumstances of the argument also make a difference. Infante, Rancer, and Jordan (1996) showed that the interactional context of the exchange alters people's sensitivity to verbal aggression. When instances of verbal aggressiveness were integrated into a nonaffirming interaction, observers substantially overestimated the number of verbally aggressive moves that were actually present in the transcript. These estimates were significantly higher than those made when the same moves were part of an affirming interaction. Once verbal aggression is perceived, Kinney (1994) showed that it gives rise to feelings of surprise, anger, annoyance, and depression. Even argumentativeness, although it is generally associated with positive interpersonal results (Infante & Rancer, 1996), can have some negative effects. Schullery (1998) compared self-reports of argumentativeness and supervisory

level for more than 300 women holding full-time jobs. She found a curvilinear relation between argumentativeness and level of supervisory responsibility, such that argumentativeness increases as responsibility increases from no subordinates to some but begins to decline as women report jobs that involve their supervising others who also supervise people. Schullery concludes that too much argumentativeness is a career problem for working women. That her conclusion may be restricted to employed women (cf. Schullery, 1999) is not important to our point here: Argumentativeness is one form of domineering behavior and so can generate relational damage. Verbal aggressiveness will have considerably stronger deleterious consequences, of course (Infante & Rancer, 1996), but it is clear that dominance behaviors of several types in arguing are socially inappropriate. They may also be nearly unavoidable, especially in interaction with aggression-sensitive others, making remedial work a common necessity for competent arguing.

To this point, we have only considered dominance as an interactional production. There are institutional resources that give rise to the perception of power, however, and which reliably place their possessors in one-up positions. Hutchby (1996) did a nice analysis of the institutional constraints involved in the arguments featured in certain talk-radio programs. The host—by virtue of his or her organizational position, responsibility for the program’s progress, and technological control—has resources unavailable to the caller. The standard format of the conversations requires the caller to take the “first position,” that is, to advance an opinion. This places the burden of proof on the caller. The host need never take a position. He or she can merely challenge and criticize from “second position.” Combined with the ability to terminate the conversation (almost never used by the caller), these circumstances give the host a structural dominance. The caller must expose his or her opinions, evidence, and reasonings to any critiques that occur to the host, and the host need defend nothing.

Hutchby’s analysis, when combined with pragma-dialectics, showed that the protagonist in a critical discussion (person A in Table 11.2) is in an inherently one-down position. The person advancing a standpoint is required to prove, to answer, and to extend, while the antagonist can challenge without propounding or committing to an alternative position. As much as pragma-dialectics wishes to describe an ideal for dialectical argumentation, a dominance difference with important implications for the conduct of the argument is unavoidable. This structural reality is magnified by the individual difference and situational variables that highlight aggression in arguments. Because competent interpersonal arguments must be socially appropriate, we can therefore conclude that remediation, identity definition, and relational negotiations are essential elements of arguing. They are not digressions or irrelevancies.

## Experiencing the Process of Arguing

Arguing can be an involving personal experience, generating positive emotions in some people, such as high argumentatives (Infante & Rancer, 1996), and negative feelings in others, such as those who tend to take conflicts personally (Hample, 1999). More systematic research needs to be done before we can describe the emotional trajectory of arguing, however, so in this subsection I concentrate on certain of the cognitions that ground face-to-face argumentation.

I begin by trying to understand the cognitive structure of people’s knowledge about their available tactics during interpersonal conflict. Roskos-Ewoldsen (1997) showed that the two dimensions on which people mainly understand persuasive

messages are social appropriateness and association versus message orientation. The relevance of the first dimension to argumentative competence should already be clear. The second dimension contrasts utterances that are associational or person-oriented (e.g., an appeal for consensus, or use of friendship as a persuasive resource) to those that are message- or content-oriented. This last category's prototypes include detailed arguments, complex arguments, and counterarguing, for instance. Roskos-Ewoldsen reported that messages that combine social appropriateness and message orientation are generally and reliably preferred. Message-oriented tactics (i.e., arguments) are particularly likely to be used when the issue is important and when the audience is seen as highly knowledgeable on the topic.

These results suggest that people's implicit theories of persuasion are reasonably consistent with the view of argumentative competence in this chapter. People see social appropriateness as an important issue, one that is independent of the quality of their arguments. This is encouraging, because it suggests that we should find ready reception for our teaching, once we guide people toward better overall frames for understanding what they are doing when they argue.

The importance of social appropriateness in implicit theories of persuasion suggests that we turn again to the topic of goals for arguing. An actual argumentative episode, of course, may have instrumental (e.g., persuasive) and face (e.g., preserving other's self-image) goals, among others. Samp and Solomon (1999) studied how goals affect the ways people respond to problematic events in close relationships. When respondents feel that a relational goal describes the main issue, their messages have more relationally oriented clauses. People's messages are much more focused on self when the troubling event gives rise to intensely felt goals to maintain the relationship, accept fault for the problem, or to manage own positive face. These three goals also lead to more elaborate messages, as do the goals of managing the conversation and controlling emotions. When people are especially aware of more than one interactional goal, or when they think the goals are especially challenging, their messages are also more embellished. The Samp and Solomon research indicates that people tend to speak out of a self-oriented frame when relational and own face goals are prominent and that they will offer more elaborated remarks when they feel they need to manage the relationship, the interaction, and one another's feelings. Goal conflicts also stimulate more communicative work.

Although Samp and Solomon (1999) studied messages in general rather than arguments in particular, these results are still suggestive, because arguments (i.e., repairs) seem to be typical of people's responses to problematic relational events. Certainly more research needs to be done to build up an account of the detailed ways people argue in the face of different goals or constellations of goals. Nonetheless, Samp and Solomon showed that people's messages display emphases that match the interaction goals that stimulate the communication, and in that way, the messages also reflect the complexity and challenge of the goals being sought.

Arguments are complex enough that they may need to be planned, either well before production or during the interaction. Just as people's goals need to be coordinated in an argument (Drake & Donohue, 1996; Gilbert, 1997), so do their plans. In one article, the complexity of which may explain why so little follow-up research has been conducted, Bruce and Newman (1978) explored how two conflicting parties' plans interact. Using the Hansel and Gretel story as an extended illustration, Bruce and Newman contrasted real and virtual plans. Readers will recall that the parents' real goal in the story was to get rid of the children, and so they formed a plan to take them into the forest, get them lost, and abandon them. Naturally, they did not

intend to share this plan with Hansel and Gretel, so they propounded the virtual plan of going into the woods to gather firewood. The children, however, overheard the real plan. Just as naturally, they could not reveal this. Therefore, they constructed a virtual plan of cooperating with their parents; however, their real plan was to leave a trail so they could find their way home. We have in this example a number of plan interactions. Both parties' real and virtual plans need to have enough in common to achieve the real plan while making the virtual plan plausible. The children, being one-down in the interaction, have the further task of making their virtual plan appear to coordinate with the parents' virtual plan.

Here is a template for complex arguments in which one or another party has a covert agenda, possibly even one not consciously acknowledged by its possessor. The virtual plan in arguments is normally issue resolution, and often this is the real plan as well. But the real plan may also concern dominance, relational negotiation, or some other person-centered issue. Arguers must manage to address the real goals of self and other. Sometimes this can be done with a deft plan, which appears to discuss the apparent topic while accomplishing a hidden goal. Other times, an arguer may seem to digress from the putative topic to make remarks that, apparently irrelevantly, address other's face needs, for instance. A final option is to bring the real plans to light and discuss them openly. In any case, to argue without coordinating one's own plans, real and virtual, with those of the other party, invites emotionally and substantively unsatisfying interaction. These interactional requirements create a whole additional layer of complexity for competent dialectical discussion of argumentative positions.

This section of the chapter began with a pragma-dialectical description of argumentative episodes that approach the ideals of dialectic. This is a valuable way to evaluate the conditions under which sound arguments will emerge. Two well-intentioned, intelligent, and knowledgeable interlocutors, if they follow the rules for critical discussion, will test arguments against critical standards, and the soundest arguments will prevail by consensus. This is only part of what happens in face-to-face arguing, however. Whether we wish it or not, arguments are often received as aggressions, and dominance issues are never far from the surface of any conflictual interaction. People have more goals than the apparent one of resolving an issue, and their messages and argumentative plans reflect all their goals. Furthermore, the fact that face-to-face arguments are truly interactional means that interpersonally competent people (see, e.g., Burleson & Caplan, 1998) will be continuously trying to identify and adapt to the other's goals and plans. These realities should not be seen as causing awkward imperfections in arguing behavior; rather, they should be understood as fundamental to it. Competent arguing involves approaching the dialectical ideals, managing power, and integrating goals and plans.

## THE ARGUMENT ITSELF

I have referred frequently in this chapter to argument soundness but have not offered much explicit discussion of the idea. This is not because soundness is unimportant to argument competence. I have chosen to emphasize other issues because I think they have not been sufficiently appreciated by argumentation scholars or worked out in the detail that soundness considerations have been. In this last section of the chapter, I need to clarify what a sound argument is. In contrast to the psychological orientation of the section on argument framing and the interpersonal bent of the section on argumentative interactions, here I necessarily consider arguments as public texts having nonpersonal existence. Although the analysis applies equally to arguments<sub>0</sub>,

arguments<sub>1</sub>, and arguments<sub>2</sub>, my treatment will seem as though it is only about stable, public argument products, since for these purposes it makes little difference whether premises and claims are made by a single person or emerge from several people's interaction. The question is whether the argument is sound, after all, not whether the arguer is. This represents Wenzel's logical perspective for analyzing arguments.

In addressing this question, I treat the standard topics but must begin with an examination of an argument's structure and thereafter consider evidence, warrants, and claims.

## The Structure of Arguments

Arguments can be structurally described from several different theoretical viewpoints. Perhaps the best known of these is logic. This generates the distinction between deduction and induction and is sometimes helpfully filled out with the addition of abduction to the list. Abduction, which refers to the generation of hypotheses to explain a collection of premises (rather as a detective begins to suspect a particular person after examining clues), is an important idea. Deduction and induction, however, are too arid and formalistic to describe human arguing without distortive translation into strict logical terms. The distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning also seems to blur on examination, possibly reducing induction to a specialized form of probabilistic deduction (see Hample, 1985b). Both deduction and induction understand arguments as simple linear structures, moving neatly from one premise to the next. Although this is often a reasonable approximation of human arguing, it necessarily misses nonlinear arguments, such as metaphors, emotional displays, or pointed narratives (Bosanquet, 1920; Fisher, 1987; Gilbert, 1997; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969).

Another point of view would be the practical one exemplified by argumentation textbooks, in which one typically sees arguments distinguished according to their types. The books have lists that include analogical arguments, arguments from generalization, causal arguments, arguments from authority, and the like. These typologies have pedagogical value because they encourage students to see the different proof requirements involved in these reasonings. The lists are ad hoc, however, with different textbooks having different systems and none being able to make any reasonable claim to mutual exhaustiveness, mutual exclusivity, or overall thematic coherence.

Fisher's (1987) treatment of how narratives contain implicit arguments is important. Kneupper (1981), for example, showed how a story can be slanted toward a particular conclusion by featuring the actor, the setting, or some other dramatistic element in its telling. Fisher argued that two standards, fidelity and coherence, are criterial in evaluating the rationality of a narrative. Fidelity refers to the question of whether the narrative's factual assertions are accurate, and coherence reflects the intrinsic probability of the story and its components. This analysis is useful for understanding the soundness of clearly nonlinear arguments, and the two standards might, with some effort, be extended to linear arguments as well. Consistent with the usual disciplinary prejudice, however, I concentrate here on messages with surface features that are more explicitly argumentative than is usual with an argumentative narrative.

A useful and familiar way of understanding the structure of an argument is to apply the Toulmin (1958) model (see Fig. 11.1). People say or do things argumentatively that fulfill several probative functions. A fully elaborated argument points toward a claim, which may be qualified in some way. The claim depends on the data, and the

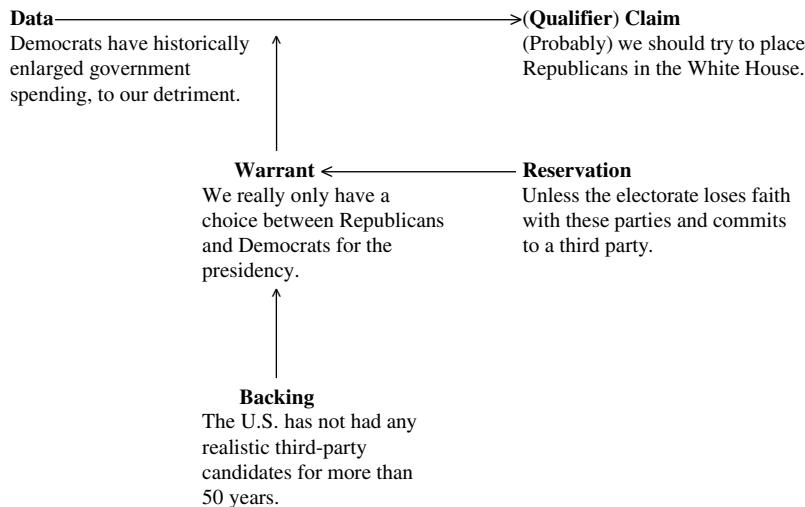


FIG. 11.1. Toulmin model.

data are connected to the claim by means of a warrant. The warrant itself may need to be established, and so Toulmin also made room in the model for backing, which is datalike material that supports the warrant. Finally, even supportable warrants may permit exceptions, and so reservations must be acknowledged. Although the Toulmin model is not entirely uncontroversial in detail (Hamble, 1977; Willard, 1976), it has, from the beginning, been immediately recognized as having several important values. It permits analysis of arguments with components that remain in their natural form, it directs attention to evidence and its link to the claim, and it emphasizes the importance of qualifying one's claims.

A sound argument has sound evidence and a sound warrant, and these are soundly supportive of a claim that is qualified in such a way as to reflect its support. Therefore, I offer some specific discussion of evidence, warrants, and claims.

## Evidence

The function of evidence is to offer factlike material that is acceptable to the audience, and that can be linked supportively to the argument's conclusion by means of the warrant. Questionable evidence needs to have its factuality established in a prior argument. Questionable connections to the argument's conclusion need to be strengthened by providing backing for the warrant or finding a better warrant.

Argumentation and public speaking textbooks often treat the topic of evidence by listing different things that can serve as support in an argument. Typical lists include statistics, stories, quotations, analogies, and so forth. These typologies, although they may have some pedagogical value, are as ad hoc as the lists of argument schemes and have no better claim to being mutually exhaustive, mutually exclusive, or coherent (see Hamble, Baker, Luckie-Parks, Moore, Thorne, & Dorsey, 2000; Kellermann, 1980). In fact, not much thought is required to see conceptual problems with this typological approach: What is one to make of a statistic that is being used analogically, for instance?

Despite the near absence of a theory of evidence, however, teachers are able to convey standards for critical evaluation of supporting materials. These criteria are

usually based on the typologies. Evidence is often from authorities, and Newman and Newman's book (1969) is particularly recommended as a guide to evaluating that sort of data. They suggested that a variety of elements affect the likelihood of the authority being accurate, including the degree of tension in the situation being reported on; the accessibility of the situation to other observers; the freedom of the authority to speak freely; the authenticity of the quoted document; the material's internal consistency; the care the authority takes in generalizing; the possibility that the evidence may be reluctant; the authority's expertise, objectivity, and record of accuracy; whether the authority is a contemporaneous eyewitness; and which primary sources a secondary authority uses and whether he or she cites them responsibly.

Newman and Newmans' thorough analysis of the quality of evidence from authorities is unfortunately not paralleled for other sorts of data, at least from sources within the argumentation community. But we might well observe that evidentiary standards are externally available from other fields. Evidence drawn from the empirical social sciences, for instance, needs to reflect valid and reliable measurement, an appropriate sample, a tight empirical design, standard statistical analysis, and awareness of possibly confounding variables. Evidence from the natural sciences needs to meet similar criteria, except that quality of instrumentation is often of paramount importance, sample size considerations may be completely unimportant, and results may not be statistical. Evidence from the humanities is more difficult to evaluate. The conclusions of a philosopher, for instance, depend on the argument he or she used to generate them, and so the criteria for good evidence turn out to be the soundness of the authority's own arguments. The chance that this makes evidentiary evaluation infinitely regressive may be a problem. This brief discussion of other sorts of evidence makes clear the importance of a well-rounded education, as Cicero [1988] noted long ago (*de Oratore*, I).

To this point, I have implicitly been considering evidence as something external to the speaker, something imported into an argument, like a quotation. The Toulmin model does not describe data in this way, however. Regardless of their source or form, data are simply something factlike that supports the claim. Personal experience, emotional displays (Gilbert, 1997), common sense, word meanings—all of these can take on a probative role, and all need to meet the standards appropriate to their origin if the argument is to be sound. Informal logicians have written many useful textbooks (e.g., Govier, 1997) that clarify the conditions under which various sorts of premises are acceptable.

## Warrants

Warrants link data to claim and therefore take on the function of showing “if the data are so, the claim is so.” Their surface features—verbal or nonverbal, precise or vague—are not their defining elements. In the context of an argument, a sound warrant must satisfy two criteria: It must connect the data to the claim, and it must itself be acceptable or well supported. If support is required, this is supplied by the backing (see Fig. 11.1), which contains a subordinate argument to which the warrant is the conclusion (Hamble, 1977).

Warrants may not be universally applicable to the data-claim link. If the warrant would normally connect data to claim reliably, but not in a particular instance, then a reservation should be part of a full argument. A reservation or rebuttal delineates circumstances in which the authority of the warrant should be set aside (see Fig. 11.1). For instance, the killing of another person should be punished

(warrant), unless the killing is in self-defense (reservation). Notice that the reservation is directed exactly against the warrant and is not a counter to the argument as a whole.

Because many public argumentative texts are enthymematic, portions of arguments are often unexpressed. Although any element, including data and claim, might be left implicit, warrants in particular are often not explicated. Therefore, this subsection on warrants is a convenient place to discuss unexpressed premises.

A problem in reconstructing arguments for analysis is that any incomplete argument can be made to be logically valid, if an appropriate missing proposition is supplied. This might, however, not do justice to the arguer's intentions. Therefore, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, ch. 6) recommended that the "pragmatic optimum" be used as the standard for understanding what is missing. The pragmatic optimum is a premise that accomplishes two things: The argument becomes valid, and the speaker is protected from the assumption that he or she has violated any of the rules for critical discussion. Their idea is that speakers are responsible for offering valid arguments, and so reconstruction needs to assume that they have done so. The analyst must make the further assumption that the arguer is satisfying both the specific rules for critical discussion and the general rules for competent conversation, however. A premise that only affords logical validity will not always meet these other criteria. Therefore, creating the pragmatic optimum "is a matter of generalizing the logical minimum, making it as informative as possible without ascribing unwarranted commitments to the speaker and formulating it in a colloquial way that fits in with the rest of the argumentative discourse" (p. 64). In their somewhat unfortunate example, a speaker has said, "Angie is a real woman, therefore she is nosy." The minimally required premise to make the argument valid is "if Angie is a real woman, then she is nosy." The pragmatic optimum, however, which also presumes argumentative and communicative competence on the part of the speaker, is "real women are nosy." Notice how much more informative the pragmatic optimum is, and how it represents a reasonable judgment of the speaker's substantive commitments.

## Claims

The claim, of course, is the argument's conclusion, its point. The key critical notion here is that the claim's force must precisely reflect the strength of the argument that supports it. A weak supporting argument should yield a strongly qualified claim, and a strong one might produce a claim with hardly any softening language at all (see Fig. 11.1). The soundness of the data, the soundness of the warrant, and the applicability of the reservations all directly affect the clarity with which a conclusion can be stated. Overgeneralizations are claims too strong for their support, for instance.

The logical perspective on arguments entreats us to consider the soundness of an argument. To do this, we must be able to make judgments about the quality of each structural component and to assess the degree to which the constellation of ideas cohere in support of the claim. Competent arguments are not the most forcefully stated; they are the ones whose conclusions best match the strength of their support. This portion of the chapter has given some general guidance for the critical reception and production of relatively small argument units. It should not be forgotten, however, that these argument units take their places within larger contexts of interaction, thoughts, and feelings. A sound argument, as we said earlier, is one that deserves to be effective, on structural, epistemic, and moral grounds. And a competent argument is one that is both sound and appropriate.

## FINAL THOUGHTS: ARGUING WELL AND ARGUING BADLY

A person who argues well will be positively evaluated from Wenzel's rhetorical, logical, and dialectical perspectives. A good argument is therefore effective, sound, and fair. As I remarked earlier, I have omitted much discussion of effectiveness in favor of the standard that a good argument must be technically competent, that is, that it deserves to be effective. Soundness refers to the argument's structure and the coherence and probative value of its elements. Fairness is achieved by careful attention to the rules of critical discussion. If these are understood and valued by both participants, a fair argument will also be a socially appropriate one.

People do not always argue well. Inferential errors, which I would class as problems of soundness, are well documented (e.g., J. Baron, 1990; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Schauble & Glaser, 1990; Wason & Johnson-Laird, 1972). People overvalue some sorts of evidence and neglect other kinds; they are misled into inferential atmospheres stimulated by words such as "not"; they equivocate as to whether " $p$  or  $q$ " can mean that only  $p$  or  $q$  can be true, or both at once; they are unable to bracket their personal biases to judge an argument's validity. Problems of social appropriateness are equally common. People lose their tempers; they take apparently inoffensive things personally; they insult instead of rebutting; they create hurt feelings accidentally or on purpose.

The soundness issues have been taken up by the critical thinking movement (e.g., Paul, 1993). Along with the sometimes overenthusiastic editorializing about critical thinking has developed an empirical research program. Follman, Lavelly, and Berger (1997b) identify 69 different critical thinking instruments. The degree of concurrent validity of these tests remains an issue, because many of them correlate more strongly with tests of critical reading than with other tests of critical thinking, and a noticeable number of the critical thinking–critical thinking correlations are below .50 (Follman, Lavelly, & Berger, 1997a). But even allowing for the blunt edges of some of the measurements, the meta-analytic finding that instruction in argumentation raises critical thinking scores is heartening (Allen et al., 1999).

The question of an argument's social appropriateness has perhaps been most thoroughly dealt with in connection with studies of interpersonal conflict. There, the issues of climate, defensiveness, threat, and attitude toward the other have been studied in great detail. That research shows that these "nonsubstantive" matters have clear effects on the possibility and quality of interaction outcomes. As illustrated in this chapter, a variety of interventions, aimed at children and adults, have been shown to be helpful in teaching people to argue more appropriately and effectively.

Perhaps a suitable way to close this chapter is to provide a synecdochic summary, in the form of recommendations. If people wish to argue more skillfully, these are the things they need to do:

- I. Improve their framing of the experience of arguing.
  - A. Be aware of their own goals in arguing and perceptive about the other's;
  - B. integrate their own goals with the other's cooperatively, not competitively; and
  - C. intellectualize and internalize the positive consequences of arguing.
- II. Improve their interpersonal process of arguing.
  - A. Understand and abide by the rules for critical discussion;
  - B. be perceptive about dominance, power, climate, and other interpersonal matters, trying to avoid or resolve these nearly inevitable problems; and
  - C. be perceptive about their own and other's real and virtual plans, trying to conjoin the real plans cooperatively.

- III. Improve the soundness of their arguments.
  - A. Use and require good evidence;
  - B. use and require good connections between evidence and claim; and
  - C. use and require carefully qualified conclusions.

Although this list might be used as a set of learning objectives for a single course, it is really a life syllabus. Reason and emotion are not opposite poles, and one need not interfere with the other. Achieving coalescent argument and eschewing eristic will lead to the sound, appropriate, and effective arguments that generate the positive outcomes our textbooks describe. Each of us would benefit from improving our own arguing, and by example or instruction, the arguing of those around us.

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CHAPTER

# 12

## PERSUASION AS A SOCIAL SKILL

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On some occasions, it is illuminating to view the various means by which individuals endeavor to “get their way” as arrayed on a continuum (cf., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hunter & Boster, 1988). The continuum is bounded at one end by no message behavior, that is, doing nothing. This anchor accurately reflects the fact that there are many instances in which individuals wish to achieve some persuasive end but judge that the effort will not be worth the trouble (Dillard, 1990a, 1990b; Solomon & Samp, 1998), so they take no action whatsoever. If this is defined as the left pole of the dimension, then as we move slightly to the right we encounter an assortment of “nice” techniques that might include a simple, polite request, a promise of a future favor in return for compliance today, or an appeal to the target’s sense of altruism (“Will you help me?”). Further movement to the right traverses territory that becomes increasingly hostile, moving through criticism, negative altercasting (“Only a bad person could refuse my request”), and threat, before arriving at the opposite anchor: physical aggression.

The focus of this chapter is on that vast area between the two poles, although not on the poles themselves. Broadly speaking, this area can be called social influence. In using that term, however, we wish to be clear that our coverage is limited to social interactions that involve verbal exchanges, or their near equivalents, not on phenomena such as conformity, group pressure, or subliminal influence. Thus, we examine literature pertaining to interpersonal influence, much of which highlights messages that are brief, relatively spontaneous, lacking in detailed argumentative structure, and focused on personal objectives. In addition, we integrate persuasion research. This latter body of work is characterized by longer messages, usually carefully planned, often consisting of a fairly lengthy number of arguments on topics of social, political, and commercial interest. Because interpersonal influence and persuasion comprise historically distinct research traditions, many possible points of integration remain undeveloped. Consideration of these literatures jointly should serve to highlight commonalities and reveal the contributions of each toward answering questions of social skill. Except where specified, we use the terms *influence* and *persuasion* interchangeably.

Because social skill begins with an awareness of the options available to communicators, our emphasis is on summarizing what is known about influence and persuasion. Reviews that give greater emphasis to history and theory are available elsewhere (e.g., Miller, 1987; Seibold, Cantrill, & Meyers, 1985; Wilson, 1997). Even our focus on contemporary knowledge is necessarily selective. Rather than attempt an exhaustive summary of the persuasion and influence literatures, we limit ourselves to literatures of sufficient size and coherence that reasonably strong generalizations can be achieved. More comprehensive efforts can be found in Stiff (1994), Perloff (1993), and Gass and Seiter (1999).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSUASION AS A COMMUNICATION SKILL

One general strategy for evaluating the operation of some variable is to examine circumstances in which it is absent. Application of this strategy to the question of persuasive social skill yields some dramatic findings. Consider, first, the research on two trait communication variables. Persons characterized as high on *argumentativeness* are predisposed to present and defend their positions on controversial issues (Infante & Rancer, 1982). They enjoy argumentative exchange and are skilled in this form of interaction. Individuals characterized as high on verbal aggressiveness have a tendency to attack others' self-concepts for the purpose of inflicting psychological pain. Infante, Chandler, and Rudd (1989) proposed a dyadic explanation of interspousal violence built around marital partners' individual levels of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Domestic abuse appears to occur most often in those couples in which one spouse is low in argumentativeness and the other is high in verbal aggressiveness. Although the high verbal aggressive partner may be the instigator of a hostile communication episode, it is the absence of argumentative skill in the spouse that apparently allows the interaction to spiral into violence.

Sadly, it appears that skill deficiencies are not confined to adult-adult interactions. Oldershaw, Walters, and Hall (1986) presented data showing that mothers previously identified as being abusive toward their children manifest distinctively different communication patterns than do nonabusive mothers. This observational study revealed that whereas nonabusive mothers sought compliance from their offspring via reasoning, requests for cooperation, and offering approval, abusive mothers used these tactics less frequently. The latter group tended toward heavy-handed strategies such as threat, physical aggression, humiliation, shouting, and the expression of disapproval. Although there are many inferential complexities associated with these data, one plausible explanation of them is that the abusive mothers simply lacked the persuasive skill to instantiate the more prosocial compliance tactics.

Further consideration of the venues in which persuasive discourse occurs also helps to illustrate the enormous pragmatic implications of variation in this social skill. One such venue is, of course, politics. Mutz, Sniderman, and Brody (1996) maintained that "persuasion is ubiquitous in the political process; it is also the central aim of political interaction. It is literally the stuff of politics" (p. 1). Here, the stakes are high. Suasory discourse in the political realm is responsible for the outcome of campaigns at all levels of government, for the passage of legislation in Congress, and for the formation of citizen opinion in churches, taverns, and other public meeting places. In fact, the concept of civic deliberation, thought by many to be a defining feature of effective democracy (Cohen, 1989; Fishkin, 1992), resides beneath the broad umbrella of persuasion.

The legal setting, too, is shot through with persuasive interaction. In civil and criminal actions, judges and juries serving as processors of persuasive appeals must weigh the evidence and render verdicts of consequence. It is no understatement to claim that persuasion can be a matter of life and death. As long as the death penalty remains legal, the relative suasive skill of prosecuting and defense attorneys will play an important role in determining whether defendants in murder trials receive the ultimate sanction. Persuasive skill is also implicated in many more common matters such as child custody arrangements, the settlement of contracts, and the resolution of property disputes.

In addition, the engines that power economic expansion are fueled by consumer spending that is, in turn, at least partially a product of the skill of the advertising and marketing industries. Information regarding the price of goods and services is vital to market efficiency. But, just as in the political and legal arenas, the role of persuasion in commerce is not all to the good. Members of the persuasion industries strive to sell particular products through mind-numbing, repetitive exhortation. At both a more subtle and more powerful level, it has been argued that the persuasion profession “serves not so much to advertise products as to promote consumption as a way of life” (Lasch, 1978, p. 72), but many of these same marketing techniques are also used to help solve pressing social problems such as improvement of the nation’s health.

## ELEMENTS OF PERSUASIVE SKILL

### Two Fundamental Tasks

Aristotle is widely credited with defining rhetoric as “observing, in a given case, the available means of persuasion” (Solmsen, 1954, pp. 24–25). His phrase “the available means of persuasion” rightly implies that the skilled persuader will have a variety of approaches in his or her repertoire, but that not all of them will be suitable. Due to the specifics of the “given case” some of those approaches will be set aside on the grounds that they are ineffective, inappropriate, or inefficient. One of the defining aspects of the “given case” is the message recipient, be that one person or many. Thus, Aristotle’s thinking points toward two fundamental tasks for any would-be persuader. *Audience analysis* is the process of discovering or inferring facts about message recipients that permit judgments regarding their likely reaction to the message. *Message production* involves the conception, design, and execution of a suasive appeal. The manner in which these two tasks are carried out is determined by a number of other concerns and constraints all of which require elaboration. That is the task to which we now turn.

### Modalities and Roles

According to one report, the advertising industry spent roughly \$2 billion on advertising to children in 1998 (Numbers, 1999), an amount that constitutes a 20-fold increase over spending just a decade earlier. Are advertisers getting anything for their money? Research relating the amount and duration of advertising with sales indicates that they are indeed (Assmus, Farley, & Lehman, 1984; Clarke, 1976). These short, slick persuasive messages known as commercial advertisements *do* make the cash register ring. It is estimated that the average American child will view approximately 30,000 advertisements in a year (Numbers, 1999). For adults, that number rises to a staggering 109,500 per year (McCarthy, 1991). Frequencies such as these indicate

that persuasive attempts in the context of the mass media are ubiquitous. Everyone is the target of many ongoing media campaigns, most of which devote substantial time and effort to both audience analysis and message production.

Not every suasive message is the carefully orchestrated product of a multi-billion-dollar industry. In fact, several studies indicate that a great deal of persuasion is far less planful and more informal than commercial advertising (e.g., Cody, Canary, & Smith, 1994). It takes place between individuals who know each other relatively well. One study asked college students two questions: Who tries to persuade you? and Who do you try to persuade? (Rule, Bisanz, & Kohn, 1985). Friends and family accounted for 59% of the data generated by the first question and 76% of the data generated by the second question. These numbers suggest two important observations. First, the majority of attempts at interpersonal persuasion take place within the confines of close, often personal relationships. The people with whom we are intimate are more likely to be both the source and target of persuasive messages than are strangers. In contrast to mass-mediated persuasive attempts, audience analysis of intimates occurs over a long period of time and message production is often rapid and nearly automatic.

A second observation to make about the Rule et al. (1985) data goes back to the finding that 59% of friends and family try to "persuade you," whereas "your" persuasive attempts target friends and family 76% of the time. This discrepancy suggests that although everyone acts as both source and target at different times, individuals view and probably experience the interaction differently when they assume one role versus the other. In sum, a comprehensive approach to persuasive skill recognizes that individuals function as both message producers and consumers, and that persuasion attempts are common in both interpersonal and mass-mediated contexts. Role and context exert regulatory influences on audience analysis and message production, but more is needed for a complete understanding of those tasks. One important question is what is source trying to achieve?

## **Research on Naturally Occurring Influence Goals**

It might seem that people seek to persuade others for an enormous variety of reasons; however, research on interpersonal influence goals reveals that perceptions of immense variety are more illusory than real (Cody et al., 1994; Dillard, 1989; Rule et al., 1985). The most frequently identified reasons for persuading others are as follows: give advice (i.e., provide guidance regarding the target's health or lifestyle), gain assistance (i.e., obtain favors, objects, or information), share activity (i.e., spend time together), change orientation (i.e., alter target's opinion or behavior with regard to some social or political issue), change relationship (i.e., initiate, escalate, or de-escalate the source-target relationship), obtain permission (e.g., secure the endorsement of someone in power), enforce rights and obligations (e.g., compel the target to fulfill a previous commitment or to stop an annoying behavior). Despite the fact it is possible to parse certain of these goals more finely and that it may be useful to do so in some circumstances, it is nonetheless evident that these seven goals are a useful means of characterizing a large portion of the persuasive landscape.

An important point in the acquisition of persuasive skill is the recognition that influence goals rarely exist in a vacuum. Would-be persuaders usually possess goals in addition to the goal of influencing the other (Berger, 1997; Hamble & Dallinger, 1992; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998). Because such concerns arise from consideration of the influence or *primary goals*, these other concerns are called *secondary goals*.

(Dillard, 1990a; Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989). Rather than driving the interaction, as does the primary goal, secondary goals shape the range of behavioral options available to the speaker. For example, the speaker who wishes to gain the compliance of another without also damaging their relationship will probably be less aggressive in his or her message output than one who is concerned with nothing but effectiveness.

The concept of secondary goals is of value here because it prompts consideration of related ideas that can aid efforts to understand persuasive social skill. It is self-evident that attempting to accomplish two ends simultaneously is a more demanding task than focusing on one alone. Three goals are more demanding than two, and so on. Circumstances that give rise to multiple goals create interactions that are relatively higher in *goal structure complexity*. For example, giving advice to one's parents is generally viewed as low in complexity, whereas initiating a relationship activates a relatively large number of secondary goals (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). If persuasion is to be successful, then as complexity increases, the degree of social skill necessary to manage it must rise accordingly.

The preceding paragraphs consider research findings from the study of interpersonal influence. Although corresponding goal studies have not been carried out in the mass communication realm, even brief consideration of the list above suggests a number of parallels. Governments beseech their citizens to engage in healthy behavior (i.e., give advice), whereas charitable organizations seek volunteers (i.e., gain assistance). Various political parties engage in well-financed efforts to shape public opinion (i.e., change orientation). Other of the interpersonal goals, such as relational initiation, lack perfect analogs. Nonetheless, the list of motives offers some useful distinctions and a sound starting point for thinking about persuasion in the context of mass communication.

Research on influence goals contributes to our understanding of persuasive skill in three ways: (a) by identifying seven common persuasive aims, (b) by recognizing that, when engaged in persuasion, individuals are typically trying to accomplish other ends as well, and (c) by revealing that influence attempts vary in complexity to the extent that persons are trying to address more, rather than fewer, goals. Despite the value of these points, this strain of inquiry has focused primarily on why individuals attempt to produce behavioral change in others. This feature of the research overlooks the fact that there are other targets of persuasion and different ways in which change may take place.

## Targets of Change

We use the term *target* in a very specific manner: to refer to aspects of individuals that might be changed by a persuasive interaction. Traditionally, persuasion research has recognized three such targets (Rajecki, 1982). *Beliefs* are estimates of the truth or falsity of some proposition. Individuals hold a variety of beliefs about the existence of objects, the occurrence of events, the relevance of evidence, the causal relationship between one event and another, and so on. *Attitudes* are summary evaluations of the goodness or badness of an attitude object, where the term attitude object means virtually anything that can be represented mentally. Finally, *behaviors* are actions performed by some individual. An important skill for any message producer is to have a clear idea of which of these three targets she or he hopes to change.

It is generally the case that these three targets can be arrayed in terms of the difficulty of change. Typically, beliefs are the most pliable, attitudes are less so, and behavior presents the greatest persuasive challenge. Of course, there are many

exceptions to this general rule. For example, some attitudes are firmly held because they are based on a great deal of information. In contrast, getting message recipients to wear a lapel button expressing a value that they endorse (e.g., "Don't litter") is a discrete and fairly trivial action that may be relatively easy to produce. Convincing someone to stop smoking is a persuasive challenge of a different order of magnitude.

## Types of Change

It is common for people to speak of persuasion as if the result of the process were a more or less homogeneous set of outcomes. Appreciation of the differences between the targets of persuasion goes some distance toward alleviating this misconception. Distinguishing among the types of change that might occur in any of the three targets provides another important means of nuancing what it means to be persuaded (Miller, 1980). *Formation* occurs when an individual acquires a new belief, attitude, or behavior where none existed before. Instances of formation are probably most common among children and adolescents, but adults, too, engage in formation when they encounter new products, novel concepts, or unexpected requests.

Certainly not all persuasion begins with a blank slate. Rather, a great deal of persuasive discourse aims to strengthen preexisting beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors either for the purpose of increasing their extremity or combatting the effects of counterpersuasion by other message sources. This sort of change is termed *reinforcement*.

Perhaps the most common conception of persuasion can be equated with *conversion*. When Democrats become Republicans or evangelicals become atheists, then conversion has occurred. Thus, conversion instances in which beliefs are altered from true to false, attitudes shift from positive to negative, or individuals act on behalf of a cause rather than against it.

## Motivations for Message Processing

Having already addressed the goals of message sources, we might also ask what sort of goals do message consumers try to achieve. In fact, predicting how message recipients will orient toward a message or topic is the overarching question in audience analysis. One answer to it can be found in contemporary extensions of the functional theories of persuasion (Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly (1989) specified three conceptually distinct orientations that receivers might assume toward a message. *Accuracy-motivated* processing occurs whenever a receiver's primary motivation is to objectively assess the validity of the message advocacy, the soundness of its arguments, the quality of its evidence, and so on. Typically, individuals embrace the goal of accuracy when they perceive that the topic is one that has positive or negative personal consequences for themselves or persons close to them.

Individuals do not always seek "the Truth." On many occasions, people are committed to a position before message exposure and often that position has implications for their view of themselves. Under these conditions, *defense-motivated* processing is likely to occur. Defense-motivated processing is aimed at maintaining the preexisting orientation. Hence, this form of message processing may be characterized as biased in that the goal is not to obtain a fair and impartial weighing of the facts. Rather, the purpose of defense-motivated processing is to fend off the persuasive attack leaving the original opinion or value unchanged. One should expect that any attempt at conversion would inspire defensive processing.

Receivers may also adopt a third approach to message processing called *impression-motivated*, which refers to the desire to hold and express evaluations that are seen as appropriate to the social situation. Typically, this means that individuals align their attitude with those of attractive others (usually the message source); however, persons may also adopt positions counter to those that they dislike. Having the goal of pleasing or displeasing others suggests that, like defense-motivated processing, this form of message consumption is biased. But in this instance, the objective is not maintenance of a preexisting orientation, but change in any direction that will enhance liking by others. Consequently, impression-motivated processing tends to produce flimsy attitudes that are easily changed.

## Depth of Processing

The preceding paragraphs are intended to make that point that individuals process messages for different reasons. In parallel with the research on naturally occurring persuasion goals, we should note that message processors may hold one or more goals and that processing becomes more or less complex as a function of the number of goals that individuals are attempting to achieve simultaneously. There is also the question of how carefully or deeply individuals process the message. According to Chaiken et al.'s (1989) heuristic-systematic model, individuals' level of motivation will determine which of two processing modes are used (assuming that there is adequate cognitive capacity). The *systematic mode* of message processing is analytic and contemplative, focused on evaluating the evidence, and on understanding the facts. Relatively speaking, it reflects deep processing. In contrast, *heuristic processing* is comparatively superficial and simplistic, relying on various decision-making shortcuts and learned rules to arrive at an attitude. Compared with systematic processing it may be thought of as shallow.

The benefit of systematic processing is the greater likelihood of accurate message evaluation, but this comes with a cost: greater effort. Heuristics, because they are simple, require little effort or even conscious awareness. For example, application of a rule such as "If my friend Joe says it's right, that's good enough for me" provides a quick and easy solution to the problem of attitude formation. Depending on Joe's other qualifications, however, this process may or may not produce the best outcome for the individual in question. The sufficiency principle embodies the trade-off between the desire to minimize effort and the desire for an adequate degree of confidence in one's position (Chaiken et al., 1989). As long as individuals possess adequate cognitive capacity, they will strive to reach their desired level of confidence in their position. When individuals are unable or unmotivated to expend cognitive effort on message processing, they will turn to heuristics so resolve the question of what to do or believe.

## AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Every skilled attempt at persuasion is predicated on the source's predictions about how the recipient will respond to the message. The accuracy of such predictions can be maximized by knowledge of the recipient's ability and motivation to process the message as well as his or her processing goals. Information about ability, motivation, and goals is often hard to come by, however. If the audience consists of more than one person, they may vary on any or all of these three variables. And even if they don't, discovering this similarity may necessitate an outlay of time or

money or both. As a consequence, message sources are often forced to make inferences about the audience's ability, motivation, and goals on the basis of less direct forms of information such as membership in cultural or sociological groups (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Next, we turn to an analysis of the different types of information that are used to make predictions about how audience members will respond to a message.

## Cultural Information

Anthropologists often define culture as the totality of the behavior patterns, beliefs, values, language, and practices shared by a large group of people living in some definable geographic area. Of course, message sources can use cultural knowledge to anticipate how others will respond to their persuasive appeals. One particularly influential approach to understanding how cultures differ is the product of a research program initiated in 1967. Hofstede (1980) and his colleagues conducted a series of large scale survey studies in 50 countries around the world. The product of their research was a list of dimensions used to characterize various cultures: (a) individualism versus collectivism, (b) power distance, (c) femininity versus masculinity, (d) uncertainty, (e) long-term versus short-term orientation to life.

Probably the most actively researched of these dimensions is individualism versus collectivism. This distinction rests on the observation that some cultures emphasize the rights and responsibilities of individuals (i.e., individualistic cultures) whereas in other cultures the group is seen as more important than any of the individuals that compose it (i.e., collectivistic cultures).

If individualism–collectivism is, in fact, an important determinant of persuasion, then we might expect to see manifestations of it in products of the mass media. This was the premise with which Mueller (1987) began her content analysis of Japanese and American print advertisements. First of all, she identified several possible themes that might be emphasized more or less in the two cultures. For instance, advertisers often adopt one of two approaches known as hard sell or soft sell. Because Americans are thought to value explicitness in communication whereas Japanese privilege decorum, we might expect that American advertisements would use the hard-sell approach more often than Japanese ads. Examination of close to 400 advertisements in Japanese and American magazines yielded data consistent with expectation. It was also true that soft-sell ads were more common Japan than in the United States. The results of this study and others like it indicate that certain approaches to persuasion are more likely to be found in some cultures than in others.

Importantly, there is also evidence that matching the appeal to a cultural value is more effective than the alternative. Han and Shavitt (1994) provided experimental evidence of this using data gathered in Korea and the United States. Members of individualistic cultures do respond more favorably to appeals to self-benefit, whereas members of collectivistic cultures are relatively more susceptible to other-benefit messages.

Although the research suggests ways in which cultural information might be useful in understanding persuasion, for the most part this type of information does not provide a strong basis for predicting the responses of message recipient. The reason is apparent: Use of cultural information requires the assumption that all members of the category are interchangeable. Although cultures do value some things over others, there is also tremendous variation in the extent to which those values are internalized among members of a given culture.

## Sociological Information

Sociological information is that which locates individuals with regard to groups. Demographic data, one form of sociological information, are relatively objective features of individuals that provide the basis for certain social categories such as gender, age, race, income, and level of education. Information of this sort is often relatively inexpensive to obtain, and it is put to heavy use by marketing organizations and political campaigns in part for this reason. Although demographic information suffers from the same problems of generalization associated with cultural information, the problems exist to a lesser degree because sociological groupings are often more narrow than cultural groupings and because sociological data are typically used in conjunction with cultural data.

Whereas membership in many demographically defined groups is largely a matter of fate, individuals do make choices about becoming elements in other social categories. To the extent that groups are constructed around particular causes or values, knowledge of group membership may permit relatively accurate inferences about an individual's related beliefs and attitudes.

## Psychological Trait Information

Trait information is concerned with the mental makeup of the message recipient. What values does this individual hold? What thing does she like or dislike? Is she introverted or extroverted? Quarrelsome or agreeable? All of these questions are concerned with the psychological makeup of individuals.<sup>1</sup> One example of the use of trait information derives from efforts to reduce risky behaviors among adolescents, which has made extensive use of the concept of sensation seeking. As the name implies, high sensation seekers have an affinity for thrills and excitement. They tend to use more drugs and to use them earlier than persons low in this trait (Donohew, Lorch, & Palmgreen, 1993). High sensation seekers also are more responsive to novel and dramatic messages (Palmgreen et al., 1993). Because it speaks more directly to mental functioning, knowledge of trait information about the message recipient permits a source to make predictions with greater specificity than either cultural or sociological data alone.

## Involvement With the Message or Message Topic

As discussed previously, individuals may possess different goals for processing a persuasive message: accuracy motivated, defense motivated, and impression motivated. Which of these goals is activated is largely determined by the way in which the audience member is involved with the message. In general, accuracy goals result from the perception that the message describes some circumstance with tangible positive or negative consequences for the recipient or someone close to him or her. The possibility of substantial consequences encourages systematic, accuracy-motivated message processing (e.g., Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). In contrast, when the issue is viewed as trivial, heuristic processing is the result. The explanation for this difference is straightforward. Under conditions in which something substantial is at stake, individuals are willing to devote more effort to evaluating the message.

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<sup>1</sup>We depart somewhat from Miller and Steinberg's (1975) conception of psychological-level data. Whereas they viewed psychological-level data as those data that discriminate individuals from one another, we speak of trait information as another means of grouping individuals.

In contrast, when the issue is unimportant, most individuals are content with the "good-enough" solutions that are the result of heuristic processing.

Defensive processing comes about when audience members relate to the message or topic in a way that has implications for their self-concept. Hence, messages that run counter to an individual's values, world view, or past actions are likely to prompt defense-motivated processing. Consciously or not, the defense-motivated individual's prime aim is to enhance or maintain his or her self-concept. The primary mechanism by which this is achieved is selective information processing (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996).

Recent theorizing suggests that some additional conceptual nuance is needed to this otherwise tidy formulation. Slater (2002) argued for the need to distinguish between value-protective processing (i.e., defensive processing) and value-affirmative processing (cf., Chaiken et al., 1996). Indeed, Slater and Rouner (1996) reported that individuals processing with a goal of affirming their values were more persuaded by statistical evidence than were value-protective message recipients. Although it would be incautious to offer strong advice given the relatively small research base, these data are surely sufficient to suggest the need for heightened sensitivity to the position of the advocacy (i.e., pro vs. counter).

Impression-motivated processing is primarily concerned with the interpersonal consequences associated with expressing a given judgment in a particular social situation. As this definition implies, a necessary condition for activation of an impression management goal is the presence of others whose opinion or relationship the message recipient sees as significant. Of course, these significant others need not always be physically present at the moment of attitude presentation. Impression-motivated processing might result from the expectation that others would learn later of the individual's stand on the issue via interpersonal or mediated channels. In any case, the goal of impression management might promote either deep or superficial depending on the magnitude of the anticipated interpersonal consequences.

## Synchrographic Information

It is sometimes said that timing is everything. An audience analysis concept that exploits that observation is known as synchrographics. The idea here is to segment the market (i.e., the audience) with regard to the timing of some event. In this vein, clothing manufacturers purchase the names of women from obstetricians, then classify those women according to the trimester of their pregnancy. Later, these women become the recipient of mail-order catalogues for maternity clothing synchronized with their needs at the moment. Knowing the age of the child permits fairly accurate estimates of when the family will be in the market for clothing of various sizes, toys adapted to different levels of cognitive development, vaccinations, day care, and schooling. The use of synchrographic information explicitly avoids the assumption that individuals' message-processing goals are stable over time. Although it still depends on a process of generalizing, by breaking the audience into smaller, more homogeneous units, the accuracy of the audience analysis is heightened.

## FEATURES AND COMPONENTS OF PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

It is not enough to speak of the available means of persuasion. Before one can choose among those means, some method of characterizing them is needed. Next, we consider two lines of research that attempt to do exactly that. Whereas the first

is grounded in the perceptions of lay actors, the second is the result of an individual philosopher/rhetorician. Although the two efforts are quite different, they complement one another in such a way as to provide a thorough framework for characterizing persuasive messages.

## Perceptual Dimensions

Several investigations have sought to recover the perceptual dimensions that individuals naturally use to characterize influence messages (Cody, McLaughlin, & Jordan, 1980; Falbo, 1977; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Wiseman & Schenck-Hamlin, 1981<sup>2</sup>). Although they are few in number, their findings are remarkably consistent (see Dillard, Wilson, Tusing, & Kinney, 1997, for an extended review). The labels we have given to these three dimensions are explicitness, dominance, and argument (see also Dillard et al., 1997). Although persuasive messages can be examined along many more lines than just these three, this trio of concepts serves as a serviceable introduction to the detail that will follow.

*Explicitness* is the degree to which the message source makes her or his intentions transparent in the message itself. Whereas explicit messages require little or no guesswork regarding the speaker's wants, inexplicit messages necessitate more interpretation and cognitive labor (Blum-Kulka, 1987). Thus, explicitness is best considered as a message property that is present to a greater or lesser extent, rather than as a dichotomous quality that either is present (on record) or absent (off record) (see also Kim & Wilson, 1994). It is also important to bear in mind that in a persuasive message of any length, portions may be highly explicit, whereas others are more indirect.

Explicitness is not, however, an intrinsic feature of a message. Rather, message explicitness is a function of the context in which the utterance occurs. For example, a question that is classified as conventionally indirect by virtue of its linguistic form (e.g., "How about a movie?") is judged as highly explicit when posed as a dating request. Individuals rely on their tacit knowledge of the nature of the situation and the other interactants to judge the explicitness of persuasive appeals.

*Dominance* is the term used to reference the relative power of the source vis-à-vis the recipient as that power is expressed in the message. Dominance is not, however, some objective feature of the source–recipient relationship. Rather, it is the source's bid for power. The recipient may respond to a dominant message with submission, in which case the bid has been accepted. Alternatively, the recipient may respond defiantly, thereby rejecting the source's attempt to define the relationship in that manner. Thus, an expression of dominance need not accurately reflect formal differences in status nor a consensual definition of the source–recipient relationship. Message dominance simply expresses the source's perception of, or desire for, a particular source–recipient power relationship.

Dominance may be communicated via multiple communication modalities. These include, but are not limited to, (a) variation in the vocalic parameters of speech (e.g., pitch or volume); (b) gross body movements, such as gesture or lean; (c) facial displays; and (d) message content (see, e.g., Burgoon, Buller, Hale, & deTurck, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>Harkness (1990) and Kemper and Thissen (1981) conducted very similar investigations and report very similar findings; however, we excluded them from consideration because the researchers provided participants with the dimensions on which the message stimuli were to be judged (effectiveness and politeness, respectively).

In this channel sense, dominance is a broader communication variable than explicitness, which is primarily (although not exclusively) communicated through linguistic means. In the same sense, it is also broader than argument, the dimension that we turn our attention to next.

In studies of interpersonal influence, *argument* has been defined as the extent to which a rationale for the sought-after action is presented in the message (e.g., Dillard et al., 1997). In other words, argument refers to the degree to which the source provides reasons for why she or he is seeking compliance rather than simply making an unelaborated request. Thus, "Would you close the door?" is low in argument because no justification is offered for the sought-after behavior change, whereas "I'm cold. Would you close the door?" includes a reason and is higher in argument. Of course, messages may be structured argumentatively even though the evidence is less than compelling. Argument, as the term is used in this literature, refers to the perceived *quantity* of reason giving.

As with explicitness, arguments are primarily expressed verbally, not nonverbally (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Kruiger, 1987); however, the perceived degree of argument will be shaped by the context in which the utterance occurs. In natural discourse, arguments often appear as enthymemes, that is, arguments with a missing premise made more or less obvious by the context (Jackson & Jacobs, 1980). Hamble (1981) contends that most receivers fill in missing premises and evidence when they are absent or only implied by the message itself.

## The Structure of Argument

A variety of conceptual schemes exist for analyzing the structure of argument, but one of the most enduring is Toulmin's (1958). Although it is elegant in its simplicity, a full discussion of his model would exceed the limits of this chapter (but see Hamble, this volume). Interested readers may find more complete examinations in a variety of venues (e.g., Herrick, 1998; Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 1999). We focus only on the three most fundamental elements: claim, data, and warrant. A *claim* is synonymous with a conclusion, that which the source would have the recipient believe or do. *Data* is the term used to described the reasons and evidence offered in support of the claim. Data may be more or less plentiful, but to say that a persuasive utterance constitutes an argument, at least one datum must be present (although the degree to which it must be explicitly stated is a matter of some contention). The *warrant* in an argument is the concept that connects data to claim. Warrants consist of beliefs, values, assumptions, or generalization that in some way links the argument's conclusion back to the data. To illustrate each of the elements of the model, we borrow the following example from Herrick (1998, p. 41):

**Claim:** Gambling should be legalized.

**Data:** Gambling cannot be stopped.

**Warrant:** That which cannot be stopped should be legalized.

As should be apparent from this example, data and warrants may both become the focus of argument themselves. For instance, one might take issue with the quality of the data or with the fatalism of the warrant. To do so essentially transforms these components to claims. At this point, the model encourages one to search for the data and warrant that undergird those claims.

## Summary

Where Toulmin's analysis of persuasive messages focuses solely on structure, the research on perceptual dimensions of influence messages reminds us that suasive appeals also depend on linguistic variation (i.e., explicitness) and that all messages embody implications for the source–recipient relationship (i.e., dominance). The broad themes identified in this section on the features and components of persuasive messages are examined in more detail in the sections that follow. We begin by taking a closer look at how linguistic and relational factors interact with the endpoint of Toulmin's model, that is, claims.

## EVALUATING CLAIMS

### Explicitness

Making claims explicitly has a number of potential payoffs (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Metts & Grohskopf, this volume). For one, explicit claims have the property of *clarity*. They leave little doubt as to the position that the source would prefer the recipient to hold or to the action that the source desires. Moreover, there is evidence that explicit claims do translate into improved comprehension, although comprehension alone has little impact on opinion change (Cruz, 1998). Explicit claims are also *efficient* (Kellermann, Reynolds, & Chen, 1991). Many interactions involve certain conditions that encourage acceptance of a claim (such as a power differential favoring the message source). To the extent that a speaker can exploit those preexisting conditions, he or she may conserve time and effort. Finally, explicit claims *encourage favorable source judgments* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Individuals who form explicit utterances may earn social credit for plain speaking (i.e., honesty) and avoid the risk of being labeled manipulative.

Speakers who favor inexplicit speech also *encourage favorable source judgments* but of a different sort. In interactions marked by indirect claims, hearers and observers may conclude that the source is tactful, sensitive, and noncoercive (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In addition, inexplicit claims permit *plausible deniability*, a term that entered the national lexicon as a legacy of the Reagan administration. Because of the ambiguities inherent in indirect utterances, the speaker is in a position to assert that the apparent meaning of the message is not what he or she intended at all. Such ambiguity is often strategic in other ways (Eisenberg, 1984). For example, a conventionally indirect request such as, "Could you help me by . . ." allows the recipient to formulate a response in terms of ability rather than desire. "I am unable to help" presents a more palatable social inference. Neither party need confront the potentially unpleasant reality that the hearer has no interest whatsoever in rendering aid to the source. Inexplicit characterizations also allow for the appearance of unity even though the reality of positions is quite diverse (Eisenberg, 1984).

The fact that both explicit and inexplicit claims could both promote positive source judgments might, at first blush, appear paradoxical; however, individuals vary in their preference for indirect speech (Holtgraves, 1997). Thus, preference of indirectness becomes a useful piece of psychological trait information. Furthermore, because people favorably evaluate communication styles that are similar to their own (Giles & Powesland, 1975), we might expect that persons who value clarity and comprehension would draw desirable inferences about the source from explicit claims. Others,

who prize social sensitivity, would view inexplicit speakers in a more favorable light. To the best of our knowledge, this hypothesis has not been tested directly; however, suggestive evidence does exist showing that (a) on average, members of a collectivist culture (i.e., Koreans) report stronger preference for indirectness than members of an individualistic culture (i.e., citizens of the United States; Holtgraves, 1997); and (b) there is a notably higher use of indirect claims in Japanese advertising than in U.S. advertising (Mueller, 1987). Other work, focused on the evaluation of requests indicated that concern for other's feelings and the desire to avoid disapproval were the strongest predictors of perceived effectiveness in a sample of Korean students (Kim & Bresnahan, 1994). Among U.S. students, however, the desire for clarity showed a stronger association with perceived effectiveness than either concern for other or desire to avoid disapproval.

Obviously, qualifications to cultural generalizations abound, and pragmatic and social factors may play at least as great a role as culture in situated preference for direct or indirect speech (Fitch & Sanders, 1994). But nonetheless, skillful communicators will recognize the important role that explicitness may play in the persuasion process and grant attention to it accordingly. Matching message explicitness to the recipients' preference for directness will enhance persuasive impact.

## **When Claims Stand Alone**

As noted earlier, when an argument is incomplete, message recipients tend to fill in the missing pieces (Hampe, 1981). In most natural discourse, the warrant is the part left unstated, but it is quite common to encounter simple requests that are unelaborated in any way. In terms of sentence meaning, these claims are missing both data and warrant. In fact, this absence is more apparent than real because much of the supporting structure of argument is drawn from knowledge of the relationship of the interactants. To wit, Roloff, Janiszewski, McGrath, Burns, and Manrai (1988) demonstrated that, when requesting resources, persons in close relationships use fewer elaborated requests, fewer explanations, and fewer inducements compared with interactants in more socially distant relationships. The obligations inherent in intimate relationships serve as data and warrants for a variety of requests. Even though explicit statements of data and warrants may be unnecessary to produce compliance, research shows that individuals in close relationships still prefer to hear the reasons behind the appeal (Dillard et al., 1998). Although unsupported claims may be justified when time is short, reason-giving creates generally positive relational outcomes.

## **High Stakes Episodes**

Influence interactions vary in their degree of goal structure complexity (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). Asking a close friend to accompany you to a movie is unlikely to generate much concern for secondary goals. On the other hand, initiating a romantic relationship or seeking compliance from someone in power are two instances in which the source has a great deal to lose. In both cases, individuals report relatively high levels of concern about making the interaction go smoothly, their relationship with the recipient, their personal resources, and their own level of anxiety (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). Consequently, situations that are high in goal structure complexity have been labeled *high stakes episodes*. They stand apart from more routine influence episodes by virtue of their importance and this has implications for what constitutes effective communication behavior. Importantly, Schrader (1999) presented data showing

that explicitness and argument produce negative judgments of competence in high stakes episodes. In other words, high stakes episodes should be approached more obliquely. This represents an important qualification to the recommendations made in the preceding section to match message explicitness to preference for explicitness and to use argument even when it is unnecessary to secure compliance.

## EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

As noted previously, an argument consists of three parts: claim, warrant, and data (Toulmin, 1958). Having considered claims alone in the previous section, we now turn our attention to the evaluation of data (i.e., evidence) and warrants. Three conditions are necessary for the effective use of evidence (Reynolds & Reynolds, *in press*). Message recipients must (a) be aware that evidence is present in the message, (b) cognitively process the message, and (c) evaluate the evidence favorably. Although most empirical investigations of the effects of evidence have not attempted to establish that all three conditions were met, we consider next those studies in which evidence was experimentally controlled. Presumably, subjects in those studies met Reynolds and Reynolds awareness criterion. Following that, we turn our attention to the two other criteria for the effective use of evidence: processing and evaluation.

### Forms and Effects of Evidence (i.e., Data)

Reinard's (1988) review of the research literature suggests the following general conclusion: Including evidence in a persuasive message (vs. not) has a dependable and often substantial influence on the effectiveness of that message and perceptions of the credibility of the message source (Reinard, 1998; see also Reynolds & Reynolds, *in press*). Thus, we may assert with confidence that including evidence in a persuasive message will enhance the performance of the appeal. Evidence can take many forms (see Reinard, 1988; Reynolds & Burgoon, 1983), however, and one might wonder as to the specific effects of various evidentiary types. There are three forms for which the research has provided reasonably clear results.

*Testimonial assertions* are statements in which a message source introduces material from an outside source in an attempt to support the claim. Meta-analytic studies indicate that testimonial assertion produces a positive effect on attitude change and judgments of credibility that is dependable across studies (O'Keefe, 1998; Reinard, 1998). Messages high in *argument completeness* are those that explicitly spell out the premises, warrants, backing, and qualifications that compose the argument. There is strong support for the claim that argument completeness promotes persuasion and favorable source judgments (O'Keefe, 1998). Finally, messages vary in terms of the extent to which they rely on vague words or phrases such as "most" or on more precise language such as "90%." *Quantitative specificity* contributes to message effectiveness and enhanced credibility, though the effect is less clear than for testimonial assertions or argument completeness (O'Keefe, 1998).

### Argument Processing

As noted earlier, the dual-process models of attitude change assert that individuals process messages in two modes (Chaiken et al., 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). *Systematic processing* is contemplative, analytic, and responsive to the argumentative quality of the message. *Heuristic processing* occurs whenever an individual relies on

some shortcut decision-making rule to construct an attitude toward the persuasive advocacy.<sup>3</sup> This distinction is pertinent to our discussion of argument because it suggests that what counts as evidence will vary as a function of message-processing mode. In general, heuristic processors cue on superficial aspects of the message or message source whereas systematic processors evaluate the argumentative structure and content of the message more closely.

**Specious Arguments.** In what is now considered a classic investigation in the study of influence, Langer, Blank, and Chanowitz (1978) demonstrated the persuasive power of utterly specious reasons. The experiment, conducted in a library, was one in which individuals using a copy machine were interrupted and asked if the experimenter could intrude to make five copies. One form of the request contained a seemingly valid reason ("May I use the Xerox machine because I'm in a rush"), whereas the other was thoroughly vacuous ("May I use the Xerox machine because I have to make copies"). The frequency of compliance did not differ between the two groups. In another condition, the experimenters upped the ante by asking to make 20 copies instead of five. Compliance with this larger, more time-consuming request varied as a function of reason quality: significantly more individuals complied with the valid request than with the vacuous one.

The study is informative in several respects. From it we see that the mere appearance of a reason may be just as persuasive as a genuine reason. At least in matters that are not of much consequence, compliance with a request may follow from the structure of a message more than its content. This qualification is notable, however. As the outcomes associated with the appeal grow more significant, it appears that individuals scrutinize message content more closely, then acquiesce or not on the merits of the case. In fact, this finding has been replicated many times since the appearance of the Langer et al. (1978) study (e.g., Chaiken, 1980; Petty et al., 1981). It is one example of the principle advanced earlier that accuracy-motivated processing is a function of the perceived consequences of the message.

**Heuristic Arguments.** It is often the case that individuals lack either the ability or motivation to carefully analyze the claims in a persuasive message. Under those conditions they turn to the use of *heuristics*, those shortcut decision-making rules that are correct often enough to be useful. From the standpoint of argumentative structure, a heuristic forms the warrant of a persuasive message. Because certain heuristics are so widely held they are sometimes exploited by professional persuaders to secure the compliance of their recipients even though careful analysis of the argument might reveal it to be flawed. The next few paragraphs examine some common heuristics. The interested reader is referred to Cialdini (1985, 1987) for a more extensive analysis and to Table 12.1 for a brief listing of other heuristics relevant to persuasion.

Western societies strongly encourage their members to exhibit behavioral consistency (Kashima, Siegel, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992). In fact, an individual's sanity or honesty may be called into question if that person displays behaviors that are markedly inconsistent or manifests little correspondence between action and stated intentions. There are at least two reasons that consistency is valued. For one,

<sup>3</sup>Petty and Cacioppo's *central route* processing is virtually identical to Chaiken et al.'s *systematic processing*; however, *peripheral route* processing is not conceptually synonymous with *heuristic processing*. The peripheral route is a sort of kitchen-sink category that includes conditioning processes, dissonance, reactance, and so on—in short, everything that is not central route.

**TABLE 12.1**  
A Nonexhaustive List of Heuristics Used in Persuasion

- 
- |  |
|--|
| 1. Longer messages are stronger messages.                                      |
| 2. Quality of an item correlates with its price.                               |
| 3. We should trust those whom we like.   |
| 4. The behavior of others is a good clue as to how we should behave ourselves. |
| 5. Confident speakers probably do know what they are talking about.            |
| 6. Something that is scarce is also valuable.                                  |
- 

individuals desire that others manifest regularity in their behavior because it makes them predictable. Second, consistency provides an efficient means of dealing with the inevitable complexities of life. If an individual has given some thought to an issue and determined the appropriate course of action there is no need to return to the details of that issue time and time again. From this reasoning, Cialdini (1987) proposed the commitment–consistency principle: “After committing oneself to a position, one should be more willing to comply with requests for behaviors that are consistent with that position” (p. 170). This warrant forms the basis of two compliance techniques known as the foot-in-the-door and the lowball.

The *foot-in-the-door* technique begins with a small request to which most anyone would be likely to acquiesce (e.g., Would you mind displaying a small sign in the window of your home that reads “Be a safe driver”? ). This is followed by a second request that is not so innocuous. In the initial investigation of the foot-in-the-door, the second request asked study participants if they would be willing to have an imposing billboard erected in their front yard for a period of 1 week (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). Those who had previously committed to the first request complied at a rate twice that of those who had not been exposed to the initial request. Although subsequent work showed the effect in that study to be unusually large, there is little doubt as to the efficacy of the technique for enhancing compliance (Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984).

Research indicates that certain side conditions can enhance or diminish the potency of the foot-in-the-door. Specifically, the technique will be more powerful to the extent that (a) the initial behavior is involving, (b) the message recipient actually performs the behavior rather than simply agrees to perform it, and (c) the two requests are topically related such that the second might be seen as an extension of the first (Burger, 1999). Guadagno, Asher, Demaine, and Cialdini (2001) presented evidence that the impact of the foot-in-the-door is moderated by audience members preference for consistency (i.e., the desire to be and to be seen as consistent) such that the effect is strongest among those high in the preference. Because persons low in preference for consistency desire to depart from established behavioral patterns, the foot-in-the-door effect may be greatly reduced or even reversed among members of this audience segment.

Another consistency-based technique is known as the *lowball*, a technique whose development is generally attributed to automobile dealerships. In the first step of the sequence, the salesperson offers a car at an unexpectedly low price. After securing a commitment to purchase from the buyer, the salesperson leaves to clear the transaction with management. When he or she returns, the buyer is told that management has rejected the deal; at that price, the dealership would lose money. Thus, the dealer can only offer the sale at a new, higher price. In addition to its apparent effectiveness at selling cars, Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, and Miller (1978)

provided systematic evidence of the technique's potency. There is, however, reason to believe that the effectiveness of the lowball is limited to circumstances in which the same person makes both the first and the second request (Burger & Petty, 1981).

In the history of humankind, every society has embraced a norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). This norm directs individuals to return in kind the actions, objects, and to a lesser extent, affections that are provided to them by others: tit for tat, an eye for an eye. The utility of such a norm is evident in that it helps to ensure equitable and predictable exchanges between individuals and groups. Evidence from recent studies suggests that the norm may be a product of our evolutionary heritage. In fact, Cosmides and Tooby (1992) contended that *homo sapiens* possess a "mental organ" dedicated to tracking our social debts and assets as well as those of others. But whether the reciprocity warrant arises from culture, biology, or the interplay of the two, its breadth and power in defining human interaction can hardly be overstated. Cialdini (1987) summarizes the principle with regard to persuasion as follows: "One should be more willing to comply with a request to the extent that the compliance constitutes a reciprocation of behavior" (p. 172). Application of this principle is apparent in the marketing efforts of charitable organizations that send small, unsolicited gifts such as calendars and address labels along with their appeal for funds. This is an example of a strategy dubbed *pregiving* (Bell, Cholerton, Fraczek, Rohlfs, & Smith, 1994). One necessary condition for the effective implementation of pregiving is that the message recipient actually accept the initial offering. Without the indebtedness created by acceptance, there would be no need to reciprocate. But if the gift is too large, audience members may balk at acceptance, presumably because they would become too indebted (Bell et al., 1994). Research reported in Boster, Rodriguez, Cruz, and Marshall (1995) suggests another important side condition. Their experiment, which varied the intimacy of the source-recipient relationship, showed that pregiving produced greater compliance than a direct request only when the influencing agent and recipient were strangers. In fact, one of the defining features of friendship is that reciprocity takes place in an extended time frame. If a source uses pregiving and also indicates a desire for immediate reciprocity, he or she also signals a conception of the relationship as not one of friendship.

Like a mirror image of the foot-in-the-door, the *door-in-the-face* compliance technique begins with a request large enough that it will be rejected by most individuals, followed by a smaller, but still substantial, target request (Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler, & Darby, 1975). Although some evidence exists to the contrary (Tusing & Dillard, 2000), many writers contend that door-in-the-face is best explained by reference to a reciprocity heuristic (Bell, Abrahams, Clark, & Schlatter, 1996; Cialdini, 1987; Hale & Laliker, 1999), but there is no controversy regarding its effectiveness. *Ceteris paribus*, it increases compliance 10% to 15% over a single message control group. There are well-identified scope conditions necessary to obtain the effect (Dillard et al., 1984; O'Keefe, 1998). The two requests must be delivered close together in time by the same individual and on behalf of the same prosocial beneficiary. When any of these elements are absent, the efficacy of the technique will suffer.

**Disabling Heuristics.** Heuristics are widely used because they often lead to successful outcomes without cognitive effort. In that advantage lies their danger. Unscrupulous individuals may exploit the fact that individuals are not giving careful thought to the applicability of the heuristic to the issue at hand (Cialdini, 1987).

The solution to this potential problem is evident in the dual-process theories. When confronted with an appeal that relies on one or more of the heuristics, the skilled consumer of persuasive messages must shift from heuristic processing to the more analytic systematic processing. Mindful message processing will aid the recipient in assessing the ethical implications of applying the heuristic in the specific context.

## Genuine Reasons

If message recipients are motivated and able to scrutinize a persuasive appeal, what sort of evidence can make the appeal most persuasive? Argumentation theorists provide an elaborate set of criteria derived from thoughtful analysis of arguments in practice. Following a brief examination of that tradition, we turn our attention to a position that claims that individuals possess certain natural standards for the evaluation of evidence.

**Traditional Tests of Evidence.** Tests of evidence should themselves be adapted to the sort of evidence under consideration. Statistical evidence from a social survey, for instance, might be weighed in terms of sample size and whether the sample was drawn randomly. Such standards would have little bearing on arguments of morality, beauty, or wisdom. Although explicating the various forms of evidence and their appropriate tests would require a book-length manuscript, familiarity with the concepts and traditions of argumentation theory is surely an essential skill for effective producers and consumers of persuasive messages (see Hample, this volume). Introductory coverage of that material can be found in a number of places (e.g., Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 1999). Herrick (1998) offered five general tests of evidence that may be posed as questions:

1. Is the evidence *available*? This accessibility criterion asks whether the evidence is available for examination by the message recipient.
2. Is the body of evidence *consistent* within itself and with the best available evidence from other sources?
3. Is the evidence *timely*? This recency criterion is sensitive to the degree to which the topic under examination is changing.
4. Is the evidence *relevant* to the conclusion that it is used to support?
5. Is there *sufficient* evidence to support the claim? The degree of concern one might have regarding the adequacy of an evidentiary base should be founded on the seriousness of the question being decided.

**Subjective Message Constructs.** At an earlier point in this chapter, we advanced the claim that individuals naturally perceive influence messages in terms of three concepts: explicitness, dominance, and argument. Focusing tightly on the argument dimension, Morley (1987) contended that individuals typically, and perhaps automatically, engage in cognitive tests of evidence against certain natural standards. These standards, or *subjective message constructs*, are also three in number. Furthermore, a favorable judgment on each is necessary for belief change to occur (Morley & Walker, 1987). The *importance* construct concerns itself with the centrality and relevance of a datum in relation to a claim. The *plausibility* judgment reflects the message recipient's subjective estimate of the likelihood that the evidence is true. Evidentiary material is also evaluated with regard to its *novelty* or the degree to which it is seen

as new to the receiver. Although the theory has not inspired a great deal of research, what evidence as does exist is supportive (Morley, 1987; Morley & Walker, 1987), and the three constructs exhibit considerable intuitive appeal as well as a certain degree of parallelism with standards developed by argumentation theorists. If nothing else, they offer a clear and succinct set of perceptual standards against which message producers and consumers can test the value of evidentiary materials. Individually, each of the three criteria are necessary conditions for the persuasive effectiveness of evidence. Together they are sufficient.

## Emotional Appeals

In Western cultures, it is widely held that affect and logic exist in an oppositional relationship. Moreover, being in a logical state of mind is generally seen as the superior approach to message processing. In fact, it is more likely that there are affective components to all persuasive interactions (Jorgensen, 1998) and that cognitive and affective processes most often work hand in hand to produce attitude change (Nabi, 2002). Indeed, it may be impossible to discuss any issue of consequence without arousing one or more emotions. The interested reader can find more extensive analyses of the affect and persuasion literature in Dillard and Meijnders (2002), Jorgensen (1998), and Nabi (2002).

**Fear and Threat Appeals.** Threat appeals are messages that describe the negative consequences that will befall the message recipient should he or she fail to comply with the advocacy. Although such messages may or may not be effective at arousing fear (Dillard, 1994; Dillard, Plotnick, Godbold, Freimuth, & Edgar, 1996), this is almost surely the intent of message producers. And in fact, there is reliable evidence that individuals change their attitudes and behaviors as a function of the degree of fear instilled by a message (Mongeau, 1998; Witte & Allen, 2000). Thus, it is important to distinguish between message content (i.e., does it contain information that describes a threat?) and message effects (i.e., does the information produce fear?).

Threat appeals are built around two components (Hale & Dillard, 1995; Rogers & Mewborn, 1976; Witte, 1993). The threat component is itself comprised of information describing the *susceptibility* of the receiver to the negative outcome as well as the *severity* of that outcome. The action component presents the behavioral solution to the problem defined by the threat component. There are two essential features of the solution. Information regarding *response efficacy* deals with the extent to which the recommended action will be effective in lessening the threat. *Self-efficacy* information focuses on the relative ease or difficulty of enacting the behavior by the message recipient. Although it may not be necessary that each of these points are dealt with explicitly in the appeal, skilled persuaders will give careful thought to each one before attempting to implement a threat appeal.

One concern in the implementation of a fear appeal is the potential for defensive processing. Fear appeals are often used to warn individuals about some threat to their well-being. But in many instances, audience members who are most at risk are those for whom the hazardous behavior produces some benefit. For example, although the dangers of smoking are well-established, benefits such as temporary relaxation and the camaraderie shared by fellow smokers are frequently ignored. To maximize the effectiveness of the fear appeal the investment that audience members have in the targeted behavior, as well as the costs of complying, may need to be dealt with directly (Rogers, 1983).

**Guilt Appeals.** Feelings of guilt arise when one perceives oneself as having failed to act in accordance with some personal standard (Miceli, 1992). Guilt appeals are those messages in which a source points out a recipient's past or potential failure for the purpose of motivating the recipient to remedy that failure. Such messages are common in both interpersonal and mass-communication contexts. In fact, Vangelisti, Daly, and Rudnick (1991) reported that the most common reason to evoke guilt in another is persuasion.

Guilt appeals vary in their strength, intensity, and explicitness such that some messages softly allude to failure to meet some standard, whereas others are quite direct. As the explicitness of guilt appeals increase, so does the amount of guilt that is aroused (O'Keefe, in press). However, the guilt appeal explicitness is negatively related to persuasiveness. The explanation lies in the fact that messages may induce other emotions than those intended by the message designer. These "collateral emotions" (Dillard & Meijnders, 2002) may enhance or inhibit the persuasive effectiveness of the advocacy (Dillard & Peck, 2000; Dillard, Plotnick, et al., 1996). In all likelihood, persons on the receiving end of a strong guilt appeal feel unfairly pressured by the high guilt message and, therefore, angered by it (cf., Coulter & Pinto, 1995). Anger becomes the motivational basis for rejecting the persuasive appeal.

## Mood and Message Processing

Are people in a good mood more susceptible to persuasion than those in a neutral or bad mood? Over a decade of research indicates that the short answer to this query is yes—individuals process arguments differently as a function of their preexisting mood. Nonetheless, this brief confirmation obscures some important qualifications concerning the relationship between mood and social influence. In fact, mood provides the basis for multiple, simultaneous processes all of which play a role in persuasion, but before outlining those processes, it is necessary to be more specific about the meaning of mood.

The vast majority of studies on mood and persuasion have operationalized mood in terms of a positive–negative distinction. Moods are thought to be good versus bad or happy versus sad. There is, in fact, a compelling case to be made for the idea that a central feature of the experience of affect is a positive–negative dimension (Green, Salovey, & Truax, 1999). In this respect, then, moods are simple. Whereas emotions may be conceived of as a relatively complex set of qualitatively distinct states, moods can be profitably seen as a bipolar valence model. Furthermore, whereas mood is seen as a diffuse, background state of indeterminate origin, emotions are foregrounded in consciousness, arising from readily identifiable events (Dillard, 1998; Parkinson, 1995). As it turns out, the degree to which a message recipient is aware of the causes of his or her feelings plays a significant part in determining the ultimate impact of mood.

Three major finding emerged from a recent meta-analysis of the mood and persuasion literature (Brentar, Dillard, & Smith, 1997). First, as positivity of mood increased, so did attitude change. Although this effect characterized the literature generally, it was qualified by the fact that the strength of the mood–persuasion relationship was dependent on features of the message. A stronger mood–attitude correlation was found for topics that were positive in tone, claims that were gain framed (as opposed to loss framed), and proattitudinal rather than counterattitudinal messages. All of these results suggest that individuals are strategic about message processing, preferring to grant attention and cognitive effort to those appeals that will buoy their affective state (or at least not diminish it).

Second, positive moods led to decreased depth of processing. That is, people in good moods tended to report fewer cognitive responses than those in neutral or negative moods. This relationship was unaffected by any moderator. Thus, it leads to the unqualified conclusion that positive mood works against careful and thorough analysis of the message. However, this general tendency operates in conjunction with the mood-management effect described in the previous paragraph.

Third, the more positive an individual's affective state, the greater the number of favorable cognitive responses. Apparently mood influences the degree to which an individual is likely to engage in biased processing of the message. Persons in a positive mood have a tendency to see persuasive messages through rose-colored glasses. This, too, was seen to be a general tendency.

There is good reason to believe that the findings presented above hold only when individuals are unaware of the source of their affect, that is, when they have not considered *why* they feel the way they feel. Under conditions in which individuals are prompted to consider the cause of their affect (e.g., bad weather), the relationship between mood valence and persuasion disappears (Sinclair, Mark, & Clore, 1994). Thus, the mood and persuasion findings are circumscribed along two lines: They apply to circumstances in which (a) the affect is irrelevant to the message (i.e., pre-existing) and (b) message recipients have no reason to debias the effects of mood. The skilled persuader should consider the affective state of the audience prior delivery of the message and factor in these influences accordingly.

## RELATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

The observation that all interaction functions at two levels simultaneously is foundational to the field of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). *Content* features of interaction are limited to the topical substance of the message exchange. Content is what the message is about, but any given interaction can also be analyzed in terms of what it reveals about the *relationship* between the two participants. Appeals may be constructed to imply that the source is more competent, more correct, better informed, or more powerful than the message recipient. This point is wholly consistent with studies showing that individuals naturally perceive influence messages along a dominance dimension.

Brehm's (1966) reactance theory is well known for its assumption that individuals react negatively when they perceive a threat to their freedom to believe or behave as they wish. A similar idea forms the cornerstone of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. These latter theorists contend that all individuals have a desire to be unimpeded by the actions of others (see also, Lim, 1990; Metts and Grohskopf, this volume). Because influence messages are uttered with the intent of changing another's opinion or behavior, we might plausibly expect that such messages would be viewed as intrusive<sup>4</sup> or, equivalently, as a threat to freedom and that a number of negative consequences follow. This is true of the dominance dimension discussed earlier. The more that an influence message is seen as expressing dominance, the more it is perceived by the recipient as interfering with his or her ongoing plans (Dillard, Kinney, & Cruz, 1996), the more likely it is to produce surprise and anger (Dillard & Harkness, 1992; Dillard & Kinney, 1994; Dillard, Kinney, & Cruz 1996), and the less likely it is to be judged competent (Schrader, 1999). These responses are

<sup>4</sup>Although Brown and Levinson (1987) contended that requests are inherently intrusive Wilson, Kim, and Meishke (1991) presented data to show that this is not necessarily the case. Requests have the potential to be seen as intrusive, but they are not always viewed in that light.

likely to result in rejection of the persuasive appeal and derogation of the message source. For both of these reasons, the effective persuasive message is one that does not give the impression of pressuring the message recipient or constraining his or her choice. To illustrate methods for achieving this end, two conclusions from a message urging college students to limit their alcohol consumption are reproduced below (Shen, 2002). Note that there is substantial linguistic variation between the two, with the first being likely to engender a negative reaction in the audience members, and the second considerably less so.

### **[Conclusion #1] Responsible Drinking: You Have to Do It**

The previous pages make it crystal clear: There is unequivocal evidence that overconsumption of alcohol is implicated in reduced school performance, sexual violence, secondary effects on others, and physical harm to the drinker. In fact, any reasonable person has to agree that overconsumption of alcohol is a serious campus problem that demands immediate attention. No other conclusion makes any sense. Stop the denial. There is a problem, and you have to be part of the solution. So:

***\*\*If you drink, drink responsibly. Three drinks is a safe, reasonable, and responsible limit and it's the limit that you need to stick to. Do it.***

### **[Conclusion #2] Consider Responsible Drinking**

As the previous pages attempted to show, there is pretty compelling evidence that overconsumption of alcohol is implicated in reduced school performance, sexual violence, secondary effects on others, and physical harm to the drinker. In fact, most people agree that overconsumption of alcohol is a serious campus problem that needs to be addressed right away. It's a sensible conclusion and one that is hard to deny. There is a problem and you have a chance to be part of the solution. So:

***\*\*If you drink, think about drinking responsibly. Perhaps three drinks is safe, reasonable, and responsible limit, and it's a limit you can live with. Why not give responsible drinking a try?***

As can be seen, the first conclusion is forceful, directive, and paternalistic, whereas the second grants the recipient more options and more autonomy. Language of the latter sort is less likely to engender a variety of negative responses in the audience.

## **STRUCTURE**

It is traditional to consider persuasive messages in terms of their structure or arrangement. Along these lines, one might wish for specific information to questions such as whether one should lead with or end with one's strongest argument. Unfortunately, the empirical research on such questions is surprisingly sparse (see Cohen, 1964, for an example). As a consequence, we focus this section on just three related topics: forewarning, message sidedness, and inoculation.

### **Forewarning**

Irrespective of the issue or the message, the knowledge that another person wishes to persuade you is consequential. It implies that one's current orientation to the issue, whatever it may be, is in some way faulty or inadequate and needs to be changed. Not surprisingly, individuals resist this implied criticism by resisting the message (Benoit, 1998).

The research literature distinguishes between two types of forewarning. Knowledge of *persuasive intent* suggests only that someone will attempt to persuade you,

but gives no indication of the topic or direction of their intended effort. Forewarning of *topic and position* is more specific in that it reveals the subject matter as well as the position that the persuader can be expected to adopt. Although this distinction is useful for message design and analysis, both forms result in message rejection and they do to roughly the same degree (Benoit, 1998).

The implications here for effective persuasion are quite clear: If you are a message producer you should strive to avoid creating the perception that you intend to persuade. The usual strategy for doing so is to portray one's mission as informative rather than persuasive, but knowledge that forewarning reduces persuasion can also be used strategically to deflect the efforts of other counterpersuaders. This observation provided the impetus for research on message sidedness and inoculation, the two topics to which we now turn our attention.

## Sidedness

The essential contrast in this body of work is manifested in the distinction between a *one-sided message*, which ignores opposing arguments, and a *two-sided message*, which assumes one of two crucially different forms. The *refutational two-sided message* acknowledges the existence of opposing arguments and attempts to refute them by attacking the reasoning underlying the claims, questioning the relevance or importance of the evidence, disparaging the credibility of the message source, and so on. The *nonrefutational two-sided message* is more elementary: It merely acknowledges that an alternative exists.

Meta-analytic summaries have yielded some fairly straightforward conclusions concerning the relative efficacy of these message types. Of the lot, the refutational message yields the greatest persuasive effect (Allen, 1998; O'Keefe, 1998). Nonrefutational forms are to be avoided because they produce diminished persuasion relative to one-sided messages. If, however, the goal of the episode is not persuasion per se, but credibility enhancement, both refutational and nonrefutational messages are successful in promoting favorable source judgments compared with one-sided appeals (O'Keefe, 1998).

At present, there is relatively little consensus on the theoretical processes that underlie these effects (but see Hale, Mongeau, & Thomas, 1991). Nonetheless, the empirical relationship showing the benefits of two-sided messages appears to be reliable (Allen, 1998; O'Keefe, 1998). If audience members are likely to be exposed to counterpersuasion, the skilled message producer can maximize his or her effectiveness by acknowledging the existence of an opposing position, then presenting and refuting the arguments of the other side. Although some early research suggested that this relationship might be limited to intelligent audience members or those who were already favorable to the issue, the best available evidence suggests that such qualifications do not apply (Allen, 1998; O'Keefe, 1998).

## Inoculation

The majority of persuasion research orients toward understanding attitude and behavior change. A smaller, but no less important, literature examines how attitudes and behaviors might be maintained, particularly in the face of efforts to alter them. Since its inception, theory and research on resistance to persuasion have been guided by an inoculation metaphor. As McGuire (1970) explained, "We can develop belief resistance in people as we develop disease resistance in biologically overprotected

man or animal; by exposing the person to a weak dose of the attacking material strong enough to stimulate his defense but not strong enough to overwhelm him" (p. 37).

As the logic of the metaphor suggests, the essential features of the inoculation approach are two. To induce resistance to later persuasive attack, the inoculation message must first threaten the message recipient's current position. "*Threat*" is used very specifically here to mean that receivers come to understand that their current position on the topic of interest is vulnerable to attack, that is, there may be compelling reasons for them to change. The knowledge that they may hold an inaccurate or incorrect position provides the motivational basis for more extensive message processing than would otherwise be the case.

The second component of an inoculation message is the *refutation*. In this segment, counter arguments are offered to the information used to create the threat. In other words, the recipient is shown the flaws in the arguments that produced the threat. There is strong evidence from laboratory and field research that these two message components are sufficient to greatly reduce the impact of later persuasive attacks. What is most notable about the technique is that it confers resistance beyond the particular arguments that are preempted by the refutation. It is not necessary that every persuasive attack be anticipated and refuted by the inoculation message. Rather, successfully threatening the audience's original position then refuting those arguments is sufficient to provide protection against those specific arguments as well as others not addressed by the inoculation message (Pfau & Van Bockern, 1994; Pfau, Van Bockern, & Kang, 1992). Thus, the practical advice that concluded the previous section (i.e., on sidedness) extends beyond changing attitudes at the time of message presentation to maintaining attitudes in the face of subsequent attack.

## STYLE

The style of a message is a reflection of the language choices made by the source. Although we have covered certain aspects of language in earlier portions of this chapter (e.g., explicitness), here we review the literature on gain/loss framing and figurative language.

### Gain and Loss Framing

Just as the proverbial glass of water can be viewed as half full or half empty, so can a suasive appeal highlight either the advantages of pursuing a course of action or the drawbacks of not pursuing it (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). *Gain-framed messages* express the benefits that will accrue to the receiver by adopting the recommended behavior (e.g., "Testing your cholesterol level allows problems to be detected early and that, in turn, permits the greatest number of treatment options"). *Loss-framed messages*, in contrast, emphasize the costs associated with failing to comply with the advocacy (e.g., "If you don't test your cholesterol level, you'll be unable to detect problems early and that, in turn, will severely limit your treatment options"). From a purely logical standpoint, these two message forms convey identical information; one is the logical inverse of the other. Individuals tend to respond to them quite differently, however, depending on the type of behavior that is reciprocated for change.

Rothman and Salovey's (1997), whose work in the area of framing and health is especially illuminating in this regard, drew a distinction between two types of behavior. *Prevention behaviors* are actions whose purpose is to combat undesirable health

**TABLE 12.2**

An Illustration of How Gain and Loss Frames Differ As a Function of Outcome Valence and Outcome Relationship

Relationship to Outcome	Outcome Valence	
	Desirable	Undesirable
Acquire/attain	GAIN	LOSS
Avoid/not attain	LOSS	GAIN

consequences. For example, regular exercise, the use of sunscreen, and smoking cessation are all prevention behaviors. *Detection behaviors* are oriented toward uncovering problems that may already exist: HIV testing, cholesterol testing, and mammography. A series of research studies converge on a single conclusion (Salovey, Schneider, & Apanovich, 2002). That is, gain-framed messages are more effective at encouraging prevention behaviors, but loss-framed appeals are more effective at fostering detection behaviors.

This compact summary of the research findings is rendered slightly more complex by the recognition that gains and losses both possess two faces. Gains result both from the acquisition of a desirable effect or from the avoidance of a noxious outcome. Similarly, losses can be viewed as either the failure to attain a sought-after end or the acquisition of something repugnant (see Table 12.2). An understanding of these distinctions is important to the application of framing concepts and to the language one chooses to instantiate the persuasive appeal.

## Figurative Language

A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares one concept to another (e.g., My attorney is a street fighter). Other figures of speech, such as analogy, simile, and personification, although distinct in surface respects, are cognitively processed in ways similar to metaphor. Therefore, we briefly review theory and research on metaphor with the expectation that our conclusions extend beyond that particular type of figurative language.

A recent meta-analysis provides several empirical generalizations derived from a quantitative summary of the available studies (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). The most sweeping conclusion was that metaphor does have persuasive advantages over a literal construction; however, the effect was rather small. Subsequent analysis revealed that a powerful advantage for metaphor over literal messages obtained only when several other conditions were in place. First, consider that all metaphors are of the form “A is B” as in the earlier example “My attorney is a street fighter.” The A term, attorney, is called the *target*, and the B term, street fighter, is known as the *base*. To the extent that the metaphor works, meaning is transferred from the base to the target. Upon hearing this utterance, we know that the speaker means to tell us that the attorney possesses some of the characteristics of a street fighter (e.g., the attorney is pugnacious and has little regard for rules), not that the attorney engages in street brawls. At minimum, for metaphor to operate effectively as a persuasive device it must have a familiar base. Clearly, without an understanding of the base, there can be no transfer of meaning from B to A and without comprehension, no persuasion (cf., McGuire, 1972).

A second feature essential to the effective application of metaphor is novelty. Contemporary language is littered with husks of expressions that once enlivened the imagination but since have grown empty of meaning (e.g., “He ran like the wind,” and “She kicked the bucket”). Such expressions are “frozen” or “dead” metaphors because they have seen such frequent use that the comparisons no longer reveal anything new. To create opinion change, a metaphor must be novel, a point that echoes Morley’s (1987) assertion that for evidence to be persuasive it must be seen as novel by the audience.

The best available evidence suggests that metaphors achieve their persuasive impact by serving as creative and compact means of organizing one’s thinking about an issue (Read, Cesa, Jones, & Collins, 1990). That is, metaphors simultaneously hide and highlight various features of the topic. In this fashion, metaphors enhance comprehension and suggest implications of viewing the topic in a particular manner. Our claims regarding the importance of base familiarity and novelty align well with this explanation (Sopory & Dillard, 2002).

This organizing theory of metaphor effectiveness also implies two additional guidelines for enhancing the potency of persuasive messages, each of which found empirical support in the meta-analysis (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). First, the metaphor should appear at or near the beginning of the suasive appeal. Knowing in advance the organizing principle behind a set of arguments is more conducive to learning and understanding than is learning the same principle after the fact. Second, skilled persuaders avoid the use of multiple metaphors in the same message. Multiple organizational schemes compete with one another, thereby lessening the clarity of each.

## Powerful Versus Powerless Speech

Powerful speech consists of language that expresses the speaker’s confidence in his or her position. In contrast, powerless speech conveys uncertainty or ambivalence. Research on these speech forms indicate a decided advantage for persons using powerful speech. In fact, powerful speech has been shown to exert a substantial and favorable impact on both persuasion and credibility (Burrell & Koper, 1998). There is, however, one significant qualification to this generalization: The vast majority of this research has been conducted in the context of courtroom proceedings. A typical study will assess the influence of variations in the speech style of witnesses on judgments of the guilt or innocence of the accused. In efforts to ascertain questions of fact (i.e., beliefs), the certainty with which a speaker expresses him or herself should have considerable bearing on the value and impact of the testimony. When issue to be resolved is one of policy, ethics or aesthetics, the observed effects of powerful speech may be significantly smaller. Stated more narrowly, because there is so little variation in context in this research literature, it is unclear to what extent the effects can be generalized.

With this qualification in mind, how can persuaders capitalize on powerful speech? The answer is to speak simply and explicitly, taking care to avoid overuse of the following:

1. Hedges or qualifiers (e.g., “sort of,” “kind of,” “I guess”)
2. Hesitations and fillers (e.g., “Uh,” “Well,” “You know”)
3. Tag questions (e.g., “..., don’t you think?”)

4. Disclaimers (e.g., "I'm not an expert, but . . .," "Others may see it differently, but . . .")
5. Intensifiers (e.g., "Very surely," "Really," "Really, really")
6. Politeness (e.g., "Please," "If you don't mind")

It is worth noting that all of these speech forms occur in natural dialogue to varying degrees. We are not suggesting that any occurrence of these forms is damaging, but rather that a pattern of frequent usage produces speech that runs counter to the persuader's goal. Although it is likely that certain of the six forms are more damaging than others (Smith, Siltanen, & Hosman, 1998), the research base is, at present, too small to permit strong generalizations. The best advice that current data permit is to eschew the use of powerless forms to the greatest extent possible.

## **DELIVERY**

Delivery focuses on how the message is presented. Despite the fact that public speaking textbooks are full of advice on how to best deliver a oral presentation, there is little systematic scientific evidence on which to base that advice. Because of the scant research base on variables such as vocalics, speech rate, and movement, we focus our review on affective influences on delivery. The main benefit to this approach is that affective states have implications for a wide range of nonverbal behaviors that co-occur with those affects.

### **Depression and Dysphoria**

Although there is little research on the relationship between depression and the production of persuasive messages (but see Segrin & Dillard, 1991), there is a large literature on depression and communication from which implications for persuasion can be readily drawn. As Segrin (1998) discussed, there are a great many communicative skill deficits associated with depression, including longer response latencies, lower volume, monotonous tone, affective flatness, more negative verbal content, and lessened eye contact. This cluster of behaviors reliably leads to interpersonal rejection of the depressed person by other interactants (Segrin & Dillard, 1992). We might plausibly expect that persuasive speakers who suffer from depression are likely to be judged negatively, too, with corresponding unfavorable implications for their persuasive effectiveness. Mild dysphoria can often be overcome via self-talk and reappraisal.

### **Positive Mood**

Knowing that persons in a good mood are more susceptible to persuasion might prompt a parallel question: Does being in a good mood also make persons more persuasive? Such studies as exist, respond affirmatively. Bohner and Schwarz (1993) reported that good-mood subjects who wrote counterattitudinal essays on two public policy issues were seen as more persuasive by themselves and by judges of their essays. Furthermore, investigations of requests following a mood induction indicate that good-mood subjects seemingly have a preference for clarity and efficiency. Relative to their bad-mood counterparts, they produce (or select) influence messages that are less polite, more direct, and less elaborate (Forgas, 1999a, 1999b), all of which may be taken as indications of reduced behavioral flexibility. One limitation to these

findings is that they all derive from investigations of members of individualistic cultures. It is unclear to what extent the results may generalize to collectivistic cultures. Still, within the confines of that qualification, the implications for effective delivery are apparent: Persuaders should make efforts to manage their own affective state so that they are in a positive frame of mind at the time of delivery.

## Anxiety

In the course of planning and delivering persuasive messages individuals may experience anxiety related to a variety of secondary goals (Patterson & Ritts, 1997). These include uncertainty as to what constitutes appropriate behavior, the belief that they are unable to meet the demands of the situation, as well as anticipation of negative evaluations by other interactants. Regardless of its cause, high levels of anxiety impair message production. The research indicates that, relative to low anxious persons, high anxiety communicators are less fluent, show a tendency to stutter, pause more often, repeat themselves more frequently, lose track of the flow of the interaction, and engage in less eye contact (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998; Patterson & Ritts, 1997).

The time-honored method of reducing these problems is simple practice. Indeed, as several theories would suggest, well-learned activities become increasing automatic and, in so doing, require less cognitive capacity (e.g., Greene, 1997). Freeing up this capacity permits the communicator to attend more closely to the microfeatures of interaction on which many skill judgments turn. Cognitive capacity is probably not the whole story, however. Anxious persons experience self-deprecatory thought to a greater degree than nonanxious individuals, and the presence of such thoughts is likely to produce motivational deficits as well (MacLeod, 1996).

## CONCLUSION

We opened this chapter by suggesting that the reader consider social influence messages as arrayed along a continuum that ran, loosely speaking, from nice to nasty. There may be merit in viewing persuasive action in this uncomplicated manner: Many social actors seem to depend on it. However, we have endeavored to show how much more effective persuaders can be when armed with a more nuanced conception of messages and message recipients. Although, of necessity, our review has been selective, we have touched on ideas concerning the domains of persuasive activity, conceptualizing sources and recipients, and the features and components of persuasive messages as well as how each of them operates. Also included in this chapter is a consideration of the relational implications of persuasion, a review of the effects of structure and style, and some attention to the role of affect in message processing and message production. If social skill begins with awareness, we hope that we have been successful in making readers aware of some of the concepts that are fundamental to the understanding of persuasion as a social skill.

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## CHAPTER

# 13

## MANAGING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT: A MODEL OF EVENTS RELATED TO STRATEGIC CHOICES

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### RATIONALE AND CHALLENGES

To the extent people are incompatible, conflict is inevitable (Deutsch, 1973), and people are incompatible—people differ in their needs, beliefs, goals, and behaviors. Ironically, incompatibility increases as people become more interdependent (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). That is, the more one interacts with another person, negotiating who does what and when, the greater the likelihood for conflict. Only in situations in which beliefs, goals, and behaviors are identical can we say that the incompatibility does not exist. In other words, a lack of conflict is assured in one of two extremely unlikely conditions: (a) when people are entirely constrained from thinking, feeling, and acting, or (b) when they are talking to clones of themselves.

Given the inevitability of conflict, people should learn how to manage it in a productive manner. By *productive* I refer to the process of conflict management as well as its products, because the way we interact with each other powerfully defines who we are as individuals. Also, how we interact with each other determines whether our relationships are emotionally and instrumentally functional. A moment's reflection demonstrates what can happen when people do not learn how to manage conflict in a productive manner: Lack of civility, oppressive work environments, outbursts of violence, and relational discord reflect common problems that stem from the inability to manage interpersonal conflict productively.

Accordingly, and given the inevitability of conflict, it is no surprise that researchers, clinicians, and consultants have undertaken the examination of interpersonal conflict management to help people improve their conflict management skills (e.g., Roloff, 1987). For example, Kent State University (Political Science Department) sponsors the

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“Center for Applied Conflict Management.” Through that program, Kent State offers an undergraduate major in conflict management that emphasizes mediation, negotiation, empowerment, and violence prevention. Other public universities (e.g., University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee) and private colleges (e.g., Harvard Law School) offer certificate programs and graduate degrees in negotiation, mediation, and conflict management. In the private sector, conflict management skills are often offered as part of a larger emphasis on improving corporate communication (e.g., Communication Research Associates in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania), or they constitute the sole mission of the company (e.g., the Conflict Management Group founded by Roger Fisher). Moreover, couple conflict management workshops have become visible in the past decade (e.g., the Coming Together for Life Workshops), as have various public and private mediation organizations.

Many of these programs provide understanding and advice that is based on both research findings and practical experience. Communication Research Associates, for example, relies on published research and draws from scholars in the disciplines of communication and organizational behavior to create and to tailor its content for various organizations. The Coming Together for Life Workshops is also research based, drawing heavily on the work of Markman and associates (i.e., Markman and colleagues’ Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program [PREP]). Unfortunately, the quality of conflict management programs is not uniformly high. A perusal of course materials and of the advice given reveals that several programs offer information that leans more heavily on personal experience and codes of conduct than on research findings. Although such information is often insightful and helpful, it offers weak evidence in terms of the empirical merits of the programs.

Moreover, the scope of conflict management is large; Conflict Management Systems (CMS) in Shelburne, Vermont, for example, provides conflict appraisals, organizational audits, mediation, and systems design and implementation to reduce unproductive conflict. Also, CMS provides a 24/7 “ombudservice” that helps individuals cope with organizational conflicts, using first conciliation, and then facilitation, mediation, and arbitration to help resolve employee conflicts. Communication Research Associates provides intervention, mediation, training, as well as executive coaching on many issues relevant to conflict management. Other programs are more specialized in their focus on relationships (e.g., PREP), mediation (University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee), negotiation (e.g., Harvard), and so forth. Obviously, what one might obtain from a particular program depends largely on what that program can offer. Nevertheless, the creation of many types of conflict management programs with sound academic foundations reflects an increased awareness for the need to educate people about conflict management skills.

The various approaches, topics, and behaviors covered in these programs cannot be adequately represented in this chapter. Instead, this chapter examines interpersonal conflict skills from the frame of reference of the individual as she or he deals with a prototypical conflict. In its emphasis on the individual’s experience, this chapter points to areas that the individual can learn to control better. In addition, given the emphasis on the experience of conflict, this chapter embeds advice regarding conflict management within an understanding of conflict processes, relying largely on the interpersonal conflict literature (although the ideas apply to most contexts). Thus, the reader will not find a list of prescriptions that are taken out of the context of events related to the conflict management experience; rather, I hope that the reader will find ideas within each section that stimulate thought and practical advice. Before the model is offered, a rationale for the study of conflict management is presented.

## Interpersonal Conflict: A Critical Phenomenon

How people can engage in conflict management in effective yet appropriate ways merits our exploration for several reasons. First, the manner in which individuals manage interpersonal conflicts indicates their levels of cognitive development (Shantz, 1987). For instance, Selman (1980) discussed interpersonal conflict behavior in terms of social perspective taking, which he considered the barometer of individual development. According to Selman, the more people understand how their wants must be aligned to other people's desires, the more people attempt to solve problems in a way that takes the perspective of others into account. As a result of social perspective taking, individuals engage in more productive conflict management.

Second, individuals who learn how to manage conflict will probably live longer than people who do not. Both withholding anger and the adamant expression of anger during conflict have been linked to heart disease (e.g., Siegman, 1994), eating disorders (Van der Broucke, 1995), decreases in immune system functions over time (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993), and a variety of other ailments.

Third, the skillful management of conflict is critical to the quality of relationships. Research on various forms of relationships, including parent-child (e.g., Prinz, Rosenblum, & O'Leary, 1978), friendship (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1994), romantic involvements (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1983), as well as organizational dyads (e.g., Putnam & Wilson, 1982) reveals that the management of conflict powerfully affects people's relationships. For instance, the skillful management of conflict can preempt the felt need for use of physical or verbal abuse in close relationships. Research indicates that approximately 20% of marriages and 35% of dating relationships contain recent instances of common couple violence (Marshall, 1994; Spitzberg, 1997). According to the *communication skill deficit hypothesis*, people who lack communication skills rely on more aggressive and abusive behaviors to express themselves (Canary, Spitzberg, & Semic, 1998; Clearhout, Elder, & Janes, 1982; Marshall, 1994; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993).

Finally, it is ethical to study how conflict management behaviors enable people to function better as individuals and as relational partners. The principled use of conflict messages requires a consideration of the other person's rights as well as responsibilities. "Fostering mutual respect and meeting minimal expectations for appropriate behavior promote collaboration that is necessary to sustain civilized interaction" (Cupach & Canary, 2000, p. 235). Expectations for appropriate conflict behavior can be found in personal codes regarding how to live (Cupach & Canary, 2000), relational rules that govern conflict itself (Honeycutt, Woods, & Fontenot, 1993), and cultural prescriptions regarding anger management (Averill, 1982). Accordingly, the empirical literature also should be assessed for what we might find there regarding appropriate and effective conflict behavior.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the various factors that impinge on individuals' experience of conflict and that suggest appropriate and effective management skills. First, however, challenges to this undertaking are presented. Next, factors that affect people's conflict management within a new model of strategic behavior are offered, and these are (a) *conflict instigating events*; (b) *individual differences* in people's conflict behavior tendencies; (c) *interpretation* of the causes of conflict; (d) *goal generation*, which concerns the objectives that one might have; (e) *message production*, which entails the selection and enactment of various strategic choices; (f) *the other person's response*, which emphasizes how the parties to conflict react to each other over time; and (g) *feedback* into previous events. Finally, the chapter

concludes by discussing the implications for skillful management of conflict in light of the model presented.

The reader can see how not attending to one or more of the above features would work against the skillful management of conflict. For example, not recognizing a collision course with a coworker would handicap a person's potential for controlling oneself. Likewise, being naïve about the role that attributions play in conflict, how anger works against the rational selection of productive conflict behaviors, or how one's own behavior might perpetuate a dysfunctional system limit's one's ability to manage conflict episodes successfully. Before this model is more completely developed, challenges to discussing conflict management skills are offered.

## Challenges to Conflict Management Skills

The following paragraphs develop the idea that conflict is a taxing communicative episode. Aspects of conflict challenge one's ability to use appropriate and effective strategies and tactics, and discussion about the successful management of conflict should acknowledge these challenges.

First, Sillars and Weisberg (1987) argued that characteristics of conflict interactions countermand the representation of conflict as a social skill. These authors noted that conflict goals are ambiguous both during and following the conflict, that messages enacted during conflict evade systematic description, and that conflict episodes themselves are embedded within other social episodes, which take individuals by surprise so as to render thoughtful action moot. This variation in how conflicts emerge and evolve defies simple portrayal and explanation, and such variation underscores the first challenge underlying this chapter—productive conflict behaviors are difficult to learn. The incidence and progression of conflict behaviors depend on choices in real time and on contextual constraints that defy simple presentation and (consequently) intuitive understanding; as a result, it often is difficult to ascertain which conflict behaviors are functional and which are not.

Second, *conflict* entails a broad spectrum of interpersonal behaviors, such that researchers have defined conflict in various ways. Researchers vary in their definitions in terms of whether conflict concerns a particular episode that has an identifiable beginning and end and whether conflict is defined behaviorally (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). On one hand, "conflict as pervasive" (i.e., a nonepisodic and nonbehavioral definition of conflict) would include such phenomena as ongoing tensions, relational history problems, and recurring difficulties that infiltrate a variety of unspecified behaviors. As Cahn (1992) observed, "In the context of intimacy, moreover, conflict is more than a disagreement, incompatibility between partners, or partner opposition; it is an enduring or persistent element of interaction. Because it endures, it can also change and develop in form over time" (p. 3). Other researchers have defined conflict as a particular kind of episode that involves disagreement involving perceptions of scarce resources and incompatible goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991). Such variations in the definition of conflict challenge a coherent understanding of various skills that can be useful in managing conflict.

Third, interpersonal conflict often occurs within a stressful and emotional context that challenges people's abilities to cope (e.g., Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Central to the study of stress are appraisals of the stressful event—considerations of what is at stake and possible behaviors to cope with the stress (Folkman et al., 1986). In addition to being stressful, interpersonal conflict is often a physiologically arousing event that is reflected in

angerlike reactions. People tend to respond to negative arousal with excitation during discussions of interpersonal problems. During a conflict encounter, one's body responds to the brain's "fight" or "flee" signals. Gottman and Levenson (1988) noted the following.

Within the autonomic nervous system (ANS), the classic 'flight-fight' . . . pattern is well known, consisting of such changes as increases in cardiac rate and cardiac contractility, sweating, deepened breathing, redirection of blood flow toward large skeletal muscles, and release of catecholamines (i.e., epinephrine and norepinephrine) from the adrenal medulla. (p. 189)

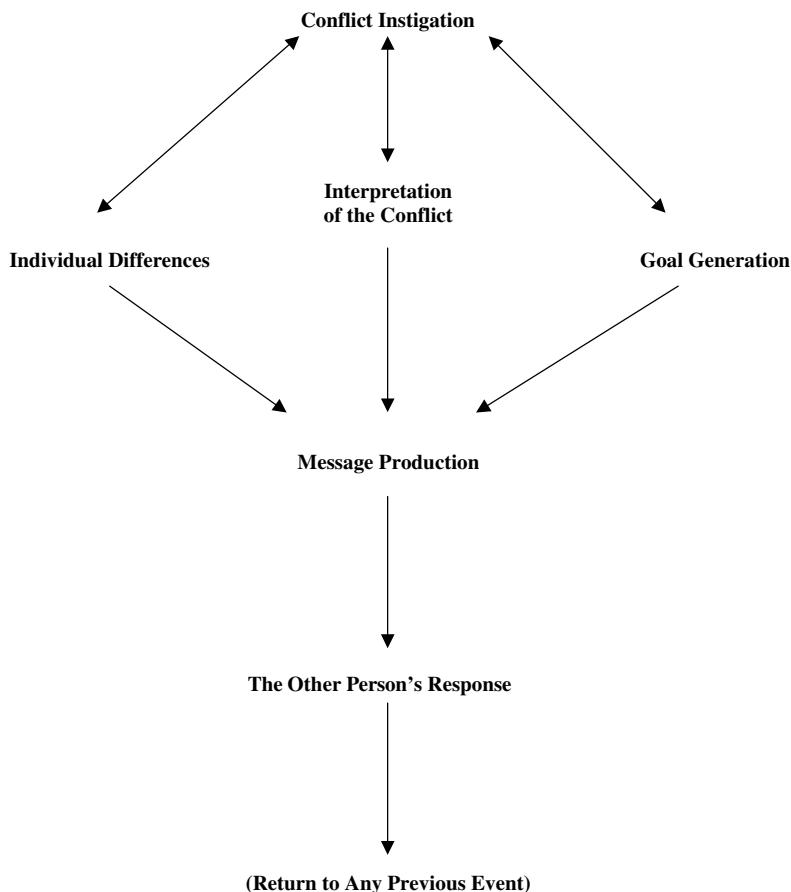
Zillmann (1990) argued that once begun, people's emotional responses to one another during conflict tend to cascade in an increasingly arousing manner.

Finally, choices regarding which conflict strategies to use are made with a limited amount of information, a bias toward one's own conversational goals, implicit as well as explicit decision rules, and online judgements made in the context of emotional reactions (Kellermann, 1992; Sillars & Weisberg, 1987). Seibold, Cantrill, and Meyers (1994) noted that the strategic choice model (i.e., the view that people carefully select message strategies) undergirded much of the research on compliance-gaining in the 1970s and 1980s. They criticized the model, however, because "the limitations of the Strategic Choice Model may have fomented an overly rationalistic perspective of strategic language use" (p. 552). Various cognitive and affective constraints, reactions, and decisions that people experience when they manage conflict should be addressed and incorporated. That is, *to discuss the skillful selection of conflict strategies, one must consider the events that give rise to them and constrain them*. People do not select messages based on lists of behaviors that they download from a file in long-term memory; rather, people generate messages based on their currently salient conversational objectives and ongoing emotional reactions to their conversational partners.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe conflict management as a process of events and choices. As mentioned, recognizing how such events affect conflict behavior choices should provide the reader with a better understanding of the competent management of conflict than a list of behaviors without an assessment of these components. The following synthesis of these events is more descriptive than predictive. For example, the sequential links among the components need to be empirically tested to refine the causal connections among the components. Still, the events identified in the model have implications regarding how one might manage conflict.

## A MODIFIED STRATEGIC CHOICE MODEL

The modified strategic choice model used herein (Fig. 13.1) is "modified" in the sense that strategies are not seen only as a product of their feasibility or a byproduct of relational features, as much of the research on strategic selection might imply (Seibold et al., 1994). Instead, the modified strategic choice model (hereafter, the "model") takes into account factors that impinge on the person's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to a relational partner's opposition or incompatibility. This model applies to typical, everyday conflict situations and assumes that actors have the capability to self-regulate (e.g., no physical damage done to the frontal lobe, the interactants are sober, etc.). The model begins by discussing conflict-instigating events that an individual might confront.



**FIG. 13.1.** Model of Strategic Conflict.

## Conflict Instigation

Individuals do not behave in a social vacuum. Interactions with other people occur in episodes that vary in terms of their *conflict potential*.<sup>1</sup> Relational histories, personality incongruities, cultural differences, network loyalties, and even characteristics of the environment provide background influences that might help induce or reduce interpersonal antagonism and confrontation.

Importantly, scholars differ in their assessments of the issues that give rise to conflict. Many categorize the specific issues that people frequently debate, such as problems with communication, finances, showing affection, and the division of household labor (Erbert, 2000; Gottman, 1979). Others categorize issues at a more abstract level. Braiker and Kelley (1979) categorized conflict issues as concerning behaviors (e.g., how to perform a task), norms (i.e., whether a rule was broken), or personality (e.g., attributing the conflict to the peer's laziness). Or one might conceive of conflict as the outcome of dialectical tensions that people in close relationships routinely face (Erbert, 2000). Erbert reported that spouses rate the dialectical tensions of

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Brant Burleson for suggesting the terms *conflict potential*, *episode control*, *attribution control*, *goal control*, *strategy control*, and *interaction control*.

autonomy–connection and openness–closedness as important across the issues they discussed. For example, disagreements involving finances brought to the surface tensions with regard to autonomy versus connection (e.g., the husband not wanting to be held accountable for the ways he spends money). Additionally, conflict potential exists whenever people must negotiate scarce resources. The uncomfortable conversations that two people competing for the same position hold indicate the conflict potential that scarce resources entail.

Although conflict potential can be discussed using various categorization schemes on the issues at stake in conflict, perhaps the penultimate source of conflict concerns how people provoke one another. The literature regarding anger expression and anger management provide a good starting point to assess such sources of provocation. This material does not assume that individuals first feel anger and then think about its causes; rather, it primarily suggests which episodes might contain conflict potential.

**Anger Provocation.** First, people must cope with various anger-inducing behaviors, which may or may not refer to factors related to the apparent issues at conflict. Several theories explain the emergence and expression of anger. One of the most systematic treatments comes from Clore and colleagues (Clore, Ortony, Dienes, & Fujita, 1993). They distinguish among types of anger based on (a) whether the partner's action is blameworthy and (b) whether the consequences of the partner's action are undesirable.

More specifically, *pure anger* exists when another person (a) engages in a blameworthy behavior that (b) has a negative consequence for self. For example, when a colleague speaks behind one's back to one's supervisor in a way that results in a lost project, then the two conditions for pure anger exist. *Reproach* involves a blameworthy action, but one without negative consequence for self (e.g., the colleague's backbiting is about someone else). *Frustration* occurs as the result of a negative outcome that is not necessarily linked to a reproachable behavior (e.g., one cannot link a lack of salary increase to anyone's behavior). Finally, *resentment* occurs when the consequences for the other person are positive, but undeserved (e.g., the colleague gets a disproportionate raise but has done little to deserve it). Importantly, each type of situation can give rise to angerlike reactions, although pure anger entails the most serious experience of anger (Clore et al., 1993). Table 13.1 reports various anger-inducing behaviors. These behaviors indicate many sources of provocative behavior that signal high conflict potential.

**External Aversions.** Anger provocation is not limited to anger-instigating behaviors, however. Rather, people's reactions to aversive events are similar, such that sadness, pain, and other aversive events external to any antagonist can elicit angerlike responses (Berkowitz, 1993). In addition to pain, angerlike reactions occur when people undergo stress. When under stress, even small obstacles might bring about angerlike reactions (Zillmann, 1990). Not surprisingly, stress has been associated with physical aggression with one's partner (Makepeace, 1983). Finally, Berkowitz argued that the environment (e.g., hot or cold periods, crowded conditions, pollution) can elicit angerlike reactions in people.

According to Fig. 13.1, three sets of factors moderate one's reaction to a conflict episode—individual differences, explanations of the conflict itself, and one's

**TABLE 13.1**  
Sites of Conflict Potential

Site/Subcategories	Examples
1. Identity management	
Integrity threat	A supervisor questions your having read the assignment.
Condescension	A stranger acts superior and talks down to you.
Insult	Your sister-in-law makes fun of a new painting in your living room.
Blame/reproach	Someone falsely accuses you of butting in line.
2. Aggression	
Physical threat/harm	You see a man bully a much smaller woman.
Sexual aggression	A coworker suggests that you sleep with him or her.
Verbal abuse	Your partner uses threats, swearing, and demeaning comments.
3. Frustration	
Goal interference	A driver cuts in front of you and suddenly turns onto another street.
Expectation violation	A friend visits from out of town but never spends time with you.
Thwarted plans	Your airline cancelled your flight due to mechanical difficulties.
Impotence	You cannot convince the librarian that you returned the book.
4. Lack of fairness	
Inequity	Your partner never cleans, although you are expected to clean.
Blameworthiness	A friend is having an affair with a married person.
Hurt feelings	Your best friend was jilted by her boyfriend.
5. Incompetence due to ignorance	
Incompetent others	A co-worker on a project has not produced anything of quality.
Thoughtless actions	Your appointment arrives 20 minutes late and acts as if nothing wrong has happened.
6. Incompetence due to egocentric motives	
Self-centeredness	An acquaintance acts like the center of attention at another person's birthday party.
Self-opinionatedness	A coworker offers an opinion on each and every topic.
7. Relationship threat	
Jealousy	Your new love interest has an old flame that wants to have dinner.
Unfaithfulness	Your partner admits being unfaithful during a summer trip.
8. Predispositions	
Predisposition due to experiences	A colleague is prejudiced, following a long family tradition.
Predisposition due to drug dependence	A friend acts edgy when he can't get a drink, and he gets aggressive when he does drink.
9. General learned responses	
Coping processes	An acquaintance readily honks her horn loudly at other drivers.
Response to aversion	You become angry whenever you feel tired.

Adapted from Canary et al. (1998).

interaction goals.<sup>2</sup> The two-sided arrows that link each of these factors to conflict instigation indicate that these events covary with the initial incident that raises the conflict. For example, as discussed in the next section, personal dispositions affect the perception of another person's behavior as reproachable and frustrating.

## Individual Differences

**Personality and Personal Control.** Many personality factors have been studied in relation to the management of conflict. Of those relevant to the skillful management of conflict, the property of personal control appears most important. Included here are the personality factors of neuroticism and locus of control. These two factors are not exhaustive, but they do constitute important constructs that reveal how one's sense of personal control over the conflict episode can moderate one's reactions to conflict-instigating events.

*Neuroticism* concerns the extent to which people respond with negativity to their social world in terms having anxious, depressed, and angry thoughts and feelings (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). Gilbert (1991) argued that a bimodal response to aversive events occurs in neurotic individuals, and this results from a lack of active coping skills. In particular, highly neurotic individuals prefer passive coping behaviors until they can no longer avoid the partner, in which case they rely on exaggerated engagement and high physiological arousal. Once engaged in conflict, the highly neurotic individual again feels flooded with negative affect and attempts to withdraw. This avoid–approach–avoid strategy can lead to a dysfunctional pattern of conflict management. As Thomsen and Gilbert (1998) summarized, “The ‘roller-coaster’ effect of being relatively disengaged in a discussion, jumping to over-engagement, then quickly disengaging as a result of punishment or aversive stimuli” (pp. 835–836) provides many occasions for people to learn and to engage in patterns of conflict behaviors that are reproduced over time. Indeed, Thomsen and Gilbert found that conflict management skills of problem solving, listening to partner, and partner listening to self were inversely associated with indices of neuroticism and negativity. Moreover, neuroticism correlated negatively with feeling understood by partner, understanding partner, feeling comfortable about the interaction, positive feelings at the end of the discussion, and marital satisfaction.

Similarly, Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) found that one's neuroticism correlated positively with observations of one's demanding behavior, and husband neuroticism in particular correlated positively with his perception that the wife was demanding (more so than husband's self-perceived demanding behavior). Bolger and Zukerman (1995) found that highly neurotic people reported more conflicts and a greater number of self-controlling and confrontational coping responses to those conflicts. For the highly neurotic participants, however, both self-controlling and confrontational strategies were positively associated with anger and depression, and escape–avoidance tactics were positively associated with depression. For low-neurotic participants, escape–avoidance behaviors were negatively associated with depression. These findings suggest that highly neurotic people engage in more interpersonal conflicts, find such conflicts emotionally taxing, and respond to emotional upset with a variety of conflict strategies but often find that their strategies backfire.

<sup>2</sup>Moderation refers to how changes in one factor (the moderator) causes changes in the association between two other variables, whereas mediating factors entirely filter the effects of one variable on a second variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

*Locus of control* refers to how individuals vary in their assessments of mastery over their outcomes, both successes and failures (Lefcourt, 1982). Individuals believe that their successes and failures are due to internal factors, such as their own ability and efforts, or that outcomes are due to external factors, such as powerful others, fate, and luck. An internal locus of control for relationships, or the belief that one can bring about desired outcomes in his or her relationships, has been positively linked to relational harmony (e.g., Miller et al., 1986). That is, people who believe that their relational problems can be solved if they apply their energies are more likely than those with an external locus of control to enjoy positive relational outcomes. Research in organizational contexts also shows that people with an internal locus of control are more likely to rely on cooperative compliance-gaining tactics, whereas people with an external orientation use more coercive behaviors to gain compliance (Goodstadt & Hjelle, 1973).

Conflict locus of control (CLOC) refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they are responsible for their own successes and failures due to interpersonal conflicts. Research indicates that individuals who hold an internal orientation toward interpersonal conflict are more likely to use direct and positive conflict behaviors, whereas people who adopt an external orientation toward their conflicts more likely engage in direct and negative tactics or avoidance (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988). Also, Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) found that people with an internal CLOC were more likely to approach, and less likely to withdraw, from a conflict issue; however, partners with an external locus of control for conflict were more likely to withdraw from discussion of problems.

In related research, Fincham and Bradbury (1987a) used Doherty's (1981) notion of *efficacy* to explain attributions of conflict causes. According to Doherty (1981), efficacy concerns individuals' perceptions that they can solve their interpersonal problems. Consistent with research on CLOC, one's sense of efficacy was inversely associated with his or her claims that the partner is responsible for the conflict, and efficacy was negatively tied to perceived stability of conflict. In brief, holding the belief that interpersonal problems can be solved through one's personal talents and energies tempers the negative effects of physiological arousal on one's strategic choices.

**Temporary Response Modes.** People's immediate reactions during conflict, which are not necessarily linked to one's general personality, have been termed *temporary response modes* or *response tendencies* (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). Response tendencies may lead to *action readiness plans*, or a person's temporary inclination to enact particular types of behavior (Frijda et al., 1989). In addition, response tendencies resemble situational use of scripted actions or procedural knowledge to the extent that people have developed such knowledge from recurring and recent conflict encounters (Greene, 1984).

For instance, Davitz's (1969) three modes of responding to others (i.e., *moving toward*, *moving against*, *moving away*) reflect action readiness plans that probably affect conflict behaviors. Accordingly, people whose situational response mode is moving toward others would most likely enact a direct and positive conflict management strategy; those whose temporary response mode is moving against would rely on a direct but competitive approach; and those with a moving away response mode would minimize conflict or leave the scene (Canary & Cupach, 1988). For example, my own response mode in the early morning involves moving away from people, at least until I have watched the Weather Channel and have had a cup of coffee. Then

my response mode shifts to one of working toward people (most of the time). My conflict management reactions are thus linked to various times of the day, scripts that are called forth due to episodic cues, and so forth.

In sum, initial reactions that people have are a function of personality factors that affect personal control as well as more variant response tendencies. It appears that people who are neurotic and those who do not believe in their abilities to manage problems rely on behaviors that they hope would increase their own control over the issue—such as using threats and promises—or they avoid the person altogether. Strategic choices also are affected by individuals' assessments of the situation, however, and the following section discusses these cognitions.

## Interpretation of the Conflict: Attributions

Interpretations of the conflict episode refer to assessments that are elaborated in conscious thought. Such higher ordered cognitions function as a means of self-control that can moderate impulses to act in destructive ways (Berkowitz, 1993; Feschback, 1986). Although many types of cognitions have been linked to productive self-control (e.g., Zillmann, 1993), the most studied type of higher order cognition concerns the attributions that people hold for the problems they confront.

*Attributions* refer to explanations that people have for events. In conflict theory and research, attributions refer to people's explanations for their interpersonal problems. Ross and Nisbett (1991) summarized a common assumption within this perspective: An individual's construal of an event determines how that individual will react both behaviorally and emotionally to that event.

A critical attribution concerns responsibility for the cause of the problem (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987b). Once the other person is judged responsible, an assessment of that person's motivations are made. Tice and Baumeister (1993) described how angry people attribute the intentions to the other party in conflict accordingly:

Angry people tend to describe the offender's intentions as unclear, inconsistent, arbitrary, incoherent, unreasonable, incomprehensible, or otherwise opaque. In other cases, they see the offender as motivated by sheer malice or a selfish disregard for others, for they are unable to perceive any decent or socially acceptable reason for the offender's actions. Offenders themselves rarely see their own actions in those ways, however, and they are nearly always able (at least in retrospect) to offer a coherent and reasonable explanation for their intentions and actions. (p. 399)

In light of such attributions, people tend to use ineffective problem-solving behavior, to engage in more negativity (e.g., criticism, even during supportive interactions), and to exhibit negative nonverbal behaviors (e.g., whining) with their partner (Fincham, 1999). For instance, Sillars (1980) found that people who attributed the cause of the problem to their roommates were more likely to engage in competitive conflict behaviors and were highly likely to reciprocate competitive behaviors over time. On the contrary, people who attributed the cause of the conflict to themselves were more likely to engage in cooperative actions and were more likely to respond to their roommates' behavior with cooperative and direct conflict behaviors.

Beyond the issue of responsibility, attributions have also been tied to the dimensions that represent either positive and benign causes or negative and disparaging causes. The most important dimensions in this regard appear to be the following: global-specific (i.e., the cause explains many vs. few behaviors), stable-unstable

(i.e., the cause continues over time or does not), internal–external (i.e., the cause resides as part of the person or is separate from the person), intentional–unintentional, selfish–unselfish, and blameworthy–praiseworthy (e.g., Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1992; Gottman, 1994; Sillars, 1980). Globality, followed by stability and internality, appear to be the most crucial dimensions in terms of distinguishing functional versus dysfunctional relationships (Fincham et al., 1992). In other words, assessing a problem as a feature that explains the occurrence of other problems (globality), that do not change (stability), and that reside in the individual (internality) would likely lead to defensive strategic choices and negative conflict outcomes. Accordingly, the causes of conflict are interpreted as stemming from characteristics of the other person that pervade many issues and condemn the person on several counts. For instance, attributing the cause of a current conflict with one's supervisor—for example, a disagreement about the use of departmental resources—to the supervisor's "ego" or "narcissism" also explains why the supervisor acts in a condescending manner, evades meetings, and blames other people for deadlines that he or she does not meet. But attributing the cause of the current conflict regarding the use of departmental resources to the supervisor's reservations about the proposal itself, his or her concerns about recent turnovers, or even seasonal affective disorder, emphasizes an entirely different set of beliefs and outlook on the supervisor's behavior, ones that exist outside of the supervisor's control and that can be remedied in time. Zillmann (1993) advised his readers to "*preattribute annoying events and information about such events—to the extent possible—to motives and circumstances that make the induction of annoyance appear unintentional and nondeliberate, and... to reattribute annoying events and information about such events in the same manner*" (p. 382; emphasis original).

Moreover, the use of benign attributions reflects less defensiveness toward the partner and more willingness to hear what the person has to say during conflict (Gottman, 1994; Zillmann, 1993). For instance, reacting to a partner's complaint by linking that complaint to a cause that is specific to the complaint, external to the partner, and unselfishly motivated would increase one's desire to accommodate to the partner. On the other hand, linking the complaint to global, stable, and internal characteristics of the partner would make the complaint itself appear to be a reproachable act. Even positive behaviors can be attributed to global, stable, internal, selfish, and blameworthy causes (e.g., the only reason she acts friendly is to manipulate other people; he took the kids to the park because he is guilt-ridden about being a lousy father; Fincham et al., 1992).

As one might expect, people tend to exhibit self-serving attribution biases, such that they judge their own conflict behaviors more favorably than they judge the other person's conflict behavior (de Dreu, Nauta, & van de Vliert, 1995). In assessing their own versus others' conflict behavior, people more likely take into account their own cooperative conflict behavior while selectively recalling the other person's actions that were competitive or designed to avoid the issue (Canary & Spitzberg, 1990). Such shifts in evaluation have been explained in various ways. For example, other people's cooperative behavior is not salient because people expect others to be cooperative; however, competitive or avoidant messages are unexpected and therefore salient. Also, people interpret their internal reactions to the conflict largely on the basis of their field of vision, which is external to them (e.g., they do not see the disgust registering on their own faces; Storms, 1973). Accordingly, both people in conflict tend to be more sensitive to the negative behaviors coming from the other person, while thinking they are more positive and justified in the use of their messages.

In sum, interpretations of the conflict in terms of attributions for the causes of the conflict moderate one's reactions. Deriving plausible and benign explanations for the other's behavior helps lead people to more rational problem-solving behaviors. Conversely, attributing conflicts to global, stable, and internal features of the partner is associated with increased negativity and withdrawal.

## Goal Generation

Having derived explanations for the cause of the problem confronting them, individuals somehow must decide on a course of action. Of course, some decisions are made following careful thought and planning, whereas others emerge in the moment and entail less planning (Berger, 1997). Regardless, any course of action stems from some set of goals that the actor wants to achieve, for example, to obtain a resource, to maintain a relationship, to sustain a particular public identity, and so forth. People are goal directed, although their goals vary in abstractness and clarity. Research indicates that people become more mindful than usual of their interaction objectives during conflict episodes, although such objectives might entail several secondary goals that shift over time (e.g., Sillars, Weisberg, Burggraf, & Zietlow, 1990). Clearly, one's goals provide a frame of reference for evaluating the perceived efficacy, enactment, and effects of different conflict strategies (Fincham, 1999; Putnam & Wilson, 1982).

The nature of one's goals indicates the strategic route one might take (Dillard, 1990; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998). Individuals consider behavioral options that maximize goals relevant to their identity (i.e., presenting a desired image of self), relationships (i.e., regulating the desired level of intimacy and equality), and instrumental needs (i.e., obtaining resources or favors; Cody, Canary, & Smith, 1994). In addition, individuals who are concerned about their own privacy, about other person's identity management, and about maintaining relationships are more likely than others to engage in avoidance, whereas individuals who are primarily concerned about defending their personal identity are more likely to confront the partner (Canary et al., 1988; Fincham, 1999; Wilson et al., 1998).

Moreover, the defense of one's relationship objectives (Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974) or personal identity goals (Schönbach, 1990) can override instrumental goals if the conflict escalates, regardless of the initial issue being discussed. Using a previous example, the supervisor's rejection of one's proposal could easily be interpreted as a rejection of one's task competence, in which case the person might feel justified in using more direct messages in defending himself or herself. Even small disagreements about instrumentally based objectives might be seen as symbolically important to participants, especially when magnified through the perception that one's identity goals are being thwarted (Schönbach, 1990).

Social actors select strategies to achieve their goals (Hojjat, 2000; Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). Social learning theory, for example, predicts that the use of aggression is tied primarily to one's ability to obtain desired consequences (Bandura, 1973, 1977, 1986; Rubin, 1986). Likewise, we can attempt to understand our own as well as the other person's conflict messages as indicators of which goals are at stake (vs. which issues are in disagreement).

Importantly, one should consider the other person's goals during the conflict. In a study of various types of relationships, Lakey (2000) found that sensitivity to the other person's goals was a strong predictor of conflict strategies. Sensitivity to the partner's goals was positively associated with the use of integrative tactics, partner assessments of one's competence; sensitivity to partner goals was negatively associated with

distributive tactics and assessments of one's appropriateness and effectiveness. Of interest is that this effect was found for both the person who was sensitive to the other's goals and the partner who perceived the person's sensitivity. Conversely, people are more likely to engage in more destructive behaviors when they do not consider potential outcomes of their own behaviors on the other person (Yovetich & Rusult, 1994).

In brief, the clarity and importance of one's self-presentation, relational, and instrumental goals indicate which behaviors are congruent with one's goals. Such goals can further moderate other motivating factors (including one's anger and attributions about the cause of the conflict). Considering the other person's goals would further alter initial desires to lash out at the interaction partner.

## Message Production

Within the context of the instigating events, individual reactions to those events, and the development of interaction goals, people engage in conflict management behaviors. The next two sections concern people's strategic communication. Given the centrality of communication strategies to conflict skills, this section elaborates on both initial message production as well as subsequent messages produced in response to the other person's behavior.

Conflict *strategies* represent approaches that individuals take to manage their interpersonal problems, whereas *tactics* instantiate these approaches in real time (Newton & Burgoon, 1990). For example, one might decide to confront another person, but in a cooperative manner. This strategic orientation (also known as integration, collaboration, etc.) can be accomplished by using one or more of the following tactics: acceptance of one's own responsibility, problem description, seeking disclosure, offering disclosure, seeking common ground, and so forth. Given the importance of the topic and the widespread research on interpersonal conflict in a variety of contexts, it is no surprise that the number of conflict tactics that have been studied are numerous. (I found more than 135 separate tactics in only nine coding schemes). Research indicates that the numerous conflict tactics can be represented in terms of a limited number of dimensions, however.

**Two Ubiquitous Dimensions.** The literature suggests that a person's initial strategic decision during conflict concerns the extent to which one engages the partner (directly vs. indirectly, including not talking at all) and a second strategic decision regards how cooperative one decides to be (cooperative vs. competitive; Hojjat, 2000; Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). These choices regarding directness and cooperation anchor the model developed here. *Directness–indirectness* refers to the extent to which one person explicitly (vs. implicitly) engages the other person. *Cooperation–competition* refers to the extent that one wants to join resources to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Although previous research has assumed these dimensions (e.g., Putnam & Wilson's, 1982, assessment of the managerial grid research), remarkably few papers capitalizing on these dimensions have been published.

One exceptional study sought to examine various conceptualizations of conflict behaviors to offer an exhaustive typology of conflict behavior (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Intentionally including conceptualizations that reference conflict as both independent and dependent variables, van de Vliert and Euwema provided evidence that directness and cooperation constitute ubiquitous dimensions. They categorized conflict behaviors on the basis of their agreeableness versus disagreeableness

(i.e., cooperation–competition), and then distinguished “not active” versus active behaviors (i.e., direct–indirect). Accordingly, they derived four general conflict management approaches: *negotiation* (cooperative and active), *nonconfrontation* (cooperative and not active), *direct fighting* (competitive and active), and *indirect fighting* (competitive and not active; p. 684).

To take advantage of these properties of conflict, Andy Gustafson and I examined conflict tactics listed in coding manuals used in psychology and communication research and categorized those tactics along direct and cooperative dimensions (i.e., direct–indirect and cooperative–competitive). We have used this scheme in both teaching and training and have found that students and practitioners alike can learn various conflict strategies with little training. (During training, however, we refer to these dimensions as direct–indirect and nice–nasty, or the “DINN” of conflict). Table 13.2 presents a condensed version of the DINN system.

As Table 13.2 shows, direct and cooperative (*negotiation*) behaviors are seen in acknowledging the conflict problem, showing a willingness to manage the problem, showing positive regard for the partner, and sharing information by offering and seeking disclosure. Indirect and cooperative (*nonconfrontation*) tactics involve benign ways of distracting the partner from the conflict issue. These include minimization of the conflict by making abstract remarks or asking noncommittal questions, making excuses for one’s behavior, and using humor. Direct and competitive (*direct fighting*) tactics are composed of accusations and assumptions about partner’s behaviors, feelings, and so forth that are often telegraphed by the use of “you-statements.” Other direct and competitive behaviors include commands for behavioral compliance (including threats), hostile and leading questions, and put-downs that signal personal criticism, disgust, and other explicit comments reflecting negativity toward the partner. Finally, indirect and competitive (*indirect fighting*) tactics minimize one’s responsibility for the conflict, attempt to alter the path of discussion inappropriately, express dysphoric affect, and condescend in lieu of a more direct expression of negative affect.<sup>3</sup>

Initial evidence suggests that the DINN represents conflict behaviors in terms of the strategic choices that actors make. For instance, we found in one study that less satisfied (vs. highly satisfied) couples engaged in (a) more negative behaviors, (b) a higher proportion of competitive-to-cooperative behaviors, and (c) increases in the proportion of competitive-to-cooperative behaviors over the course of interaction (Canary, Gustafson, & Mikesell, 1999). As the following sections show, these general findings summarize some of the previous observational examinations of interpersonal conflict.

**Functional Versus Dysfunctional Strategies.** In general, both direct and indirect competitive behaviors are ineffective in managing conflict. For instance, compared with nondistressed couples (i.e., more satisfied or nonclinical couples), distressed couples more frequently rely on negative behaviors (e.g., Billings, 1979; Gottman,

<sup>3</sup>Several other typologies of conflict strategies have been offered. Most of the research in communication has relied on three strategy models that reference integrative, distributive, and avoidant approaches (e.g., Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Sillars et al., 1982) or a five-strategy model that resembles Blake and Mouton’s (1964) managerial styles of forcing/competing, confronting/collaborating, smoothing/accommodating, avoiding, and compromising (e.g., Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). Whereas the three-strategy typology has been supported in various factor- and item-analytic studies, the five-strategy model has not (e.g., Bernardin & Alvarez, 1976; Putnam & Wilson, 1982).

**TABLE 13.2**  
Direct–Indirect, Nice–Nasty (DINN) Conflict Categories

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*Direct/Nice Tactics*

1. Acknowledges/shows willingness to manage the problem
  - Acceptance of responsibility: showing “ownership” (part or whole) of conflict cause
  - Constructive metacommunication: benign statement about partner’s communication
  - External problem description: describing problem as external to relationship
  - Concession: statements of willingness to change behavior
  - Compromise: proposal to mutually exchange behaviors, including concessions
2. Supports/shows cooperative regard for other
  - Approval: responding favorably to attributes, actions, or statements of the partner
  - Excusing of other: providing an excuse for partner’s actions
  - Paraphrase reflection: cooperative or neutral statement that mirrors preceding statement
  - Cooperative mind reading: statement of “fact” assuming partner cooperative motive
  - Supportive remarks: statements that support, accept, and offer positive regard for partner
  - Cooperative physical interaction: affectionate touch, hug, or kiss
  - Cooperative interruptions: statements that help elaborate on partner’s thoughts
3. Seeks disclosure
  - Solicitation of disclosure: benign requests for the partner to reveal attitudes
  - Solicitation of criticism: benign requests for criticism
4. Offers disclosure
  - Disclosive statements: benign reports of feelings, attitudes, motives, etc.
  - Descriptive statements: benign observations
  - Internal problem description: description of a problem residing inside the speaker
  - Disapproval: benign statements of dislikes, including negative disclosures
  - Disagreement: benign statement expressing disagreement in a nonhostile manner

*Indirect/Nice Tactics*

1. Minimizes personal responsibility
  - Implicit denial: implying conflict is not a problem or rationalizing that it doesn’t exist
  - Qualifying statements: explicitly qualifying the extent or nature of conflict
  - Noncommittal questions: asking unfocused or general questions
  - Abstract remarks: making general remarks about the nature of things
  - Excuse: offering a reason for problematic behavior, using weak or faulty reasoning
  - Disengagement: benign statement expressing desire not to talk about conflict
2. Humor, teasing, or distraction
  - Friendly jokes: joking not at the expense of the partner
  - Humor: lighthearted humor, not sarcastic

*Direct/Nasty Tactics*

1. Accusations about partner’s behaviors, thoughts, etc; often characterized by “you” statements
  - Presumptive remarks: statements attributing negative qualities to partner
  - Personal criticisms: criticism of another’s behavior, thoughts, feelings, etc.
  - Negative mind reading: assertions of “fact” assuming negative mind-set or motive
  - Competitive metacommunication: talk about talk, said with negative intonation
2. Commands behavioral change
  - Hostile imperatives: statements that blame the partner or demand change
  - Threats: verbal or nonverbal threats, which can refer to physical or emotional harm
  - Commands: commands for compliance that could be fulfilled in the next 10 seconds
3. Hostile questions
  - Hostile questioning: questioning in a hostile tone
  - Leading questions: interrogatives that imply a correct answer

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(Continued)

**TABLE 13.2**

(Continued)

## 4. Put-downs

- Rejections: hostile reactions to personal criticism or description of the problem/solution
- Turnoffs: nonverbal gesture implying disgust or disapproval
- Mocking behaviors: demeaning the other through ridicule or sarcasm
- Hostile interruptions: not allowing partner to finish point, talking or shouting over partner

*Indirect/Nasty Tactics*

## 1. Minimizes personal responsibility

- Evasive remarks: failing to acknowledge partner
- Noncommittal remarks: remarks that do not deny or affirm existence of conflict
- Dysphoric affect: expressions of negativity, depression, whiny voice
- Stonewalling: clear withdrawal from the topic or entire discussion

## 2. Attempts to change path of discussion

- Procedural remarks: comments that bring attention to procedural matters in a fashion that overshadows the discussion at hand
- Topic avoidance: hostile demand to stop discussing the conflict
- Topic shifts: statements that derail focus of conversation
- Interruption: deflecting or disrupting partner, making it difficult for partner to finish point

## 3. Condescension/implied negativity: hints or statements that reveal a negative attitude, superiority, or arrogance

1979, 1994; Raush et al., 1974). In particular, those in distressed involvements more likely engage in sarcasm, criticism of the partner, shows of disgust and contempt for the partner, blaming the other for conflict and problems, demonstrations of hostility and anger, threats and other coercive actions, rejecting behaviors, withdrawal (stonewalling), and so forth. Gottman (1994) noted that four messages (complaining or criticizing, showing contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling) are particularly corrosive and lead to “cascades” of isolation and withdrawal. Engaging in such behaviors leads to increased defensiveness on the part of the other person and increased use of self-protecting and negative attributions (see below). Gottman (1994) also reported that a 5:1 ratio of positive-to-negative behaviors, on average, is evident in stable couples, whereas a 1:1 ratio of positive-to-negative behaviors, on average, appears among unstable couples.

Not only are competitive behaviors largely ineffective in resolving disagreements, they produce less satisfaction with the interaction episode and the product of those discussions. Research examining the link between conflict messages and competence outcomes has found that the use of distributive (direct and competitive) behaviors led to negative evaluations of the partner as well as oneself in terms of communication competence and communication satisfaction (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989, 1990; for a review, see Spitzberg, Canary, & Cupach, 1994). The finding that one becomes dissatisfied with self was unanticipated, and it probably indicates some degree of shame attached to one's imposing and inappropriate behavior (Retzinger, 1995).

**Nonverbal Messages.** Although most of the research on conflict focuses on verbal message tactics, the importance of the manner in which partners convey their cooperation or competition nonverbally cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it appears that nonverbal messages can be more powerful than verbal messages in their prediction

**TABLE 13.3**  
Summary of Specific Affect Coding System Categories

Category/Behaviors	Examples
<i>Positive</i>	
Humor	Joking, laughing
Affection or caring	Direct statements of affection, drop in amplitude
Interest	Increased volume, pitch changes
Joy	Fluctuations in speech pitch and rate, breathiness
<i>Negative</i>	
Anger	Abrupt, biting, and stressed words
Contempt or disgust	Person sounds sickened, lateral mouth movement, nose wrinkle
Whining	High-pitched and fluid voice
Sadness	Low volume, slowness of speech, furrowed brow
Fear	Vocal disturbance, frequency shifts

Source: Gottman (1994, pp. 458–464).

of satisfaction with the conflict episode as well as relational quality (Gottman, 1979; Newton & Burgoon, 1990).

Most researchers examining nonverbal conflict do so by somehow combining verbal and nonverbal indicators of cooperation and competition in terms of positive and negative affect. For example, Gottman (1994) summarized the major codes for the Specific Affect coding system (SPAFF). Using SPAFF, one demarcates neutral messages; positive (cooperative) messages as seen in humor, affection or caring, interest, and joy; and negative (competitive) messages as reflected in anger, contempt, whining, sadness, and fear. Table 13.3 reports these messages. Gottman (1979, 1994) argued that the negative affect codes are more critical in predicting relationship dysfunction, and that showing contempt or disgust appears to be the most damaging nonverbal behavior of all SPAFF codes.

Nonverbal messages also alter the affective nature of verbal messages. For instance, “mind reading” (i.e., stating what the partner is thinking or feeling) can represent a cooperative or a competitive behavior. If said with positive affect, mind reading is cooperative; if said with negative affect, mind reading is negative. For instance, making the claim, “You always think of others before you think of yourself” can be a cooperative tactic during conflict or an insult if said with negative affect. Likewise, metacommunication (e.g., “You said you didn’t want the paper until Monday because you wanted to have a free weekend”) is cooperative when said with positive affect, although it tends to be competitive if said with negative affect (Gottman, 1982). Indeed, using negative affect can reverse the meaning implied by most positive statements. Accordingly, a compliment said with negative affect is a sarcastic criticism (“That was a smart move”), agreement expressed with negative affect is disagreement (“Oh, right”), and so forth (Gottman, 1979).

Two studies have examined the systematic associations between verbal and nonverbal messages as they relate specifically to conflict. First, Sillars, Coletti, Parry, and Rogers (1982) examined how different nonverbal behaviors were linked to integrative (cooperative), distributive (competitive), and avoidant (indirect) conflict strategies. These authors found that people who were direct and cooperative tended to be more fluent and talk longer; people who were indirect tended to say less. Nonverbal adaptors (e.g., fixing one’s hair, fidgeting) were positively associated with avoidance

**TABLE 13.4**  
Nonverbal Behaviors Associated With Verbal Strategies

<i>Nonverbal Behavior</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Verbal Strategy</i>
Postural relaxation	.30	Content-validation (e.g., problem solving, information seeking, agreement)
Self-adaptors	.29	
Soft/mellow tone	.30	
Dysfluency	.22	
Lower/deeper pitch	.21	
Frequent/animated gestures	.26	Content-invalidation (e.g., disagreement, exaggeration, correcting other)
Random movement	.21	
Forward body lean	.20	
Shaking head	.34	
Loud/sharp vocal tone	.40	
Fast vocal rate/varied pitch	.28	
High pitch	.31	
Direct orientation	.22	Other-support (e.g., reinforcement of other, emphasize commonalities, concessions)
Expressiveness/animation	.31	
Physical involvement	.29	
Physical cooperation	.28	
Vocal involvement	.20	
Frequent/animated gestures	.27	Other-accusations (e.g., blaming, criticism, threats)
Shaking head	.35	
Loud/sharp vocal tone	.37	
Frequent/animated gestures	.24	Self-assertions (e.g., assertions, self-promotion, exemplification)
Random movement	.32	
Frequent object-adaptors	.27	
Loud/sharp vocal tone	.22	
Vocal dominance	.20	
Random movement	.20	Self-defense (e.g., justifications, excuses)

*Note.* Nonverbal behaviors reaching a .04 effects criterion are reported. Adapted from Newton and Burgoon (1990), p. 93.

and negatively associated with integrative tactics. Eye glances (looking quickly at the partner and then away) were positively associated with avoidance but were negatively correlated with integrative orientations. Likewise, eye gaze was positively associated with integrative behaviors and negatively associated with distributive and avoidance messages. Speech rate was positively correlated with distributive behaviors much more so than with integrative tactics. Finally, response time negatively correlated with integrative behavior, indicating that people with a cooperative orientation did not hesitate to exchange messages with each other.

Newton and Burgoon (1990) grouped nonverbal cues according to various dimensions (e.g., orientation, expressiveness, physical involvement) and correlated ratings of these dimensions with verbal strategies (see Table 13.4). These researchers found that single nonverbal behaviors serve several functions and several nonverbal behaviors might combine to convey a single meaning. For instance, animated gestures correlate positively with *content-invalidation*, *othersupport*, *other accusations*, and *self-assertions*. In lieu of focusing on any one cue, the combination of nonverbal behaviors appear to complement verbal strategies. For example, *content-invalidation* associates with animation, shaking head, loud or sharp voice, and high pitch, whereas

*other support* associates with animation and direct orientation, physical involvement, and physical cooperation. In addition, *content-validation* is accompanied by a combination of relaxed posture, mellow and deeper voice, and behaviors that one might ordinarily associate with anxiety (i.e., self-adapters, dysfluency). Newton and Burgoon also reported that nonverbal expressions of involvement (i.e., physical involvement, physical cooperation, nonverbal involvement) consistently and positively affected episodic and relational outcomes (i.e., communication satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and relational message dimensions of immediacy, similarity, equality, etc.).

Although the cited studies indicate how nonverbal behaviors at times complement verbal conflict strategies, one must allow for the possibility that the two channels will not coincide. For instance, Noller (1982) examined inconsistencies among positive (cooperative), negative (competitive), and neutral behaviors for the following channels: verbal strategies; visual channel (videotape image, without sound); vocal channel (content plus paralinguistic cues); and total channel (overall codes for each thought unit). Raush et al.'s (1974) positive, negative, and neutral codes along with the Couple Interaction Scoring System (CISS) verbal codes were used. Noller found that partners in low-adjusted marriages engaged in a greater number of inconsistent messages, relative to those in moderate or high-adjusted marriages. In particular, partners who smiled and nodded agreement at each other while criticizing and engaging in other negative behaviors (e.g., sarcasm) were less satisfied than couples who were more consistent in their use of verbal and nonverbal messages. Noller concluded that women in particular use smiles to hide their negativity and criticism, in part to "appease the person they are criticizing" (p. 739).

In sum, the use of competitive verbal messages and a low ratio of competitive-cooperative messages appear to be largely unproductive and damage relational outcomes. Additionally, competitive nonverbal behaviors combined with verbal messages appear to be more damaging to relational systems than verbal behaviors alone. Verbal messages that convey positive relational identification with partner include smiling and conversational involvement cues. Ironically, these same cues can be used to mask the act of criticizing and other negative verbal messages.

***Anger and Anger Expression.*** Studies of anger reinforce the generalization that negative comments are seen as dysfunctional. For instance, Sereno, Welch, and Braaten (1987) examined the effects of three modes of anger expression—assertive (direct and cooperative), nonassertive (indirect and cooperative), and aggressive (direct and competitive). As expected, aggressive anger expression was seen as less satisfying than assertive or nonassertive behaviors, and aggression was seen as less competent and less appropriate than nonassertive (but not assertive) anger. Similarly, Tangney et al. (1996) examined the effects of four modes of anger expression—*maladaptive* responses (e.g., malediction, physical aggression), *adaptive* behaviors (e.g., sharing information), *escapist-diffusing* behaviors (e.g., distraction, leaving the scene), and *cognitive reappraisals* (e.g., reinterpreting the partner's intentions). As one might expect, maladaptive responses correlated positively with hostility and assessments of social incompetence, and adaptive responses and cognitive reappraisals negatively associated with hostility and maladjustment. Likewise, Guerrero (1994) found that the direct and nonthreatening strategy of integrative assertion was seen as the most competent and distributive aggression was judged as an incompetent response to anger.

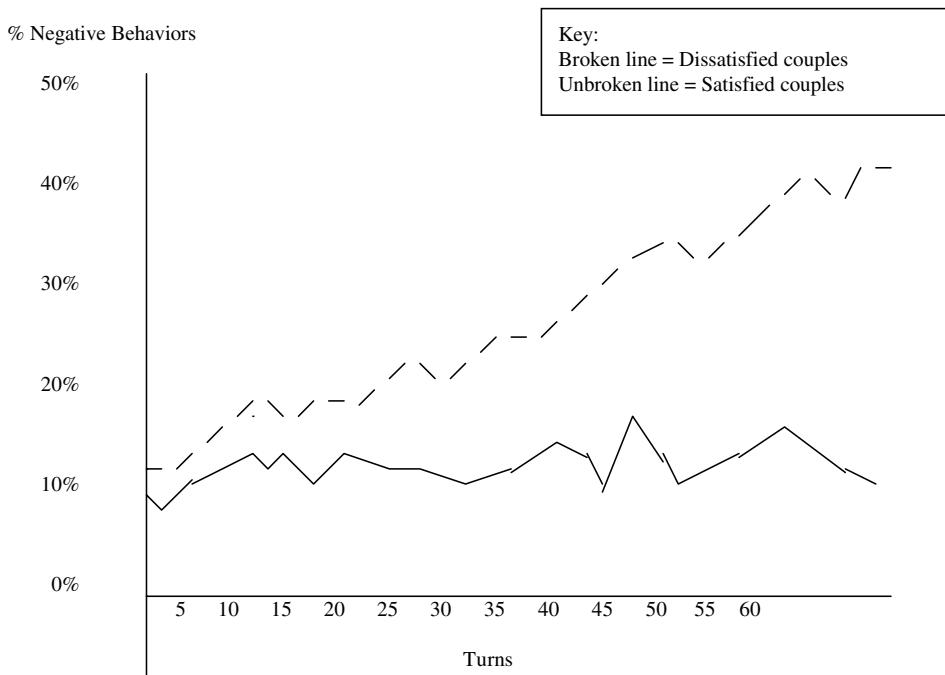
**But Cooperation Is Not Always Functional.** A few words of caution are in order about the use of positive and cooperative behaviors. First, competitive behaviors more consistently than cooperative behaviors predict relational quality (Gottman, 1979; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Schaap, 1984). In other words, both functional and dysfunctional couples use cooperative behaviors; competitive behaviors appear more critical to determining whether the relationship is functional. Second, and extending the previous point, the ratio of cooperative to competitive behaviors is more critical than the sheer frequency of cooperative behaviors. Finally, positive behaviors have been found to mediate the effect of physical abuse on women's perceptions of relational quality (Marshall, Weston, & Honeycutt, 2000). Marshall et al. found that women who were physically abused were more satisfied and committed to their abusive partner to the extent that he used positive communication behavior and showed himself to be generally happy with the relationship. Marshall et al. concluded that positive behaviors can filter the relational effects of physical punishment, such that abused wives assess their relational quality in the context of the husband's positivity and happiness.

In addition, a caveat should be made with regard to the perceived use of assertion (a type of direct and cooperative strategy): Although assertive actions are generally judged as more effective and appropriate than aggressive responses, the manner in which a person asserts himself or herself can affect the impact of assertiveness. For example, Kubany and colleagues (e.g., Kubany, Bauer, Muraoka, Richard, & Read, 1995; Kubany, Richard, Bauer, & Muraoka, 1992) argued that direct and assertive statements with regard to one's own anger (e.g., "I'm getting angry") induce feelings of hostility in the conversational partner. These authors suggested that individuals should convey distress rather than anger to communicate their emotional reactions (e.g., "I feel anxious" or "I'm getting frustrated" vs. "I'm getting angry" or "I'm so mad"). In all instances, however, Kubany and associates argued that assertive reactions (I-messages, such as those above) are more functional than aggressive reactions (you-messages) in reference to either distress (e.g., "You are making me feel anxious") or anger (e.g., "You're getting me angry"). Consistent with this reasoning, Kubany et al. (1992, 1995) found that I-statements of distress, not anger, elicited the greatest compassion and conciliation and the least animosity and antagonistic behavior. Conversely, you-statements of anger elicited the greatest amount of animosity and antagonism and the least amount of compassion and conciliation.

## The Other Person's Response

It is axiomatic that interpersonal conflict involves two people who must respond to each other. This section examines how conflict skills are contextualized by the pattern of interaction that is created when two people exchange messages. As Vuchinich (1984) argued, "linguistic and sequential organization are central in determining the social constitution and impact of utterances" (p. 217). Moreover, such patterns explain increased variance when added to the base rate frequency data. For example, Margolin and Wampold (1981) found that sequential data explained 8% to 15% additional variance in relational quality beyond frequencies of single behaviors alone.

This section discusses how parties to conflict reciprocate or compensate for their partner's preceding behavior. Reciprocation refers to symmetrical exchanges of messages, whereas compensation refers to providing an asymmetrical, alternative



**FIG. 13.2. Increased Negativity Over Time.**

*Note.* Adapted from Billings (1979).

behavior in response to the partner's preceding behavior, most likely as attempts to change partner behavior (for a background on reciprocal and compensatory responses in communication, see Rogers, 1981).

**Reciprocation Patterns.** The research is clear that the reciprocation of negative affect either verbally (in competitive tactics) or nonverbally (e.g., in displays of anger or contempt) is dysfunctional (for reviews, see Gottman, 1994; Messman & Canary, 1998; Schaap, 1984). In an early examination of reciprocal sequences, Billings (1979) compared Lag 1 behavioral sequences of dissatisfied couples with those of satisfied couples. Billings categorized behaviors into one of four types: friendly-dominant; friendly-submissive; hostile-dominant; and hostile-submissive. Billings calculated the ratio of hostile sequences for individuals in each couple as they engaged in two conversations—one in which self acts distant and one wherein partner acts distant (see also Raush, 1974, for a description of this role play). Billings found that dissatisfied partners engaged in greater reciprocity and satisfied partners engaged in less reciprocity than expected due to chance (p. 374). Perhaps more important, dissatisfied couples escalated in their exchanges of hostility over the course of the conversations. Billings reported these findings in point graphs, with each point indicating the ratio of hostility. Figure 13.2 represents Billings's comparison of satisfied versus dissatisfied couples.

Gottman (1994) reported similar findings when comparing the ratio of negative-to-positive behaviors for sequences. That is, less satisfied couples tended to engage in a higher ratio of negative behaviors toward the end of their conversations, whereas

the ratio of negative-to-positive ratios for satisfied couples remained stable. Consider the following example of a conversation that illustrates escalating reciprocation of competitiveness (from data reported in Canary et al., 1999):

(Couple #17)

<i>Turn</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Message</i>
94	Husband	Well, look at what you did. Look at the scene you made!
95	Wife	Yeah, well you deserved it.
96	Husband	No, I didn't . . .
97	Wife	Everybody fights.
98	Husband	deserve that.
99	Wife	So . . .
100	Husband	No, everybody . . .
101	Wife	Yeah, everybody fights dear. 'cause if they don't . . .
102	Husband	Yeah, but not in the presence of company. Not when, honey, we had 15 people.
103	Wife	See, I'm a very prompt [sic] person. I don't care.
104	Husband	But I do.
105	Wife	I knew everybody there.
106	Husband	Yes, but I DO.
107	Wife	And most of them was [sic] your family, and I couldn't care what they think anyway.
108	Husband	Well, I do.
109	Wife	Well, I don't.
110	Husband	Well, then I shouldn't care what your family thinks.

Some research supports the belief that reciprocation of cooperative behaviors depicts functional relating. Ting-Toomey (1983) found that highly satisfied couples tend to reciprocate cooperative and direct behaviors. She reported that highly satisfied couples engage in confirmation-socioemotional description, socioemotional description-socioemotional question, and task-oriented question-task-oriented description sequences. Ting-Toomey concluded that "the sequential results of this investigation indicate that high-adjustment marital couples typically interact in "validation-disclosive sequence" in conjunction with other unique sequences of coaxing, socioemotional questioning, and task-oriented behavior . . . to manage relational differences" (p. 317). On the other hand, the reciprocation of direct cooperative conflict behaviors, such as agreement and problem solving is not consistently related to relational satisfaction (Gottman, 1979; Schaap, 1984). Indeed, Schaap (1984) found that satisfied couples were less likely than dissatisfied couples to reciprocate positive behaviors. These findings echo other research that shows that cooperative behaviors do not strongly discriminate satisfied from dissatisfied partners.

**Compensation Patterns.** Individuals in conflict often attempt to compensate for the partner's behavior. Compensation implies that people use behaviors to change the strategy and tactics of the partner. However, some people might unwittingly engage in behaviors that complement the partner's previous behavior and so perpetuate a negative cycle. For example, Raush et al. (1974, p. 87) described one couple, the "Harrises," who engage in an attack–defend pattern:

[T]he Harrises are both bright and capable people. Yet their interactions with one another have a startlingly primitive quality. One is reminded of nothing so much as a battle between three- or four-year olds. . . . The newlywed television scene, for example, went:

- 24H: . . . You just sit back.  
25W: Oh, I don't want to.  
26H: Now, sit there, there you go.  
27W: No, I want to watch that.  
28H: Just sit back.  
29W: It's my TV.  
30H: Tough. I'll break it.

In this exchange, the husband offers a series of commands, which the wife rejects. When the wife offers a reason to watch her own program ("It's my TV"), the husband responds with a threat. One senses in these complementary patterns attempts to wrest momentum and control from the other person.

One might expect that such instances of "negative reactivity," as Margolin and Wampold (1981, p. 555) described it, would conclude after a few brief exchanges. However, Ting-Toomey (1983) reported that dissatisfied couples would engage in up to 10 sequences of attack–defend patterns. Continued reciprocation of competitive behaviors is one kind of "transactional redundancy," in which people find themselves in a conversational rut (Rogers, Courtright, & Millar, 1980). So the attempt to compensate the other person's behavior through complementary tactics is probably not a smart strategic choice.

Rather, people can compensate for competitive behaviors with both direct and indirect cooperative actions. Using the direct route, partners tend to validate each other and work toward problem solving. For example, Gottman (1979) indicated that the critical factor separating clinical from nonclinical couples' conflict patterns appears to be agreement: "In effect, satisfied couples continually intersperse various subcodes of agreement into their sequences" (p. 957). Likewise, Gottman (1979) found that satisfied couples tend to validate each other's points before offering a differing opinion ("I think your point about waiting until the term ends is a good one, but we need to act now"), whereas clinical couples would simply engage in disagreement following an opinion ("No, we need to act now"). This observation suggests that communicators should punctuate sequences involving couples agreeing with each other's ideas as they are presented during discussion. Likewise, in a study of how couples respond to partner complaints, Alberts (1988) found that satisfied (vs. dissatisfied couples) reacted to the partner's complaints with agreement.

Several studies have examined a particular kind of compensation pattern that involves one person confronting the partner and the partner responding through withdrawal, called the *demand-withdrawal* pattern (e.g., Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999, 2000; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Sagrestano, Heavey, & Christensen, 1998). The demand–withdrawal studies suggest that this pattern typically occurs when a dissatisfied person seeks change from his or her partner on a specific issue. In response, the partner who seeks to maintain the status quo withdraws or seeks to minimize discussion (Kluwer, de Dreu, & Buunk, 1998). The gender roles typically are that women demand whereas men withdraw, although gender differences are often overridden by who desires change. Also, discontent by one person has been associated with demands from his or her partner; that is, the demand–withdrawal pattern might in some cases represent a reciprocal pattern rather than a complementary pattern. For example, wife dissatisfaction with the husband's

performance of household chores has been correlated with the husband demanding change in how the house is cleaned as well as with the wife demanding change in how the house is cleaned (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999, 2000; Kluwer, Heensink, & van de Vliert, 1997). Regardless, this pattern is negatively associated with relational quality.

In some contexts, avoidance would be met with increased confrontation due to either variation in relationship types or individual preferences for managing conflict. For example, Burggraf and Sillars (1987) found that independent couples (i.e., those who do not adopt conventional sex roles and who negotiate many facets of their relationship) respond to a partner's attempt at avoidance with confrontation (see also, Fitzpatrick, 1988). This pattern was not observed for separate or traditional couples. Regarding individual differences, Denton, Burleson, Hobbs, Von Stein, and Rodriguez (1999) reported that men who initiated conflict reacted with higher arousal to their partner's avoidance than did men who tended to avoid conflict.

In other contexts, however, indirect behaviors might be functional. For example, in studies on family conflicts at the dinner table, Vuchinich and colleagues (Vuchinich, 1987; Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988) found that most conflicts (about 65%) concluded in a standoff. It appears that the way out of an escalating conflict was simple avoidance. Specifically, it appeared that family members grew tired of arguing at dinner after about five turns. Vuchinich (1987) concluded that functional conflict management in families involves indirect strategies, such as standoffs, to defuse family arguments.

In brief, the relationship conflict literature reveals that reciprocity of competitive conflict behaviors is associated with dissatisfaction with the partner. Moreover, attempts at compensation that fall within the realm of competitive reactions appear to promote the escalation in attack–defend patterns. Interspersing agreement into the conversation appears to be a functional strategic move, one that signals a cooperative orientation despite being in disagreement. The successful use of avoidance appears to depend on how tenacious the confronting partner is in wanting to have the conflict. In situations involving aggression, however, being indirect will likely work better than being direct (because an enraged person will probably interpret direct responses as a challenge; see Zillmann, 1993).

## The Self-Perpetuating Nature of Conflict

Finally, the model in Fig. 13.1 indicates that the partner's response can lead back to any previous event, extending the conflict. Whereas the previous section focused on patterns of messages, this section focuses on how a person's response leads to reaction in the conversational partner as well as himself or herself in terms of thoughts and emotions, which would suggest a return to previous points in the model.

A partner's competitive response can certainly cause defensive reactions in the self. According to Gottman (1994), a person perceives the partner's conflict messages in one of two ways—in a benign (neutral or positive) manner or in a self-defensive manner. In the self-defensive mode, two common reactions are reported: “(a) hurt, disappointment, and perceived attack, the ‘innocent victim’ perception in which a person is in a stance of warding off perceived attack, or (b) hurt, disappointment, and ‘righteous indignation,’ in which a person is in the mode of rehearsing retaliation” (p. 412). Continued competitive messages and self-defensive reactions can bring about a “set point” that positive, cooperative behaviors cannot budge. The negative behaviors cause one to feel flooded and make harsh (global and stable) attributions for partner behaviors, which leads to distance and isolation, recasting the history

of the marriage, and dissolution. Satisfied couples, on the other hand, “balance” negative behaviors with positive ones and experience a sense of well-being.

Given an escalation of conflict and reciprocation of negative affect as represented in direct and competitive verbal and nonverbal behaviors, one would expect that physiological reactions and degrees of flooding would escalate as well. Zillmann (1990) summarized how the reciprocation of negative conflict increases both parties' arousal:

Escalating conflict can be conceptualized as a sequence of provocations, each triggering an excitatory reaction that materializes quickly and that dissipates slowly. As a second sympathetic reaction occurs before the first has dissipated, the second reaction combines with the tail end of the first. As a third reaction occurs before the second and first reactions have dissipated, this third reaction combines with the tail ends of both earlier reactions. In general, the excitatory reaction to provocation late in the escalation process rides the tails of all earlier reactions. (p. 192)

When one's arousal level outstrips one's ability to engage in clear cognitive appraisals, then use of competitive and direct strategies follow, with the possibility of aggression as a result. However, this prototypical characterization does not prohibit other sources of aggressive action, such as cold-blooded and clear-minded use of physical violence.

Besides the effects of behavior on arousal, it is clear that conflict participants digest their partner's behavior in terms of how appropriate and effective it was. A competence-based approach to the study of conflict has found support for the view that the effects of conflict on relationship outcomes are largely filtered by the assessments of the behaviors enacted. Three projects using structural equation modeling have verified the important role of assessments in mediating outcomes (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Canary et al., 2001; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989). During and following a conflict interaction, partners probably assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of their partner's behavior in making plans for further engagement or disengagement.

People in satisfying relationships are more likely to endure a partner's rude, inappropriate behavior and not respond in kind. People who report being highly committed to their partners, for example, are likely to undergo a “transformation of motivation” from destructive impulses to more prosocial actions (Rusbult, Verrette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Such a transformation involves an assessment, however brief, of more than one's own salient objectives. In addition, and as a reflection of central processing, people require more time to consider a constructive (vs. destructive) response to a partner's negative behavior (Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). In other words, the transformation of motivation that results in positive responses to the partner's competitive messages requires more time for cognitive editing (Fincham, 1999; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). Allowing a few moments before responding allows the individual to make a less impulsive reaction to the partner's inappropriate behavior (Ohbuchi, Chiba, & Fukushima, 1996; Zillmann, 1993).

As mentioned, people process conflict behaviors and make attributions concerning their causes. The importance of such explanations, and the dimensions that characterize them, cannot be understated (Fincham et al., 1992). In terms of Gottman's (1994) model of relational dissolution, for instance, a change from using benign attributions to using global, stable, and internal attributions for negative conflicts indicates a change in the manner that partners consider one another and their entire relationship. Gottman (1994) discussed the progression toward the use of more global attribution:

I propose that as couples continue to feel [physiologically] flooded and increase the emotional distance between them, this is reflected in their cognitions about the entire marriage and its history, not just particular kinds of interactions. The process of reacting to a partner's negative emotional expressions in one instance and then entering the distance and isolation cascade is a process of increasing globality in how one thinks of the marriage. (p. 358)

Finally, it should be noted that individuals as well as couples tend to engage in conflict in similar ways over time, across episodes (Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). Such habituated conflict responses, especially if they are constituted by competitive behaviors, would indicate that interaction partners develop response tendencies as a dyadic system. Another way of saying this is that dyads develop routines for managing problems that rely on implicit rules and response tendencies that evade conscious thought.

In sum, individuals in conflict are affected by the patterns of interaction they themselves help to create. Both the partner's and one's own behaviors can increase one's negative arousal, which would likely reinforce any existing response tendencies to compete, as well as provide additional evidence for negative and hostile attributions. Not only are people affected emotionally, but they are also affected in the ways they think about themselves, their partner, and their relationship. If the patterns of conflict are redundant with competition, then the corresponding affective and cognitive outcomes will likely reflect a dysfunctional involvement.

## CONCLUSIONS

The review of the literature according to the model presented in Fig. 13.1 implies a number of events that influence the manner in which interpersonal conflict emerges and escalates. These events indicate topics for people to consider in their desire to gain more personal control regarding the skillful management of conflict. Examination of these areas of control constitute the conclusions of this chapter.

First, a person can achieve greater *episode control*. That is, people should be aware of the extent to which particular interactions have conflict potential and anticipate possible aversive reactions to those episodes. Anticipating such aversive reactions to potential conflict has been shown to reduce the amount of negative emotions that one experiences (Zillmann, 1993).

Also, people should realize that factors external to the conflict episode often amplify angerlike reactions. The anxious arousal derived from drinking three cups of coffee, coupled with the predictable rush-hour traffic, can place the best of us in an angerlike state. Given such a state, other people's neutral behaviors (e.g., driving the speed limit) can appear aggravating or frustrating and perhaps even reprehensible. Considering the daily stress that people often experience, it would appear likely that individuals are often primed for interpersonal conflict. In addition, given that behavior reflects people's stress, depression, and other negative states in an angerlike manner (e.g., raised voice, staccato pronunciation, dominant staring), such behaviors may be perceived as evidence of anger. Accordingly, one might want to monitor one's own angerlike reactions as well as interpret other people's angerlike behaviors as stemming from sources outside the immediate interaction context. The objective here is for people to have greater control over the conflict episode rather than vice versa.

Moreover, to increase the likelihood of *episode control*, people can ready themselves for potential conflicts by engaging in soothing activities that reduce stress. These include taking walks, meditating or praying, breathing deeply, reading,

listening to relaxing music, talking to other people about their feelings, or any other activity that allows individuals to regain control over their reactions (Tice & Baumeister, 1993). The point is that people should manage how excited they allow themselves to become before the conflict occurs, so their emotional reactions to such episodes do not stymie their ability to think through the various conflict events that challenge them (Zillmann, 1979).

Second, people can exercise *personal control* by adhering to the belief that they can work through conflict successfully using cooperative strategies. As this review indicated, the fundamental belief that a person is in control of his or her social world can dramatically affect how he or she responds to other people. Ironically, people who feel less in control tend to engage in more controlling actions, such as using threats, showing anger, and referencing their authority, and such controlling actions are typically ineffective (e.g., Goodstadt & Hjelle, 1973). On the other hand, people who believe that their own outcomes are largely determined by their own abilities and actions work harder and smarter at conflict management. They engage in problem solving, information exchange, and other cooperative and direct behaviors, which tend to be more productive. Believing that one can negotiate with a high probability of success is a critically important component in managing conflict effectively and appropriately. In short, people must believe in productive processes to obtain desired outcomes.

Third, one could achieve greater *attribution control*. This requires an understanding of the powerful role that attributions play. Initially, one should realize that conflict involves two parties who happen to have incompatible goals and that both people have biases that are self-serving and lead to attributions that may or may not be accurate. Who is responsible for causing the conflict should be understood from the perspective that incompatibility is the rule, not the exception. Additionally, one should attempt to explain the conflict causes in terms of benign attributions that have specific, unstable, external, and unintentional elements in lieu of global, stable, internal, and intentional properties (e.g., "He is late for the meeting because the weather is poor" vs. "He is late because he is irresponsible"). Blameworthy actions on the part of one person may be excused as temporary or situationally based in one context; the identical actions may be viewed as chronic and internally caused in another context.

Regardless of whether the situation involves coworkers, lovers, or strangers, it becomes difficult to change reliance on negative attributions partly because they operate to defend self from the other person's hostility. Certainly, in such cases, the individual needs to rethink the use of such attributions. If one cannot help but continue to rely on negative attributions that are dysfunctional, then that person could consult a facilitator (e.g., friend, spiritual leader, executive coach, therapist) who might help change defensive thinking.

Moreover, people can obtain greater attribution control if they examine the other person's message in terms of its information value, not as an affront or identity attack. This shift in attitude toward hearing the message helps one to focus on the redeeming qualities of the message, such that the person can address the issue, seek clarification, and resolve the problem with the other person. Attempting to derive benefit from the partner's criticism may appear counterintuitive (like leaning into a left hook), but its advantages potentially outweigh the disadvantages that might arise through a defensive orientation to the issue. That is, in most cases, one should attempt to be neutral with regard to the attributions one makes for the other person's behavior.

Fourth, individuals could achieve greater *goal control* over their conflicts if they become more aware of their goals in conflict and of the other person's interaction

goals. Three goal types that appear in various forms include instrumental objectives, relational desires, and self-presentation concerns. Being sensitive to both parties' self-presentation, relational, and instrumental goals at stake would provide people with a greater understanding of the conflict situation. Messages should be understood not only as defending a position, but also as representing a desired goal. The most severe conflicts tend to involve goals where an indictment of someone's desired public image or a threat to an important relationship is at stake, despite the fact that conflicts ostensibly concern an instrumental objective.

Fifth, people can exercise strategy control during conflict in their message production. Although the conflict episode might suggest or trigger particular behaviors, the individual is ultimately responsible for the selection and use of his or her communicative strategies. Research suggests that people in functional relationships rely on a much larger proportion of cooperative—competitive conflict messages. Individuals do what they can to increase the relative occurrence of cooperative behaviors by simply using them and avoiding the more competitive messages. The twofold tactic would be to rely on a cooperative stance and balance the use of competitive behaviors with several more cooperative behaviors.

Of course, cooperative and direct messages are not always the most desirable. At times, people may want to use threats ("If you are late again, you are off the team"); however, the use of such competitive actions should be reserved for extreme situations and not be part of a person's modus operandi. An individual does not want to lose the potential impact of a threat, nor does anyone want to paint himself or herself into a strategic corner by relying on threats or other coercive behaviors; once a person makes a threat or suggests an ultimatum, then he or she is obligated to make good on the punishment if the other person does not comply.

Finally, people can exercise *interaction control* over patterned responses. This might mean acting in ways that are incongruent with the negative arousal they experience. The use of cooperative conflict tactics combined with sincere, calm, and involved nonverbal cues appears to be the best bet in terms of controlling the escalation of conflict. Speaking in a quiet voice with a slow rate while using direct eye contact and cooperative tactics would convey that the conflict is not going to escalate. Generally, conflict can be mitigated using tactics that reflect a cooperative approach (Ohbuchi et al., 1996). In terms of referring to one's own reactions, using I-statements to state that one is distressed, anxious, or frustrated leads to a more positive reaction in the other person than stating that one is feeling mad or angry (e.g., "I am feeling frustrated," Kubany et al., 1995). Indeed, the use of you-statements to reference one's anger should be avoided (e.g., "You are really making me mad"), unless one wants to escalate the conflict in a negative manner.

Likewise, to maintain interaction control, one should choose not to react in a hair-trigger manner to the other person's competitive behavior. Perhaps most critically, this means that *people should avoid the reciprocation of competitive behavior*. This conclusion is underscored because the reciprocation of negative affect represents a most seductive and destructive communicative event. Although the impulse to react in kind is strong, the reciprocation of competitive behavior leads to a host of conflict management problems. For example, one's physiological reactions increase as the result of one's own behavior as well as the partner's behavior (Siegman & Snow, 1997). The escalation of conflict through the reciprocation of competitive behaviors also can lead to withdrawal, verbal abuse, and physical violence. Moreover, the reciprocation of competitive behaviors is a knee-jerk reaction with little strategic or goal-related value. The time-tested advice to "count to 10" before responding may

not be practical, but a moment's hesitation before responding will help one edit the impulse to act in kind to a negative message.

People can compensate the other person's negative emotions through validation (i.e., agreement on key points), coaxing, metacommunication (if said with a positive tone), and other cooperative behaviors. If either person is enraged, then indirect behaviors should be used because overly aroused people in conflict are no longer focused on the content of the message but on the emotional and behavioral information they obtain from the other person (Zillmann, 1993). Denying the presence of conflict, minimizing the problem, and leaving the situation are preferable to escalating a conflict out of control.

To conclude, whereas many factors impinge on a person's ability to engage in productive conflict management behaviors, the individual remains ultimately responsible for his or her strategic choices. The goal of this chapter has been to bring to the fore a set of events that help explain one's behavior. I hope the reader sees that the individual plays a huge role in the creation of his or her social realities and that the events highlighted by the model indicate various ways that people can manage conflict more productively.

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## CHAPTER

# 14

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SKILL

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Distressed emotional states—anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, shame, and hurt—are a ubiquitous feature of the human experience. Frequently, we cope with these distressed states by seeking emotional support from friends, family members, or others in our social network. But seeking support does not guarantee the receipt of sensitive, effective support. Indeed, the quality of the emotional support people receive from others in their network varies widely, ranging from the sensitive and helpful to the insensitive and aggravating, and this has important consequences. As I discuss in detail later in this chapter, recipients of sensitive emotional support not only feel better, they cope with problems more effectively and may even be healthier. Moreover, sensitive emotional support frequently enhances the social relationship between provider and recipient. In contrast, recipients of insensitive emotional support may feel worse than ever, cope with problems poorly, come to devalue the personal relationship with the helper, and even suffer from stress-related illness.

Numerous situational and relational factors affect the quality of the emotional support we receive. For example, both children and adults expend more effort to comfort a close friend than a more distant acquaintance (Costin & Jones, 1992; Ritter, 1979), and people are less inclined to use highly sensitive forms of emotional support with those they see as responsible for causing their own problems (Jones & Burleson, 1997; MacGeorge, 2001). Beyond these situational and relational factors, considerable evidence indicates there are substantial individual differences in the ability to supply quality emotional support. This chapter explores these individual differences in an effort to develop a foundation for understanding and improving the emotional support skills of lay actors for the everyday situations they routinely encounter. To this end, the chapter (a) presents an overview of the nature and significance of emotional support in everyday life, (b) describes methods frequently used in research examining the provision of emotional support, (c) summarizes empirical findings regarding the characteristics of sensitive, effective emotional support efforts, (d) identifies some of the demographic and psychological factors associated with individual differences in supplying helpful support, and (e) outlines an approach to enhancing several important facets of emotional support skill.

## THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

### A Conceptualization of Emotional Support

Although varied definitions have been proposed for the emotional support construct, most theorists have conceptualized emotional support as expressions of care, concern, affection, and interest, especially during times of stress or upset (see Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; House, 1981). For example, Cobb (1976) defined the broader construct of *social support* largely in terms of its impact on emotional states, as information “leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved . . . esteemed and valued . . . [and] belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation” (p. 300). The narrower construct of *emotional support* has typically been defined as the provision of “comfort and security during times of stress [that leads] the person to feel he or she is cared for by others” (Cutrona & Russell, 1990, p. 322).

These definitions capture an important aspect of the emotional support construct; however, the concept appears to encompass a broader set of phenomena. For example, in addition to expressions of care, concern, and affection, emotional support also includes helping distressed others work through their upset by listening to, empathizing with, legitimizing, and actively exploring their feelings (e.g., Burleson, 1984b). Moreover, stress and emotional hurt often stem from the invalidation of the self, either directly (e.g., rejection by a valued other) or indirectly (e.g., failing at something connected to one’s self-concept). Thus, expressions of encouragement, appreciation, reassurance, respect, and confidence in the other—often termed *appraisal*, *ego*, or *esteem* support—can be conceptualized as forms of emotional support (Burleson, 1994b; Rook & Underwood, 2000). Efforts to help solve an emotionally upsetting problem through the provision of information and advice may also be counted as forms of emotional support (Dunkel-Schetter, Blasband, Feinstein, & Herbert, 1992; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000).

Overall, the key feature in most conceptions of emotional support is the intentional effort by a helper to assist a target in coping with a perceived state of affective distress. This end may be accomplished through various means—direct expressions of affection and concern, invitations to discuss distressed feelings and associated problematic states, statements of encouragement and hope, efforts to assist with problem analysis, offers of information and advice, as well as other verbal and non-verbal behaviors. All such behaviors appear directed at helping the target cope with upset feelings (and, perhaps, the situations producing those feelings) in the effort to alleviate distress and restore happiness, or at least inner peace. Thus, it is useful to view emotional support as *specific lines of communicative behavior enacted by one party with the intent of helping another cope effectively with emotional distress*.

Several features of this conception of emotional support should be noted. First, the conceptualization of emotional support developed in this chapter treats it as an intentional response by a helper to the distress experienced by a target. This distress may be acute (e.g., disappointment over not winning a contest; anxiety over an upcoming presentation) or chronic (e.g., grief over the loss of a loved one; lingering depression over protracted ill health) and may be mild or intense in character. Some theorists (e.g., Barnes & Duck, 1994; Reis, 2001) have taken a much broader view of emotionally supportive communication, not tying it to a helper’s effort to remedy a perceived exigence, but rather conceptualizing it as any and all social activity that provides an uplift, conveys affection, enhances a sense of inclusion, or promotes coping. These

broader conceptions of emotional support encompass an extremely wide array of everyday communicative activities and routines, including casual conversation, story telling, gossip, “bull sessions,” relational rituals (greetings, retellings of events), and so forth. Although important, these communicative activities appear most likely to contribute to the individual’s global sense of support availability (Leatham & Duck, 1990) and are thus best examined within the frame of psychological perspectives on support processes (see Burleson & MacGeorge, *in press*). As defined here, emotional support assumes a helper’s perception of an exigence afflicting a target, with a resultant organization of action—especially communicative action—directed at overcoming that exigence or managing its emotional effects.

Second, emotional support represents goal-directed behavior by the helper with respect to the target. The defining feature of emotionally supportive behavior is the helper’s intention to assist the target in coping with perceived emotional distress; the helper’s aim is to improve the affect state and functioning of the target. Of course, the helper may be more or less consciously aware of this goal, as well as more or less aware of the planning and behavioral processes through which this goal is pursued. The approach taken here thus lodges the defining characteristic of emotionally supportive behavior in the intention of the helper to assist a target in coping with distressed feelings, not in specific outcomes achieved through helper behavior. The conceptual and methodological advantages of intention-based definitions of supportive behavior over tautological, outcome-based definitions have been noted by several theorists (e.g., Goldsmith, 1994; Thoits, 1985).

Third, the quality and effectiveness of emotional support efforts may vary substantially. As seen in a subsequent section of this chapter, the helper’s intention to be supportive is a vital element of the support process, and perception of this intention by the target may itself be beneficial. However, the supportive intentions of helpers can be coupled with behavior that ranges from sensitive and effective to insensitive and dysfunctional. A major concern in research on emotional support has been with identifying the distinguishing features of more and less helpful forms of behavior, as well as with determining the variables predicting the use of more and less helpful forms of emotional support.

Fourth, emotional support may be enacted through either verbal or nonverbal behavior and typically involves both types of behavior. Some have suggested that nonverbal forms of emotional support are basic and universal to our species (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). Certainly, nonverbal support precedes verbal forms both phylogenetically and ontogenetically; one has only to look at mammal mothers interacting with their infants to be convinced of this. Furthermore, as suggested by attachment theory, the nonverbal comfort and reassurance provided by caregivers have potential lifetime consequences (Anders & Tucker, 2000; Kunce & Shaver, 1994), helping to develop children’s “working models” of close relationships (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1998). Not surprisingly, then, the nonverbal behaviors first used in infancy to convey care, concern, and support continue to be fundamental vehicles for the expression of emotional support throughout life. Hugs, touches and pats, hand-holding, focused looks, and soothing sounds can be remarkably effective ways of expressing reassurance, love, warmth, and acceptance (Bullis & Horn, 1995; Dolin & Booth-Butterfield, 1993).

Although nonverbal means of expressing emotional support remain important across the life span, the emergence of symbolic language provides a more flexible, adaptable, and complex means of conveying support. Verbal support strategies are flexible in that they can be used in many situations with different targets and types

of problems. These strategies are adaptable in that they can be finely tailored to the peculiarities of particular targets and situations; they are complex in that they can be applied in highly differentiated, specific ways in complicated situations to convey fine nuances of sentiment and meaning.

Fifth, all humans share the inherent capacity to provide verbal emotional support in highly sophisticated, nuanced, and sensitive ways. As with most complex skills, however, only a relatively small percentage of individuals appears to develop this capacity fully. The complexities of human emotional life, coupled with the complexities of the verbal code and social rules governing its use, create significant challenges for those who seek to develop skill in the provision of emotional support through the verbal channel (Burleson, 1994b). Although social rules also govern the "correct" provision of emotional support nonverbally (e.g., when and how to deliver a supportive hug or shoulder pat), the flexibility, adaptability, and complexity of verbal communication make the delivery of sensitive support through this means a particularly important, but quite challenging, social skill. For this reason, this chapter primarily focuses on skills associated with the verbal provision of emotional support.

## The Significance of Emotional Support: Psychological, Physical, and Relational Outcomes

Emotional support is only one type of support that people routinely seek and provide. Other types of support frequently identified by theorists (e.g., Cutrona & Russell, 1990; House, 1981) include *network support* (expressions of connection and belonging), *informational support* (information and advice), and *tangible assistance* (offers of money, physical intervention, material aid). Although emotional support is just one among several types of support, considerable research indicates that it is especially consequential, having noteworthy psychological, physical, and relational outcomes.

**Psychological Outcomes.** A chief objective of emotional support is to bring about modifications in the psychological states of others, especially their feelings about some situation and, possibly, themselves. Considerable research indicates that emotional support provided by caring others can be quite successful in this regard, helping those in need cope more effectively with problem situations, manage upset feelings, and maintain a positive sense of self and outlook on life (Burleson, 1994b; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996). For example, the receipt of sensitive emotional support has been found to contribute to psychological adjustment (Cramer, 1985), self-esteem (Cramer, 1985), a sense of social inclusion (Bell & Gonzalez, 1988; Samter, 1992), and overall life satisfaction (Wan, Jaccard, & Ramey, 1996).

Much of the emotional support received in everyday life addresses ordinary upsets, distresses, and hurts, which might not appear to have significant or lasting impact on most people. Yet substantial evidence shows that these minor events are major determinants of moods and psychological well-being (see Burleson, 1994a). Some research (e.g., DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982; Eckenrode, 1984; Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981) has found that stress resulting from everyday hassles and disappointments is a better predictor of mood, psychological well-being, and even physical health than stress resulting from major life events (e.g., death of a spouse) or chronic conditions (e.g., living in poverty). The emotional support provided by network members can be quite helpful as people attempt

to manage everyday upsets and stresses. For example, emotional support has been found to buffer the effects of financial strain (Krause, 1987), anxiety and depression (Frankel & Turner, 1983), minor crimes (Krause, 1986), family stress (Hirsch & Reischl, 1985), work stress (Constable & Russell, 1986), test anxiety (Tardy, 1994), and a variety of other upsets (see the review by Cutrona & Russell, 1990). These findings clearly indicate that the relief obtained through the comforting efforts of caring others is an important determinant of psychological functioning.

**Physical and Health Outcomes.** The improved psychological and emotional states achieved through effective emotional support appear to have significant health consequences. Abundant research indicates that those with supportive social networks enjoy better physical health than those with unsupportive networks (see reviews by Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997). Moreover, research indicates that the receipt of emotional support is particularly predictive of health and well-being outcomes (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; Rook & Underwood, 2000; Wills, 1991).

For example, in a prospective study of 500 Swedish men, Hanson and his colleagues (Hanson, Isacsson, Janzon, & Lindell, 1989) found that of eight support measures employed, only the availability of emotional support was significantly associated with mortality after controlling for 12 potentially confounding factors. Several additional studies employing multidimensional assessments of social support have found emotional support to make the strongest contribution to varied indices of health and well-being (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Constable & Russell, 1986; Cronin-Stubbs & Rooks, 1985; Friedman & King, 1994; Krause, 1987; Lackner et al., 1993; Metts, Geist, & Gray, 1994; Roos & Cohen, 1987; Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). Furthermore, research employing global assessments of support, which primarily index the availability or adequacy (or both) of emotional support, have found strong contributions to assessments of well-being in a variety of contexts (see the review by Wills, 1991).

Other research (Berkman, Leo-Summers, & Horwitz, 1992; Blumenthal et al., 1987; Glass & Maddox, 1992; Irwin & Kramer, 1988; Krumholz et al., 1998; Kulik & Mahler, 1993; Seeman, Berkman, Blazer, & Rowe, 1994) indicates that recipients of sensitive emotional support tend to recover more quickly from various diseases and injuries, maintain their health for more extended periods, comply more completely with treatment regimens, experience lower levels of anxiety and depression, and may even live longer when battling afflictions such as heart disease and breast cancer (see reviews by Seeman, 2001; Spiegel & Kimerling, 2001). These studies suggest that emotional distress may be particularly harmful to health, perhaps due to its deleterious effects on the immune system, the neuroendocrine system, and cardiovascular functioning (Cohen & Rodriguez, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2001; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Thus, the close connection between emotion and well-being may partially explain the health-promoting effects of emotional support.

**Relationship Outcomes.** The research reviewed previously indicates that the emotional support people receive from others can help relieve hurt and stress, improve life quality, and protect, or even enhance, physical health. If everyday emotional support did nothing more, there would still be good reason for valuing this activity and those who do it well. But sensitive emotional support also signals care, commitment, interest, compassion, and even love. Emotionally supportive actions are thus relationally significant behaviors (Burleson, 1990).

Skill at providing emotional support has been conceptualized as a fundamental social competence at every period of the life cycle, including childhood (Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990), adolescence (Buhrmester, 1996; Stevenson, Maton, & Teti, 1999), and adulthood (Cutrona, 1996). Numerous theorists have viewed emotional support as a key provision of close personal relationships (Cunningham & Barbee, 2000; Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Weiss, 1974), as well as an important determinant of satisfaction with these relationships (Acitelli, 1996; Samter, 1994). People value the emotional support skills of their relationship partners (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988; Burleson, Kunkel, Samter, & Werking, 1996), and perceptions of emotional supportiveness have been found to play a critical role in the development and maintenance of friendships and dating relationships (Burleson, Kunkel, & Birch, 1994), marriages (Cutrona, 1996), and functional parent-child relationships (Coble, Gant, & Mallinckrodt, 1996). Consistent with this, some research has found that people report emotional support as one of the most, if not the most, desired and important types of support provided by close relationship partners (Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Xu & Burleson, 2001). Other research has found that deficiencies in the quantity or quality of emotional support received from a partner are particularly predictive of relationship dissatisfaction (Baxter, 1986; Sprecher, Metts, Burleson, Hatfield, & Thompson, 1995; Wan et al., 1996).

Given the significant role emotional support plays in the growth and maintenance of close relationships, it is not surprising that those who value emotional support skills and are adept at providing it tend to be popular, satisfying relationship partners. Samter and Burleson (1990a) discovered that college students who placed relatively high value on emotional support skills were better liked and more accepted by their housemates than students who evaluated these skills less highly. Similarly, Samter (1992) found that persons who valued emotional support skills highly reported lower levels of loneliness than those viewing these skills as less important. Several other studies indicate that individuals with good emotional support skills are more likeable (Samter, Burleson, & Murphy, 1987), are perceived as more attractive social companions (Buhrmester et al., 1988), and are more likely to be accepted (or less likely to be rejected) by peers (Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1992; Samter & Burleson, 1990b).

Emotional support also occurs in the workplace, especially when the work environment is stressful and institutional norms encourage displays of support to coworkers (Metts et al., 1994). For example, Zimmermann and Applegate (1992) examined how members of interdisciplinary hospice teams valued emotional support received from coworkers. Significant correlations were found between the frequency and quality of the emotional support received from team members and satisfaction with team communication, overall satisfaction with the team, desire to stay with the team, and overall job satisfaction. Subsequent research (e.g., Myers, Knox, Pawlowski, & Roog, 1999) has further documented the importance of emotional support skills in work and professional contexts.

**Problematic Outcomes.** By definition, emotional support efforts are intended to help a distressed other cope with an affectively upsetting situation; however, not all such efforts are equally successful in achieving this goal or in producing desirable psychological, physical, and relational outcomes. Two decades of research have established that well-meaning but inept efforts at emotional support can have a multitude of unintended and undesirable outcomes (e.g., Barbee, Derlega, Sherburne, & Grimshaw, 1998; Coyne, Wortman, & Lehman, 1988; Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Lehman, Ellard, & Wortman, 1986; Ratcliff & Gogdan, 1988; Sullivan, 1996; Thompson & Range, 1993). In particular, such "support attempts that

fail" (Lehman & Hemphill, 1990) can exacerbate unpleasant affective states, inhibit effective problem solving, foster unhealthy dependencies, heighten stress levels, undermine relationship satisfaction and stability, and even damage physical health. The findings of this research dramatically underscore that emotional support must be provided competently if it is to benefit its recipients.

## Summary

Emotional support is usefully understood as specific lines of communicative behavior enacted by one party with the intent of helping another cope effectively with emotional distress. Viewed as such, emotional support is a basic function of human communication and is as ubiquitous in everyday life as the upsets that occasion its use. At one time or another, all of us are seekers and providers of emotional support.

People generally value the comfort and emotional support they receive from friends, family, and coworkers—and they should. Considerable research indicates that sensitive emotional support can have desirable outcomes. Effective emotional support assists us in coping with a variety of stressors and upsets, contributes to our mental and physical well-being, and reinforces feelings of friendship, intimacy, and care; in so doing, it plays an important role in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. However, not all support efforts result in these outcomes; indeed, many support efforts fail to help their targets, and some efforts worsen an already bad situation.

There is, then, more to providing effective emotional support than the intention to do so. Some emotional support attempts succeed, but others fail. Put another way, emotional support represents a *skill* and can be performed either well (yielding numerous positive consequences) or poorly (yielding numerous negative consequences). What counts as sensitive, effective, and helpful emotional support versus insensitive, unhelpful, dysfunctional emotional support? What features or properties distinguish more and less effective emotional support efforts?

## RESEARCHING MORE AND LESS EFFECTIVE FORMS OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT: PROBLEMS, PRACTICES, AND PARADIGMS

Identifying message forms that reliably provide some relief to those suffering from emotional distress is a task demanding considerable inventiveness. Such research also requires attention to important ethical concerns. In this section of the chapter, I review many of the research practices and paradigms that have been developed by scholars seeking to identify the properties of more and less effective emotional support messages. First, however, I discuss some of the practical and ethical problems inherent in research evaluating different approaches to the provision of emotional support.

### Practical and Ethical Problems in Research on the Effects of Emotionally Supportive Messages

Experimental assessments of the effectiveness of emotional support messages require samples of emotionally distressed persons. Some insist that researchers ethically can never do anything to create such samples. Others argue that mild distress can be temporarily created in subjects with very minimal risk or harm to them. For example, Barbee (1990) had participants repeat a series of depressing statements or watch clips from sad movies to induce mild states of sadness. Winstead and her colleagues

(Winstead, Derlega, Lewis, Sanchez-Huckles, & Clarke, 1992) have induced mild levels of stress in research participants by assigning them to prepare and deliver a public speech. Participants in these studies, and others like them, have been carefully monitored and do not appear to have been harmed by their research experiences. Obviously, great care must be exercised any time distress or depression is experimentally induced.

Another ethical problem involves the researcher's responsibilities to emotionally distressed individuals, regardless of whether distressed states are "natural" or experimentally induced. Some might argue that whenever confronted with persons experiencing emotional distress there is an ethical obligation to do all one can to help. Randomly assigning distressed people to different message treatments might be viewed as ethically suspect, especially if it is possible that some message treatments might exacerbate, rather than relieve, the distressed condition. Furthermore, there are limited options available for objectively determining the degree of emotional distress experienced by people. This makes it difficult, although not impossible, to assess levels of emotional distress before or after exposure to emotional support efforts (e.g., see Hill, 1996; Winstead & Derlega, 1991; Yankeelov, Barbee, Cunningham, & Druen, 1995).

These practical and ethical concerns have led to the use of alternative research designs in the study of emotional support processes. As an option to creating emotionally distressed targets in the laboratory, some researchers (e.g., Barbee, Derlega, et al., 1998; Bippus, 2000; Sullivan, 1996) have had participants recall situations from the past where they have suffered an acute or chronic upset and describe support efforts by others they remember as being more and less helpful. Some studies (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Jones & Guerrero, 2001) have examined how "naturally upset" people respond to different comforting messages uttered in laboratory contexts. Other studies (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1985a) had confederates feign emotional distress and then have evaluated the effectiveness of responses to their distress cues. Still other work (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; Samter et al., 1987) has asked participants to read hypothetical situations involving an emotionally distressed target and, in their role as "observers," identify more and less supportive messages from those provided by the researcher.

These alternative procedures typically avoid the ethical problems associated with directly inducing distress in the laboratory, although there are no guarantees about what will or won't cause upset (for example, I have witnessed some research participants become quite distressed while observing a confederate feign upset about a mundane stressor). Moreover, although these alternatives avoid some ethical problems, they can raise other moral issues. For example, conclusions reached in studies employing hypothetical situations may have less external validity, and thus may lead to less appropriate recommendations about the support strategies to use and avoid. No research strategy in this area is free from ethical concerns; hence, researchers should rigorously examine their procedures for ethical implications and ensure that their research practices carefully balance possible benefits against potential costs.

## **Practices and Tasks in Research Assessing the Features and Effects of Messages Intended to Provide Emotional Support**

Much of the research on emotional support (as well as other forms of social support) has employed simple frequency counts of behavior to measure the receipt of support. This methodological approach reflects a purely quantitative, "more is better"

orientation to the conceptualization and assessment of support behavior (Vaux, 1990) and fails to appreciate that not everything said or done by a support provider is equally helpful or effective. The growing recognition that all emotional support efforts are not equal (some being useful, some not) has motivated research aimed at identifying the features of behavior that reliably distinguish helpful, ineffective, and dysfunctional support efforts.

Researchers confront at least three analytically distinct tasks when attempting to identify the features of messages that distinguish more and less effective forms of emotional support: (a) generating a sample of messages to evaluate, (b) evaluating these messages according to some standard, and (c) describing the features that characterize more and less effective message forms. I next describe research practices frequently used in executing these tasks, discussing strengths and limitations of different options.

**Generating Samples of Messages.** Researchers can generate a sample of supportive messages by having study participants produce messages in the course of responding to some questionnaire or task (participant-generated messages) or by developing a set of messages themselves (researcher-generated messages). Participants may generate messages *prospectively* by, for example, indicating what they would say in response to some hypothetical situation (e.g., Burleson, 1982, 1983); *retrospectively* by, for example, indicating what they said to a recipient, or had said to them as a recipient, in support situations (e.g., Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990); or *presently* by responding to a real support situation created in a laboratory (e.g., Cutrona & Suhr, 1992), a contrived laboratory situation that they believe to be real (e.g., Samter & Burleson, 1984), or experimentally manipulated situations constructed and controlled by the researcher (e.g., Barbee & Cunningham, 1995). Researchers can write sample messages themselves (e.g., Tardy, 1992) or select them from some source (e.g., messages reported in previous studies [Tardy, 1994, Study 4], messages appearing in novels or other literary sources, or messages previously produced by other participants).

The suitability of these options depends, naturally, on the specific research objectives of a study. When researchers have an interest in the message behaviors *typically* used in efforts to cope with a particular stressor (e.g., messages used to support spousal caregivers of cancer patients), the ecological validity, representativeness, and diversity of the message sample becomes critical. In such cases, participant-generated messages are likely to be desired, with retrospective self-reports by message recipients being a common choice. If researchers are also interested in recipient evaluations of messages, then generating a message corpus through the retrospective reports of recipients may be especially appropriate. However, there are some serious limitations inherent in the use of retrospective self-reports as sources of information about message behavior. People have poor memories for the details of conversational interaction (e.g., Benoit, Benoit, & Wilkie, 1995; Stafford, Waldron, & Infield, 1989) and are better at recalling the perceived intentions of others and episode outcomes than details of what another actually said (unless a statement was so remarkable as to be truly memorable). This limitation is quite evident in the “messages” obtained through retrospective self-reports, which typically contain descriptions of intentions (“I knew she was trying to help”), outcomes (“He reassured me”), and physical behaviors (“He was just there for me”) in addition to descriptions of statements actually made.

This particular limitation does not arise with messages that participants generate prospectively or in interaction because participants actually *produce* messages

rather than recall them, often generating messages in settings where they can be recorded by researchers. Unfortunately, messages generated prospectively (by having participants produce messages in response to hypothetical situations) cannot be judged for effectiveness *by their intended targets* because no such targets actually exist. Moreover, questions can be raised about the ecological validity of such messages (i.e., do the messages people produce when responding to hypothetical situations resemble those they produce in real-world situations?).

Messages generated by participants during interactions recorded in a laboratory suffer from neither of these limitations, but characteristics of messages generated through this procedure depend critically on the realism of the interactional problem used by researchers, the relationship history of the participants, as well as participant reactivity to the lab environment. In addition, having participants generate messages through interactions in the lab is the most expensive and time-consuming method of developing a message corpus, requiring the taping, transcription, and unitizing of spoken discourse.

Researchers are most likely to write (or select) messages to be evaluated when seeking to test a specific theory of message effectiveness. In such cases, messages are generally constructed so as to manipulate critical features of interest, while controlling (or allowing to vary randomly) noncritical features (e.g., Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). In addition to ensuring the validity of message manipulations (making sure that they instantiate the qualities of interest), researchers must develop messages that participants will perceive as realistic and appropriate in the context examined. Limitations of this procedure include that only a few message features can be manipulated at one time, and only a small number of messages with a limited range of variation can be employed in any particular study.

**Evaluating Messages.** The second task facing researchers is acquiring evaluations of the messages composing a sample, however they have been procured. This task involves obtaining judgments of message quality, worth, or effectiveness along some dimension (or set of dimensions) designated by the researcher. Three issues must be addressed in developing an evaluation procedure: (a) Who should evaluate the messages? (b) How should the messages be presented to judges? (c) What outcomes are relevant in judging the messages (e.g., changes in affect state, changes in conduct), and what criteria or standards should be used in conjunction with particular outcomes (e.g., for changes in affect state, decreased sadness, increased confidence)?

With respect to who does the evaluating, messages may be judged from one (or more) of three different perspectives (see Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1992): the message source or helper, the message recipient or target, and third-party observers (who may be naive actors or some kind of "trained expert"). Few studies have obtained evaluations of messages from sources; this probably reflects the assumed bias of sources, as well as the questionable relevance of evaluations generated from the source perspective (but see Lehman et al., 1986).

For obvious reasons, researchers have been especially interested in evaluations made by actual message recipients, and several procedures have been used to obtain these. For example, one common procedure involves asking participants who have retrospectively recalled messages directed at them to evaluate each message for a quality such as "helpfulness" or "sensitivity," sometimes providing explanations about why they found certain messages more or less helpful (e.g., Barbee, Derlega, et al., 1998; Dakof & Taylor, 1990). Although effective at eliciting evaluations from the actual targets of messages, the reported evaluations may be quite distant

from the supportive encounter (weeks or months, if not longer) and thus may be influenced by recall problems as well as numerous factors other than the message (e.g., current mood state of the evaluator). A second procedure, often used in experiments that expose participants to messages in the context of real or contrived support situations in the laboratory, has participants evaluate the message (as well as the source of the message) for several qualities (e.g., Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Jones & Guerrero, 2001; Winstead et al., 1992). Although prized for their validity, these recipient evaluations may be influenced by many unknown (and uncontrolled) sources of variation, including features of behavior not examined (e.g., nonverbal behaviors), the social relationship between the helper and target, and aspects of the laboratory environment.

In an effort to increase experimental control, researchers have had messages evaluated by third parties. For example, third-party judges have been asked to evaluate the messages they observe in live or videotaped interactions between others (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1985a, Study 1). Third-party judges have also been asked to evaluate messages embedded in transcripts of conversational interactions (Samter et al., 1987), as well as messages appearing in lists of options relevant to certain hypothetical situations (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1985a, Study 2; Range, Walston, & Pollard, 1992). These latter methods enable researchers to obtain more pure evaluations of messages; however, the increased rigor and reliability come at the price of decreased validity. There is obviously a difference (of unknown magnitude) between actually experiencing a supportive message when upset and making judgments about messages directed at hypothetical others. Because all assessment procedures have limitations, the best evidence regarding the effectiveness and outcomes of different messages is obtained through triangulation or use of multiple methods.

One important issue in developing an evaluation procedure is selecting the criterion (or criteria) on which messages are to be judged. Most studies have had judges use the criterion of "helpfulness" when evaluating messages (see Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1992). Unfortunately, just what "helpfulness" means has remained undertheorized, with few researchers articulating detailed conceptualizations of what this term means in the context of their studies. Some researchers have used other assessments, such as perceived message "sensitivity" and "effectiveness" in studies in which participants rate lists of message options (e.g., Kunkel & Burleson, 1999), or multi-item assessments of "message quality" (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; MacGeorge, Lichtman, & Pressey, 2002). Experimental studies exposing distressed participants to supportive messages in the laboratory have assessed actual affective improvement (e.g., Jones & Guerrero, 2001). Recent research (Bippus, 2001; Goldsmith, McDermott, & Alexander, 2000) indicates that "helpfulness," "sensitivity," "effectiveness," "appropriateness" and changes in specific emotional states are not necessarily comparable outcomes. Moreover, different criteria obviously should be used when evaluating messages primarily intended by helpers to manage problematic situations rather than distressed emotions (MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, & Budarz, 2002).

Burleson (1994b) identified four outcomes or effects with which scholars of the emotional support process should be concerned. These include (a) the *immediate instrumental effects* of an emotional support effort (i.e., how well the message reduces the target's emotional distress in the here and now); (b) the *long-term instrumental effects* of support efforts (the extent to which messages help the target develop coping strategies that enhance his or her long-term ability to manage emotional distress), (c) the *immediate relational and identity effects* of support efforts (how the

target thinks and feels about the helper, as well as how the helper thinks and feels about himself or herself), and (d) the *long-term relational effects* of support efforts (how the consistent use of certain message forms affects the quality of a helper's relationships with others). This specification of different outcomes suggests some of the many ways in which emotional support efforts can be more and less "helpful" or "effective."

Clearly, researchers need to give careful thought to the criteria on which messages are evaluated, the meanings of different criteria, and the appropriateness of particular criteria in specific research contexts. At a minimum, researchers should be explicit and clear about the specific message outcomes they seek to assess. Attention should also be directed to ensuring that judges actually apply the criteria selected by researchers when evaluating message samples, and do so consistently across the set of evaluated messages.

### ***Describing the Distinguishing Characteristics of More and Less Effective Messages.***

The most important theoretical task for researchers lies in specifying the features of behavior that distinguish more and less effective emotional support efforts. These features constitute the underlying mechanisms through which messages have their effects, so in specifying such features, researchers offer (implicitly or explicitly) a causal explanation for message outcomes. Two general strategies can be used when identifying and characterizing message features, an inductive strategy and a deductive strategy.

The inductive strategy involves generating distinguishing characteristics of more and less effective emotional support efforts by examining many messages (and sometimes multiple sets of messages), allowing relevant features to emerge from the data. More specifically, users of this strategy seek to induce the distinguishing features of effective and ineffective support messages by (a) collecting and examining sets of messages judged to be more and less effective by evaluators, (b) noting both common and noncommon features for effective and ineffective messages, and (c) using existing theory (along with personal insights and common sense) to guide inferences about the critical features within each set that make messages more and less effective. Characteristics that are common to effective messages and noncommon to ineffective messages are typically assumed to be relevant distinguishing features. The inductive strategy has been used widely in research on effective and ineffective forms of emotional support (see reviews by Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1992; Goldsmith, 1992). For example, Lehman and Hemphill (1990) described the following features as characteristic of effective emotional support: expressing love, concern, or understanding; providing encouragement; listening; praising abilities; including in social activities; and presence ("being there"). Dakof and Taylor (1990) identified the following features for the general class of "helpful esteem/emotional supports": physical presence; expressed concern, empathy, or affection; calmly accepted the patient's disease; expressed a special understanding because of being a similar other; was pleasant and kind.

Applications of the inductive strategy have provided some rich insights about the properties of more and less effective support messages. In particular, this strategy is useful for discovering many of the inventive and powerful devices everyday people develop in the effort to help upset targets feel better about things. Ideally, the inductive strategy should be followed up by experimental research that carefully manipulates the hypothesized critical features and ascertains whether they actually

account for differences in judged message effectiveness. Unfortunately, such follow-up experimental work is rare. Moreover, as Goldsmith (1992) indicated, many of the qualities generated through the inductive strategy index the interpretation of behaviors, or the evaluation of their outcomes, and not features of the messages producing the interpretation or outcome. An additional problem with most of the lists of message features generated inductively is their lack of internal coherence. No single principle, or group of principles, informs the features appearing in these lists. It is not uncommon for a single typology to contain categories referencing a diverse array of features, including specific message content, grammatical form, illocutionary point, functional outcome, recipient interpretation, assumed intentions, and recalled effects. Ultimately, many of the lists of characteristics generated through the inductive strategy provide little principled basis for distinguishing effective from ineffective support efforts.

Whereas the inductive strategy seeks to generate features that distinguish more and less effective support efforts directly from message data, the deductive strategy seeks to test specific hypotheses about the features of more and less effective messages derived from particular theories of emotional support. More specifically, researchers using the deductive strategy proceed by (a) deducing from a specific theory of emotional support features that effective and ineffective messages should possess, (b) obtaining (or generating) samples of messages with the theoretically derived features, and (c) conducting an experiment that assesses whether the theoretically better and worse messages are evaluated as such by appropriate judges. Alternatively, researchers may examine whether messages (typically obtained through retrospective self reports) exhibiting theoretically specified features were judged by their recipients in the predicted manner. In either case, the critical features of more and less effective messages are derived from a theory of effective emotional support. The deductive strategy has been less widely used than its inductive counterpart but has been effectively employed by several research groups to test theoretical models of effective emotional support (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1985a; MacGeorge, Lichtman, et al., 2002; Reisman & Yamokoski, 1974; Tardy, 1994).

The deductive strategy is powerful but has several limitations. First, it provides a narrow examination of support messages. Researchers employing this strategy consider only those features of messages made relevant by a particular theory. Although this has the virtue of ensuring that specific message features are subjected to detailed scrutiny, it is easy to overlook relevant features of messages not specified by the particular theory. Second, most of the research designs available for testing hypotheses about the features of more and less effective messages impose specific methodological requirements (e.g., randomization of participants to experimental conditions, manipulation of specific message features, control of extraneous variables such as relationship factors). These, in turn, lead to the use of procedures (e.g., evaluation of messages in hypothetical situations) that, although methodologically rigorous, may lack realism and thus raise questions about external validity. Third, the theories of emotional support from which message features are derived must be clear, precise, and specific if they are to generate testable hypotheses; few such theories are currently available. Finally, it is essential that research employing the deductive strategy carefully validate the operationalization of the message features suggested by theory; if the messages employed in studies do not validly embody the qualities implied by the relevant theory, the research will have little value.

## Paradigms in Research on More and Less Effective Forms of Emotional Support

Logically, the three tasks of message generation, evaluation, and description are independent of one another, so it is conceivable that emotional support researchers could combine different procedures for each task in developing approaches to message assessment. In practice, however, four research paradigms have emerged in the effort to assess the effectiveness of supportive messages, with each paradigm exhibiting a particular combination of practices with respect to message generation, evaluation, and description. (For a detailed review of these paradigms, their strengths, and their limitations, see Burleson & MacGeorge, in press.)

**The Naturalistic Paradigm.** The most frequently used approach is what Dunkel-Schetter et al. (1992) termed the *naturalistic paradigm*. Participants in such research typically include those coping with some acute stressor (e.g., death of a child) or chronic stressor (e.g., suffering from a serious medical condition or providing care to someone suffering from such a condition). Responding to oral interviews or written questionnaires, these participants are asked to provide retrospective self-reports regarding “helpful” and “unhelpful” messages they have received from others. A study by Lehman and his colleagues (Lehman et al., 1986) provides a particularly poignant exemplar of this paradigm; in this study, 94 people who had lost either a spouse or child in a car wreck were asked to describe support attempts from others that the participants recalled as being either particularly helpful or unhelpful. Inductively derived coding systems were used to classify the helpful and unhelpful support efforts into several categories.

**The Interaction Analysis Paradigm.** A second approach focuses on conversations by couples (often spouses, sometimes friends) in a laboratory in which one member describes a current stressor while the other listens and comments. These interactions are typically recorded and then subsequently transcribed and coded for varied forms of emotional support, with frequencies of supportive acts then correlated with outcomes of interest. A study by Winstead and her colleagues (1992) exhibits a variant of the interaction analysis paradigm. Participants in this study interacted in a lab setting with a partner (either a friend or a stranger) while planning to engage in a stressful task (giving an extemporaneous speech that would be videotaped and shown to others). The interactions were recorded and subsequently coded for the occurrence of emotion-focused and problem-focused supportive behaviors; frequencies in each category of behavior were correlated with several participant outcomes, including reductions in negative affect, performance on the speaking task, and perceived social support.

**The Message Perception Paradigm.** In a third approach, researchers present participants with sets of supportive messages (either in lists or embedded in constructed conversations) and have participants evaluate these messages on certain criteria (e.g., effectiveness, sensitivity, helpfulness). For example, Samter and her colleagues (1987) had participants read conversations (putatively occurring between two college students, but actually written by researchers) in which a helper exhibited a low, moderate, or high level of person-centered comforting; participants subsequently evaluated both the message and helper on a variety of dimensions.

**The Experimental Paradigm.** In the fourth approach, researchers use varied procedures to induce stress or upset (typically of a mild sort) in participants. Participants are

then exposed to supportive messages generated by the researcher, an experimental confederate, or another participant; subsequently, a postexposure assessment of relevant outcomes (e.g., change in emotional state) is obtained. Tardy (1994) employed a simple version of this paradigm in several studies in which participants were assigned to complete a challenging anagram task under stressful conditions. In each study, an experimental assistant produced brief messages designed to convey no support, emotional support, instrumental support, or both forms of support. Task performance and participant ratings of perceived experimenter supportiveness served as dependent variables in this study.

## Summary

Each of the four message assessment paradigms provides distinctive and valuable information. The naturalistic and interaction analysis paradigms are quite rich and generate numerous instances of “real-world” supportive messages, allowing researchers to see those messages at work in actual supportive interactions. Unfortunately, these two paradigms typically do not provide much information about the precise features of effective emotional support. Most often, applications of these paradigms use inductive methods of message analysis that result in only surface descriptions of message content. More problematic, the internal validity of most studies generated within these paradigms is suspect; it is often unclear what specific features of messages caused particular outcomes. The message perception and experimental paradigms are useful for testing well-developed models of message effectiveness because researchers manipulate the messages employed in these studies to instantiate certain theoretically based qualities (e.g., person centeredness, face support). However, the external validity of the findings generated through these two latter paradigms remains a concern; it is uncertain how well the findings of these studies will generalize to real-world settings. Because all assessment procedures have limitations, the best evidence regarding the effectiveness and outcomes of different messages is obtained through triangulation or use of multiple methods.

## PROPERTIES OF MORE AND LESS EFFECTIVE FORMS OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL ACCOUNTS

The four research paradigms have generated a rich body of findings regarding the properties of more and less effective emotional support efforts. In this section, I first summarize findings generated by this research; other reviews of these and related findings are available in several sources (Burleson, 1994b; Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Burleson & MacGeorge, in press; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000; Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1992; Goldsmith, 1994). Next, I synthesize these findings to elaborate a model for the effective provision of helpful emotional support. I then consider whether what counts as sensitive, effective emotional support varies as a function of demographic and cultural factors.

### Some Distinguishing Features of More and Less Effective Messages Intended to Provide Emotional Support

**Features of Helpful Messages.** There is near consensus regarding several features of helpful, effective emotional support efforts. Research conducted within each of the

four methodological paradigms converges in demonstrating that messages expressing positive helper intent, feeling, and commitment are perceived by both targets and observers as helpful. More specifically, messages are perceived (or experienced) as providing functional emotional support when the helper (a) clearly expresses the desire to help or provide support ("I really want to help with this"); (b) expresses acceptance, love, positive regard, and affection for the target ("You mean the world to me"); (c) expresses concern, care, and interest about the target's current situation ("I'm really concerned about you and this situation"); (d) expresses his or her availability to the target ("I'll be right here any time you need me"); and (e) expresses alliance with the target ("I'm with you 100% on this"). These qualities are appreciated by targets and experienced as helpful across a broad array of circumstances, stressors, and emotional states (Barbee, Derlega, et al., 1998; Caplan & Samter, 1999; Chesler & Barbarin, 1984; Cramer, 1990; Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Dunkel-Schetter, 1984; Goldsmith, 1994; Lehman et al., 1986; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990; Range et al., 1992; Sullivan, 1996).

Most messages that express acknowledgement, comprehension, and understanding of the target's feelings and situation are also experienced as helpful. In particular, messages that convey a genuine sense of connection and understanding are perceived as sensitive and helpful, as are messages that express sincere sympathy, sorrow, or condolence (Burleson, 1994b; Burleson & Samter, 1985a; Jones & Burleson, 1997; Samter et al., 1987). However, helpers must be cautious about how they express their comprehension and understanding of the target's feelings and situation. Claims by helpers that they "totally understand" what the target is feeling, know exactly what the target is going through, or have felt exactly what the target is feeling are often experienced as unhelpful—and are not appreciated—by targets (Barker & Lemle, 1984; Dunkel-Schetter, 1984; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990).

Statements by helpers that legitimize the target's feelings (and sometimes actions) typically are experienced as quite helpful. Such legitimizing efforts may take a variety of forms, including (a) assertions that the feelings, actions, or response of the target are understandable or reasonable; (b) comments that the target's feelings are normal or appropriate to the situation; (c) expressions of appreciation for the target's plight or for difficulty of the situation ("This has to be so hard!"); (d) expressions of absolution, especially that the target is not at fault for the situation ("No one could have seen this coming; there's nothing you could have done"); and (e) assurances that the expression of distressed feelings is allowable, understandable, and not subject to censure (Burleson, 1994b; Burleson & Samter, 1985a; Jones & Burleson, 1997; Samter et al., 1987).

Another class of helpful statements encourages the target to talk about and elaborate on the problematic situation and his or her feelings. This class includes (a) statements that convey interest in listening and encourage targets to "tell their stories" (Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1992; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990; Range et al., 1992); (b) encouragement to express and explore feelings about, and reactions to, the problem (Barbee, 1990; Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Burleson, 1994b; Burleson & Samter, 1985a; Cutrona, Cohen, & Ingram, 1990); (c) open-ended questions about the target's feelings and emotional reactions (Elliott, 1985; Greenberg, Rice, & Elliott, 1993); (d) hypotheses about what the target may have felt ("Oh my! I'll bet you felt awful about that!"; Coupland, Coupland, & Giles, 1991); (e) reflections or restatements of the target's emotive expressions ("So, you got mad when he refused to talk about it"; Elliott, 1985; Greenberg et al., 1993); and (f) conversational acknowledgements and continuers ("mmhmm," "yes," "uh-huh," "and then?") that encourage further or extended elaboration (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). Although most studies substantiate

the helpfulness of statements encouraging targets to disclose and elaborate of their feelings, a study by Clark and Delia (1997) found that targets preferred messages that allowed them to determine whether to discuss the upsetting situation and their feelings about it.

The helpfulness of statements pertaining to the problematic situation, especially offers of information and advice, is contingent on numerous factors. Open-ended questions about the problem situation, particularly those encouraging targets to "tell their story" about troubling events, tend to be viewed as helpful (Elliott, 1985); however, it is important that targets not be made to feel that they are being subjected to the "third degree" (see Tracy, 2002). Sharing information about the problem is experienced as helpful, provided the target perceives the information as relevant (Cutrona, 1990; Cutrona, Suhr, & MacFarlane, 1990; Lakey & Cohen, 2000) and the source as an expert (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1992; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990). Providing advice about how to manage aspects of the problem is a risky enterprise that frequently backfires; advice may be viewed as helpful (Barnett & Harris, 1984; Sullivan, 1996), but is also regularly identified as a feature of unhelpful supportive efforts (see the review by Goldsmith, 1994). Recent research (Caplan & Samter, 1999; MacGeorge, Lichtman, et al., 2002) indicates that advice is most likely to be viewed as helpful if it is presented in a "face-supportive" way (i.e., in a manner that conveys positive regard and respects the target's autonomy). In addition, advice is likely to be viewed as helpful if it is judged to be sound (i.e., contains proposals that will solve the problem), implementable, and without significant disadvantages (MacGeorge, Feng, et al., 2002).

Several other common forms of emotional support elicit mixed reactions. Efforts to reassure the target, particularly through assertions that "everything will work out," are occasionally perceived as helpful, but often are experienced as insensitive and unhelpful (Dunkel-Schetter, 1984; Lehman et al., 1986; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990). Similarly, assertions that the "worst is over," "things are improving," and there is "reason for optimism" are viewed as both helpful and unhelpful, depending on circumstance (Clark et al., 1998). Finally, efforts aimed at distracting the target's attention from the upsetting situation appear to be helpful in limited circumstances (Clark et al., 1998; Costanza, Derlega, & Winstead, 1988; Winstead & Derlega, 1991; Winstead et al., 1992) but often are experienced as invalidating and unhelpful (e.g., Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Burleson, 1994b; Jones & Burleson, 1997). Given the mixed outcomes associated with these emotional support strategies, helpers probably should avoid using them unless they are quite confident about their appropriateness in a particular situation.

**Features of Unhelpful Messages.** Whereas message features such as advice, distraction, and reassurance have mixed or variable effects, some features of support efforts have consistently been found to be unhelpful or dysfunctional. Not surprisingly, condemnation or criticism of the target's feelings (or the target's expression of those feelings) leads the list of counterproductive support efforts (Burleson & Samter, 1985a; Elliott, 1985; Samter et al., 1987). Particularly dysfunctional support strategies include (a) telling targets that their feelings (or expressions) are wrong, inappropriate, immature, or embarrassing; (b) asserting that the target is behaving badly ("You're making a fool of yourself by acting like this"); and (c) ordering the target to cease affect displays ("Calm down! And stop your crying!").

Another dysfunctional strategy involves assertions that state or imply the target's feelings are unwarranted or illegitimate (Clark & Stephens, 1996; Dakof & Taylor,

1990; Lehman et al., 1986; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990). Included here are (a) minimization of the target's feelings ("It's not that big of a thing; this kind of thing happens all the time"); (b) denigration of the object or source of the target's feelings ("I thought he was a jerk anyway; you're better off without him"); (c) indicating that the target's responsibility for the situation makes his or her distress illegitimate ("If you don't study for a test, then don't whine when you flunk it"); (d) implying that target incompetence is responsible for the problem ("Well, you've never been good at math"); (e) asserting that the expression of feelings is not functional ("You're only upsetting yourself by carrying on like this"); and (f) claiming that the provoking problem is small or easily solved, so that upset is not appropriate ("Hey, chill out. We can get you another cat").

Imperatives asserting how the target should think or feel about the upsetting situation have also been found to be ineffective, if not dysfunctional (Barker & Lemle, 1984; Burleson, 1994b; Goldsmith, 1994; Lehman et al., 1986). Equally problematic (and ineffective) are assertions encouraging the target to forget about the problematic situation, to ignore his or her feelings about that situation, or to think about happier things.

An extended focus by the helper on his or her own feelings about the current situation, or about a similar situation in the past, tends to be resented by targets and is unhelpful at improving their affect (Barker & Lemle, 1984; Lehman et al., 1986; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990). Finally, several studies (Clark & Stephens, 1996; Coyne et al., 1988; Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Lehman et al., 1986; Sullivan, 1996) have found it is unhelpful for helpers to exhibit "overinvolvement, intrusiveness, oversolicitousness, and overconcern" (Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1992, p. 97). These behaviors are not only ineffective at providing emotional support, they have detrimental consequences for the social relationship between the helper and target.

## **Explaining the Effects of Emotional Support Efforts: Toward a Comprehensive Model of the Emotional Support Process**

Knowing why particular efforts are effective or ineffective at providing support is just as important as knowing what outcomes are associated with particular efforts. Several theoretical accounts for the effects of different support strategies have been proposed in recent years, including Cutrona's (1990) optimal matching model, Barbee and Cunningham's (1995) sensitive interactions system theory, and Burleson and Goldsmith's (1998) theory of conversationally induced cognitive reappraisals. (For review and critique of the "Rogerian" or "therapeutic conditions" theoretical account of emotional support, see Burleson, 1994b.)

***The Optimal Matching Model.*** As proposed by Cutrona and her colleagues (Cutrona, 1990; Cutrona et al., 1990; Cutrona & Russell, 1990), the optimal matching model (OMM) holds that the type of support offered must be *relevant* to the particular stressor experienced by the target if it is to be effective. According to this view, each stressful circumstance places specific demands on the affected individual; hence, effective support is that which responds appropriately to the demands of a particular stressful circumstance. More specifically, emotional upset is effectively addressed by emotional support, informational needs are addressed effectively by informational support, esteem needs are addressed effectively by esteem support, and so forth.

Despite its intuitive appeal, the OMM has not fared well empirically (see the review and critique by Burleson & MacGeorge, *in press*). Several conceptual problems contribute to the theoretical and predictive inadequacies of the OMM. For example, many stressors are complex, creating multiple needs for those affected by them (e.g., the loss of a job may produce emotional distress and the loss of self-esteem as well as financial problems and the need for information about employment opportunities). More problematic is the assumption of functional equivalence among messages of a “type” relevant to the stressor. As we have seen, many different messages can be equally relevant to a stressor (e.g., expressions of sympathy to someone suffering a bereavement) but differ dramatically in other important ways (e.g., the sensitivity with which sympathy is conveyed). In sum, the OMM is inadequate because it maintains that a single message feature—relevance—is sufficient to distinguish more and less effective emotional support efforts (or more and less effective informational support efforts, etc.); the OMM fails to provide any theoretical explanation about how and why the features of different, equally relevant emotional support efforts produce characteristic outcomes.

**Sensitive Interactions System Theory.** Barbee and Cunningham’s (1995) analysis of support strategies (or, what they term *interactive coping behaviors*) is one part of their larger sensitive interaction system theory (SIST), which seeks to describe how contextual, personal, and relational factors influence support seeking, provision, and outcomes (also see Barbee, Lawrence, & Cunningham, 1998). These researchers developed a typology of supportive behaviors by crossing two conceptual dimensions of the coping process: approach versus avoid and problem focus versus emotion focus. That is, when confronting someone in need of assistance, a potential helper can either approach or avoid that situation and, furthermore, can focus on either the emotional or instrumental features of the situation. Crossing these two dimensions gives rise to a four category typology of support strategies: *solace* behaviors (approach-based, emotion-focused responses intended to elicit positive emotions and express closeness); *solve* behaviors (approach-based, problem-focused responses designed to find an answer to the distressing situation); *escape* behaviors (avoidance-based, emotion-focused responses that discourage the experience and expression of negative emotion); and *dismiss* behaviors (avoidance-based, problem-focused responses that minimize the significance of the problem) (Cunningham & Barbee, 2000, p. 279). Barbee and her colleagues have found in several studies (e.g., Barbee, 1990; Yankeelov et al., 1995) that solve and, especially, solace behaviors are functional in support contexts, whereas dismiss and escape behaviors are not (see reviews by Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Barbee, Lawrence, et al., 1998; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000).

SIST represents an advance over the OMM in that it provides a somewhat more differentiated analysis of support messages. However, as Goldsmith (1995) indicated, the SIST analysis of message features remains seriously underspecified; for example, all “solace” strategies are regarded as equivalent by SIST. Furthermore, SIST provides little or no theoretical explanation about why particular messages produce the effects they do. Thus, within the purview of this theory, it is difficult to see just how effective emotional support is actually accomplished.

**Toward an Integrative Model of the Emotional Support Process: A Theory of Conversationally Induced Reappraisals.** Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) developed an account of the emotional support process grounded in appraisal theories of emotional

experience (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1996). Appraisal theories maintain that emotional reactions are a product of the evaluations (or appraisals) people make of external events in the context of their currently relevant life goals. Thus, affective distress results when people appraise a situation or event as relevant to, but incongruent with, current goals. Change in emotional states (e.g., feeling better about things) can be brought about through altering features of the problem situation (problem-focused coping) or modifying appraisals (or goals) associated with the upsetting event (emotion-focused coping). On this view, the chief objective of most emotional support efforts becomes facilitating the target's cognitive reappraisal of the problematic situation.

Helpers cannot directly change a target's appraisal of a situation; rather, they can only facilitate the target's own reappraisal of the situation. Burleson and Goldsmith underscored that facilitating such cognitive reappraisals is not usually something that can be accomplished through single, brief messages. Rather, effective emotional support requires an extended process in which helpers foster target reappraisals through multiturn (and sometimes multiepisode) conversational interactions. Drawing from a variety of literatures, including appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991), cognitive analyses of coping processes (Clark, 1993; Harber & Pennebaker, 1992), client-centered psychotherapy (Greenberg et al., 1993; Rogers, 1957), person-centered approaches to comforting (Burleson, 1994b), and conversational analyses of "troubles talk" (Jefferson, 1984, 1988), Burleson and Goldsmith propose that target reappraisals of problematic situations are most likely to be induced by conversational interactions in which the target articulates extended, emotion-focused narratives about the upsetting situation. The articulation, repetition, and refinement of such narratives assists the target in understanding and making sense of the situation and, in so doing, developing more functional (i.e., less distress-producing) appraisals of that situation.

Burleson and Goldsmith tied features of many effective emotional support efforts (as detailed in the previous section of this chapter) to the facilitation of such sense-making, reappraisal-promoting narratives. In particular, such narratives appear to be fostered by three broad classes of helper behavior. First, helpers need to *create and then sustain a supportive conversational environment*, an interactional context in which painful and upsetting matters can be safely discussed. Helpers contribute to the establishment and maintenance of such environments by (a) developing a trusting atmosphere (through the expression of their affection, availability, concern, and supportive intentions), (b) fostering the expression and discussion of emotional states (through "facework" and "person-centered" message forms that acknowledge, elaborate, and legitimize the target's feelings; see Burleson, 1994b; Goldsmith, 1994), (c) monitoring and managing the target's level of emotional arousal (by encouraging venting, physical activity, and sometimes redirection of attention), and (d) maintaining a secure conversational setting (by controlling distractions, interruptions, and other disturbances). Second, helpers can *foster the target's discussion of his or her emotions* by identifying and pursuing particular conversational topics, especially the target's feelings about and reactions to the problematic situation. Helpers contribute to the discussion of suitable topics through questions about the troubling situation and the target's feelings and interpretations, hypotheses about these feelings, and assurances that the expression and discussion of feelings is appropriate. Third, helpers can *facilitate the target's elaboration of reappraisal-inducing narratives* by encouraging the target to take extended conversational turns. Helpers can promote extended turns and elaborated narratives through open-ended questions about the

problematic situation, follow-up questions, encouraging the target to take his or her time and tell “the whole story,” and verbal and nonverbal conversational continuers (acknowledgements, head nods, and expressions such as “yes,” “uh-huh”). Helpers also foster extended target narratives when they avoid giving strongly worded advice or expressing their evaluation of the situation.

Burleson and Goldsmith’s theory of conversationally induced reappraisals provides a comprehensive, integrated explanation for the effects of more and less helpful emotional support efforts. It also provides a parsimonious account of the mechanism—cognitive reappraisal—through which supportive behaviors have their effects. This theory is consistent with what is known about effective (and ineffective) emotional support forms, especially the use of facework and person-centered comforting strategies. Moreover, this theory suggests some novel hypotheses and directions for future research (see Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998, pp. 274–275). Thus far, however, this theory has not been evaluated by research directed at testing its specific predictions, and so its ultimate value remains to be determined.

A more specific limitation of this theory is that it does not currently consider how facilitating problem-focused coping may contribute to improved affect. For example, it seems likely that targets may be helped to feel better when assisted by problem-focused coping (or planning) that (a) stimulates future-oriented thinking through prompts and open-ended questions (“So, what do you think you are going to do about this?”), (b) facilitates the generation and evaluation of alternatives (through brainstorming and questions about the consequences associated with different alternatives), and (c) occasionally offers information, opinions, and advice in a face-supportive and nondirective manner. Recent research (Goldsmith, 2000; MacGeorge, Feng, et al., 2002) shows that information and advice are especially appreciated by the target when solicited. In addition, some reasoning suggests that these more instrumental efforts will be maximally efficacious after targets have had an opportunity to work through their feelings about a problem situation (Burleson, 1994b; Jacobson, 1986). This hypothesis, and many others, need systematic evaluation in future research.

## Uniformity and Diversity in Perceptions of Effective Emotional Support

Research highlighting the features and effects of various emotional support efforts raises an important question: Is what counts as sensitive, effective emotional support the same for everybody, or does it differ as a function of demographic and cultural factors? A related question concerns whether members of different social groups (sexes, ethnicities, nationalities) have equal expectations of emotional support from close relationship partners and equally value their skill in providing such. Increasing research has examined these questions in recent years, much of it stimulated by claims that members of different social groups differ substantially in how they orient to emotion in close relationships and what they regard as more and less supportive forms of behavior (a comprehensive review of this research appears in Burleson, in press).

***Similarities and Differences in the Value Placed on Emotional Support Skills in Close Relationships.*** A popular thesis for the last 20 years has been that men and women think about relationships—especially close relationships such as friendships, romance, and marriage—in fundamentally different ways. In particular, proponents of the “gender-as-culture,” “separate cultures,” or “different cultures” thesis (e.g.,

Johnson, 1989; Kyratzis & Guo, 1996; Tannen, 1990; Wood, 1993) maintain that women value close relationships for their emotional and expressive qualities, whereas men chiefly conceptualize close relationships in terms of their instrumental features. According to this perspective, girls are taught that talk is the primary vehicle through which intimacy and connectedness are created and maintained (Maltz & Borker, 1982), and thus should especially value communication skills associated with the provision of emotional support. Boys, on the other hand, are socialized to view talk as a mechanism for getting things done, for accomplishing instrumental tasks, for conveying information, and for maintaining one's autonomy (Wood & Inman, 1993) and should thus especially value instrumental communication skills such as informing, persuading, and entertaining.

These claims have been evaluated in several studies comparing men's and women's valuing of partners' emotional support skills, as well as their valuing of partner skill in more instrumental forms of communication (e.g., informing, persuading). These studies are remarkably uniform in their findings, even though they have employed varied samples (college students, older adults) and different relationship contexts (siblings, same-sex friends, opposite-sex friends, romantic partners, spouses). Consistently, these studies have found that participants—both men and women—placed the highest value on their partners' emotional support (ego-support and comforting) skills (Burleson et al., 1996; Griffiths & Burleson, 1995; MacGeorge, 1998; Myers & Knox, 1998; Westmyer & Myers, 1996). Indeed, both men and women reliably view partners' emotional support skills as substantially more important than their instrumental skills. Some small gender differences were found in most of these studies, with women rating emotional support skills as slightly more important than did men, and men rating some interactional and instrumental skills as slightly more important than did women. But these sex differences were small and existed within much larger patterns of similarity. In sum, these studies suggest that men and women place similar value on emotional support from partners in various relationships.

Another group of studies have examined whether there are differences in the importance accorded emotional support skills as a function of ethnicity or nationality. There is some basis for thinking that certain cultural groups do not accord emotional support processes the same status as do most White Americans and Europeans. Research exploring cultural differences in emotion (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Mesquita, 2001) suggests that people from more collectivist cultures (such as African Americans and Chinese) are less likely to be comfortable dealing with the personal ego needs and emotional states of others than are more individualist European Americans; this may lead members of collectivist cultures to place a lower value on emotional support skills than do members of individualist cultures. Consistent with this reasoning, one study (Samter & Burleson, 1998) found that African Americans placed lower value than either Asian Americans or European Americans on most partner communication skills, especially emotional support skills, and this was particularly true for African American women. However, another study (Mortenson & Burleson, 2002) compared the communication skill evaluations of Chinese and American college students with respect to same-sex friends; Chinese and Americans did not differ in their evaluations of friends' emotional support skills, with both groups valuing these skills more strongly than the instrumental skills of their friends. A third study (Xu & Burleson, 2001) found that both Chinese and American married individuals viewed emotional support as the most important type of social support provided by their spouses.

Overall, the limited research examining evaluations of partners' communication skills by different sexes, ethnicities, and nationalities indicates that emotional support occupies a preeminent place in close relationships across cultures. Thus, these data raise some question about whether cultural values such as individualism and collectivism influence people's conceptions of and expectations for close relationships, particularly with respect to the import of emotional support from partners.

***Similarities and Differences in Evaluations of Emotional Support Strategies.*** Finding that different groups view emotional support as equally important in close relationships does not mean that these groups will experience the same sorts of messages as equally supportive. Indeed, distinct social groups may view specific support messages quite divergently and have very different beliefs about which message forms do the best job of providing support. For example, the "gender-as-culture" view maintains that men and women should have very different ideas about "effective, sensitive" comforting messages—views that flow from different implicit theories of emotion and emotion change. Specifically, this viewpoint maintains that women should strongly endorse highly person-centered messages that explicitly elaborate and explore a distressed person's feelings (Tannen, 1990; Wood, 1997). In contrast, men are predicted to prefer less person-centered messages that avoid discussion of feelings and focus on either fixing the problematic situation or redirecting attention away from that situation.

Despite the popularity of the different cultures view in both lay circles and some sectors of the scholarly community, its predictions have not received much empirical support (see reviews by Burleson, 1997, in press; Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997; Kunkel & Burleson, 1998). For example, several studies employing the message perception paradigm have found remarkably little difference between men and women in the emotional support strategies they perceive as most (and least) sensitive and effective (Burleson & Samter, 1985b; Jones & Burleson, 1997; Kunkel & Burleson, 1999; Samter et al., 1987). These studies consistently indicate that although women perceive highly person-centered messages as slightly more helpful than do men, and men perceive messages low in person-centered qualities as slightly more helpful than do women, both sexes view highly "person-centered" messages as most the sensitive and effective means of emotional support. These findings are extended by the results of a recent experimental study (Jones & Burleson, 2002) that found men and women who revealed emotional upsets in informal discussions were both best comforted by highly person-centered messages. Such results clearly contradict the different-cultures perspective. Men and women have largely similar ideas about what messages do a better and worse job of reducing emotional distress; both believe that the explicit elaboration and exploration of feelings is the best way to provide comfort to another and are themselves most comforted by such messages.

Several recent studies have also explored whether there are ethnic and national differences in beliefs about the character of effective emotional support. One study (Samter, Whaley, Mortenson, & Burleson, 1997) found that level of person centeredness exhibited by comforting messages accounted for substantially more variance in the message evaluations of European Americans (74%) than in the evaluations of Asian Americans (45%) or African Americans (32%). These results suggest some degree of cultural difference in beliefs about the character of effective emotional support, with European Americans believing more strongly than other ethnic groups that explicit talk about distressed feelings will help improve the other's affective

state. More recently, Burleson and Mortenson (*in press*) found that although both Americans and Chinese rated highly person-centered comforting strategies superior to their less person-centered counterparts, Chinese viewed messages low in person centeredness as much more sensitive than did Americans, whereas Americans viewed messages high in person centeredness as somewhat more sensitive than did Chinese. Similar results were obtained in this study for Barbee and Cunningham's (1995) typology of support strategies: Both Americans and Chinese rated escape and dismiss strategies as much less appropriate than solve and solace strategies; however, Chinese viewed the "avoidance" strategies of escape and dismiss as somewhat more appropriate than did Americans.

In sum, both similarities and differences have been observed in how men and women, Blacks and Whites, and Americans and Chinese evaluate emotional support efforts, with the differences typically situated within larger patterns of similarity. Overall, the greatest amount of variance in participants' evaluations of support behaviors was explained by the nature of the behavior evaluated, and not by gender or culture. Members of all social groups view solace strategies or highly person-centered comforting messages as the most sensitive and effective ways to provide emotional support. This finding is important because it suggests broad similarities in how distressing situations are interpreted by people from different cultural backgrounds, as well as similarities in the evaluation of different approaches to remedying another's distress. These data are also consistent with research indicating that there are transcultural and transgender similarities in emotional experiences, as well as in the circumstances that provoke certain emotions and lead to emotional change (Lazarus, 1994; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994).

## **Summary**

Research investigating the properties of effective emotional support efforts has documented several message features that reliably distinguish more and less helpful messages. Much of this research underscores the multifaceted character of emotional support. Like most sophisticated communication competencies, emotional support is not a singular skill, but a complex of interrelated skill components. Thus, providing sensitive emotional support requires the mastery of several skill clusters, including creating and maintaining a supportive conversational environment, prompting feeling-centered disclosures, facilitating the elaboration of sense-making narratives, and fostering reflective thinking and problem solving. Significantly, what counts as sensitive and effective emotional support is largely the same for most people, at least for the social groups examined thus far.

Although much has been learned about the properties of effective emotional support, much also remains to be learned. Future research should seek to further specify features of both helpful and unhelpful support efforts. In addition, scholars in this area need to develop a more detailed understanding of the structure and process of support episodes, as well as articulate and test more refined theoretical accounts about why various features of emotional support messages have characteristic effects.

## **INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SKILLS**

Both casual observation and systematic research indicate that some people consistently employ sensitive, effective forms of emotional support, whereas other, equally well-intentioned helpers regularly employ less effective forms. In other words, some

people are more skillful than others when it comes to providing helpful emotional support. Why? What attributes, qualities, and characteristics of individuals distinguish providers of more and less helpful forms of emotional support? Addressing this question may help us to isolate and understand some of the prerequisites for skillfulness in this area, thereby perhaps improving our capacity to enhance emotional support skills.

## Age, Sex, and Class Differences in Emotional Support Skills

A variety of studies have found emotional support skills associated with demographic factors such as age, social class, and sex. Numerous studies have found varied aspects of emotional support skill to increase with age, at least through early adulthood (e.g., Burleson, 1982; Clinton & Hancock, 1991; Denton & Zarbatany, 1996; Hoffner & Haefner, 1997). Women are regularly found to exhibit more sophisticated emotional support skills than men, though the magnitude of this sex difference is modest in most studies (e.g., Goldsmith & Dun, 1997; Hale, Tighe, & Mongeau, 1997; MacGeorge, Clark, & Gillihan, 2002; Samter, 2002). Finally, some limited evidence indicates that those from advantaged socioeconomic circumstances display somewhat more sophisticated emotional support skills (e.g., Applegate, Burke, Burleson, Delia, & Kline, 1985; Matthews, Stansfeld, & Power, 1999; Rothbaum, 1988).

Most explanations for demographic differences in emotional support skill invoke the mechanisms of maturation and socialization. Emotional support skills are thought to increase with age (at least through early adulthood) because of age-related developments in underlying cognitive abilities, as well as the acquisition of relevant social experience (Burleson, 1984b; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Losoya, 1997). Although some suggest that sex differences in emotional support skill may be due to biological (i.e., genetic) factors (Matthews, Batson, Horn, & Rosenman, 1981; Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, & Emde, 1992), most scholars treat these sex differences as a function of differential socialization patterns (see Kunkel & Burleson, 1998). In many societies (both Eastern and Western), women are expected to be the primary source of nurturance and emotional support. These expectations lead to somewhat different social experiences, with women having more opportunities to practice nurturance and emotional support than men, and getting greater social reinforcements for doing so (e.g., MacGeorge, Clark, et al., 2002; Saurer & Eisler, 1990). Somewhat similarly, members of advantaged social classes develop within a culture that is more centered on the psychological and affective characteristics of differentiated individuals (see Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995; Dekovic & Gerris, 1992). This focus (and to some, preoccupation) with individual feelings and perspectives leads to a variety of experiences over the course of primary socialization that foster the development of emotional support skills. In particular, children from more advantaged social classes are more likely than those from less advantaged classes to have been exposed to socializing agents (both parents and peers) that regularly discuss the emotions and motivations of others in a way that promotes social-cognitive development (Dunn, 1998). These socializing agents are also likely to model the use of highly person-centered, feeling-focused forms of emotional support (Burleson & Kunkel, 1996; Eisenberg, 1998).

In sum, most explanations for demographic differences in emotional support skills point to differences in underlying cognitive, motivational, and experiential factors associated with age, social class, and sex. Consistent with these theoretical accounts,

substantial research (e.g., Applegate et al., 1985; Burleson, 1984a; Samter, 2002) has found support for the hypothesis that demographic differences in emotional support skills are mediated by several psychological factors, especially certain motivational and cognitive variables. Thus, I next examine these more proximate sources of individual differences in support skills.

## Cognitive and Motivational Correlates of Emotional Support Skill

Theorists agree that the production of sophisticated, effective emotional support messages is a demanding task dependent on both competence and performance factors (Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Burleson & Kunkel, 1996; Feeney & Collins, 2001; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Competence factors reference knowledge or abilities needed to produce sophisticated, effective forms of emotional support, and include a variety of social perception and message generation skills. Performance factors related to individuals include the motivation to be supportive, especially the desire and willingness to undertake the task of providing emotional support.

To date, most research addressing individual differences in emotional support skills has focused on motivational factors. Theoretically, individual differences in motivation should predict whether a potential helper undertakes the task of providing emotional support to a needy target, as well as how much effort the helper expends in so doing. Thus, motivational factors probably have their strongest effects on a helper's *likelihood* of providing support, the *quantity* of support provided, and the *persistence or duration* of supportive efforts, especially in the face of resistance or initial failure. Most motivational predictors fall in one of three categories reflecting the helper's (a) desire to provide emotional support to others, (b) sense of self-efficacy in support contexts (i.e., belief in one's ability to successfully comfort and support others), and (c) willingness to undertake the task of providing emotional support. Indices of *desire* found to predict aspects of emotional support include attachment style (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Weger & Polcar, 2002), emotional empathy, or the tendency to experience vicarious affective arousal (Tamborini & Bahk, 1993; Trobst, Collins, & Embree, 1994); prosocial orientation (Feeney & Collins, 2001); gender-role orientation (Burleson & Gilstrap, 2002; Winters & Waltman, 1997); and affiliative need (Hill, 1996). Indices of *self-efficacy* predictive of emotional support include locus of control orientation (Samter & Burleson, 1984) and self-efficacy for providing emotional support (Feeney & Collins, 2001; MacGeorge, Clark, et al., 2002). Indices of *willingness* associated with emotionally supportive behavior include dispositional anxiety and depression (Gurung, Sarason, & Sarason, 1997), extraversion (Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997), willingness to communicate (Samter & Burleson, 1984), and shyness (Eisenberg, Fabes, Karbon, & Murphy, 1996).

Motivational factors successfully predict whether a potential helper offers emotional support to a needy target, as well as how much support gets offered. However, motivational factors are not powerful predictors of the *quality* of a helper's emotional support messages. The sensitivity, helpfulness, effectiveness, and appropriateness of messages—in short, their quality with regard to both short- and long-term instrumental and relational outcomes—are best predicted by competence factors, especially those reflective of underlying cognitive abilities. High-quality comforting messages are complex forms of behavior that require sophisticated cognitive processes for their production. Contemporary models of message production (e.g., Berger, 1997; Greene, 1997) suggest that two sets of cognitive processes are integral in the fabrication of sophisticated message forms, those involved in the generation

of interaction goals and those involved in the generation of message designs or plans.

Goal generation is the process of forming (and reforming) specific interactional intentions for unfolding communicative encounters. Individuals generate goals through processes of interpretation in which they attend to and process information about the target (e.g., aspects of the others cognitive and emotional state), the social context (e.g., situationally relevant roles and rules), and the interactional setting (e.g., potential for privacy). Many emotional support situations are complex and make multiple demands on helpers. Helpers are most likely to provide effective support in these situations if they develop detailed cognitive representations of them—representations which inform the generation of goals sensitive to the multiple issues that need to be addressed. Consistent with this analysis, substantial research indicates that individual differences in social perception skills, especially interpersonal cognitive complexity and social perspective taking ability, are associated with the use of sophisticated, feeling-centered forms of emotional support (for reviews, see Burleson, 1985; Burleson & Caplan, 1998; Burleson & Kunkel, 1996).

Message design or planning is the process of generating message content appropriate to current interactional goals and situational constraints. In general, individuals are best able to generate message plans well suited to their goals and situation when they possess an extensive store of relevant procedural knowledge (i.e., knowledge of how to do things; see Berger, 1997; Greene, 1997). Consistent with this analysis, several studies have found that individuals with more extensive procedural memory stores relevant to providing emotional support are most likely to employ sensitive, person-centered messages when seeking to comfort distressed others (e.g., Applegate, 1980; Burleson, Waltman, & Samter, 1987).

## Summary

Individual differences in emotional support skills are associated with several demographic, motivational, and cognitive variables. Our understanding of the connections among these variables will be best facilitated by detailed models of the message production process. I recently proposed one such model (Burleson, 2002) in which sex differences in biology (e.g., genetic differences in temperament) and socialization (e.g., differences in interactional history) represent proximal influences on enduring differences in personality (e.g., attachment styles, prosocial values) and cognition (e.g., cognitive complexity). These enduring features of the person interact with contextual factors in generating both a situated interpretation of a specific event and a situated motivational–emotional response to that event. The situated interpretation and motivational–emotional response lead, in turn, to the formation of interaction goals, perhaps through processes such as those Wilson (1995) described. Goals activate planning or design processes (Berger, 1997; Greene, 1997), and these ultimately generate the articulated message. Comprehensive models of message production also need to consider how transient features of helpers (e.g., mood states), targets (e.g., responsibility for the problem), relationships (e.g., helper–target intimacy), and context (e.g., presence of others) affect the quality of emotional support efforts and the outcomes of those efforts (for a systematic consideration of these contextual influences in support contexts, see Burleson & MacGeorge, in press). The articulation, testing, and refinement of such models should enhance our theoretical understanding of individual differences in emotional support skills.

## **ENHANCING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SKILLS THROUGH TRAINING EFFORTS: RATIONALE AND SOME CRITICAL SKILLS**

One contribution of research on individual differences in support skills is in suggesting some of the skill domains that can be targeted by training efforts. For example, the preceding section implies that emotional support skills can be enhanced by developing social perception processes, emotional sensitivity, prosocial values, support self-efficacy, willingness to communicate, and aspects of procedural memory. But training efforts are time-consuming and expensive, as well as a waste of resources if they fail to target the most important facets of the skill to be developed. So, is there reason to think that people need training in emotional support skills? And if so, what aspects of these skills should receive greatest attention in training efforts?

### **A Rationale for Training: Some Challenges to Providing Support**

Diverse evidence suggests that many people would benefit from training in emotional support skills. People do not offer each other emotional support as often as they might, and when they do, much of what they offer is of poor quality. Indeed, an extensive research literature documents a widespread incidence of “support attempts that fail” (e.g., Lehman & Hemphill, 1990), “miscarried helping” (e.g., Coyne et al., 1988), “unsupportive responses” (e.g., Davis et al., 1991), and “cold comfort” (Burleson, 2000). These findings suggest the pervasiveness of inept efforts to provide emotional support. There are several reasons for such ineptitude.

First, providing emotional support to a distressed target is often a complicated, demanding endeavor. Appreciation of the complexities involved with providing support can lead to helpers feeling overwhelmed, resulting in inaction (“I want to help, but I just don’t know what to say”). Such frustrated inaction may also stem from the recognition that one can easily say “the wrong thing” when seeking to help an emotionally distraught target and that doing so can make a bad situation even worse (see Lehman et al., 1986).

Second, considerable research indicates that all phases of supportive interactions are filled with perils, pitfalls, paradoxes, and predicaments for both helpers and their targets. These problematics of supportive interactions stem from a variety of sources, including self-presentational dilemmas of targets and helpers, threats to independence inherent in seeking or offering support, social norms for expressing and managing negative affect, and more (see review by Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1994).

Third, many features of support situations increase the difficulty of providing support, even for skilled helpers. Factors such as target responsibility for the problem, apparent target need, type and intensity of target affect, and target responses to prior support efforts all influence the quality of the supportive behavior generated by the helper (for review of these factors, see Burleson & MacGeorge, *in press*). In particular, providing support means interacting with others who may be stressed, upset, anxious, and even out of control. Dealing with others who are in an aroused emotional state can be difficult even for those who possess well-developed support skills and frequently generates emotions in the helper (including anxiety, embarrassment, and depression) that interfere with the execution of cognitive processes associated with goal formation, plan generation, and behavior execution (Burleson & Planalp, 2000; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Darbon, 1994).

Fourth, most people do not receive explicit training in how to provide emotional support from either parents or teachers. Instead, the “instruction” they receive is informal and indirect, coming from the behavior of others. Unfortunately, many people are exposed to bad models—to parents, peers, teachers, and others who are themselves “challenged” when it comes to providing various forms of support—and thus perpetuate incompetence in this skill domain (Burleson & Kunkel, 1996; Eisenberg, 1998). Moreover, most people appear unlikely to develop sophisticated support skills through trial-and-error learning; these skills appear too complicated to be induced from personal experiences.

Fifth, exposure even to highly skilled models probably is not sufficient to develop true proficiency in the art of providing support. Support situations are among the most interpersonally complex events people face; to be successful in navigating their demands helpers need considerable facility in analyzing these situations, reasoning about behavioral alternatives, monitoring and managing their own cognitive and affective responses, executing chosen behaviors carefully, evaluating the impact of those behaviors, and modifying subsequent behavior appropriately. Simply observing successful (and unsuccessful) models is unlikely to develop all these requisite skills.

An increasing number of people appear to appreciate the challenges of providing emotional support, as well as their own lack of skill in this area. Responding to this demand, self-help books directed at improving emotional support skills have proliferated in recent years (e.g., Fujishin, 1998; Kolf, 1999; Zunin & Zunin, 1991). These may be valuable resources for their readers, although some are pessimistic about this (Forest, 1988). Some textbooks dealing with interpersonal communication have begun to provide treatments of support skills (e.g., Verderber & Verderber, 2001), but this is a recent development. Of course, numerous programs have been designed to enhance the emotional support skills of professional helpers (counselors, therapists, pastors), and these are suggestive of both skills that need to be fostered in everyday helpers and effective methods for doing so (e.g., Egan, 1990; Greenberg, 1993). However, most programs for professionals focus on providing support in therapeutic contexts to those suffering from serious psychoemotional pathologies (phobias, depression, paranoia, morbid grief) and thus have limited relevance to lay persons faced with more routine forms of emotional upset. There is, then, an apparent need for training efforts designed to enhance the emotional support skills of lay actors for the routine situations they regularly encounter.

## Training Support Skills: A Rhetorical Approach

The importance of emotional support skills in multiple domains of life, the complicated character of these skills, and the probability that few people “naturally” acquire proficiency in these skills suggest that most people would benefit from formal, sustained efforts directed at developing and enhancing these competencies. What should be included in the curriculum for such training efforts, and how should this curriculum be delivered? Comprehensive answers to these questions will require input from many sources, including communication researchers, educators, psychologists, professional helpers, community leaders, and others. For example, the research examining individual differences in emotional support skills suggests that any complete effort to enhance these skills will need to address the psychological competencies on which support skills rest, including person perception skills, social inference skills, affect recognition and understanding, arousal control, role-taking

skills, and so forth (Burleson, 1985). Adequate training efforts will also need to enhance normative systems and motivational orientations, including prosocial values, empathy, self-efficacy, and the willingness to communicate with those in need.

Developing such psychological competencies, norms, and motivational orientations is important but likely will not be sufficient to produce a competent provider of support. Helpers must also possess a repertoire of behavioral strategies and tactics through which knowledge of the target and situation can be integrated and effectively applied. Thus, potential helpers should particularly benefit from direct instruction in rhetorical strategies for providing emotional support. This should include training in what can be said in various situations to be supportive, as well as in the analytic skills needed to recognize the most appropriate thing to say in different situations or at different times in a particular situation. This instruction should enhance the procedural memory store from which helpers draw when generating supportive messages.

Training communication skills is a complicated matter (Segrin & Givertz, in press), and I can only address a few of the many relevant issues here. In what follows, I emphasize *what* to teach helpers to improve their rhetorical skills with respect to producing effective support messages. I do not discuss here *how* to teach these skills most effectively; this important matter awaits research that will warrant specific recommendations. Thus, I describe here several verbal strategies for pursuing three goals associated with effective emotional support efforts: conveying supportive intentions clearly, buffering threats to face inherent in supportive efforts, and facilitating the elaboration of sense-making narratives by targets through a person-centered approach to comforting. My hope is that these comments stimulate thinking about curricula for enhancing emotional support skills and the eventual development, testing, and refinement of detailed training programs.

***Expressing Supportive Intentions Clearly.*** Supportive intentions refer to the desire by the helper to provide aid or assistance to a target perceived as needing help. Recognition of the helper's supportive intentions should lead the target to comprehend that, at least in the context of the ongoing episode, the helper is concerned and wants to provide assistance. Appreciation of the helper's supportive intention should also establish an interpretive context for making sense of the helper's concurrent and subsequent actions (e.g., "I know he was trying to help even though some of the things he said hurt terribly"). Helpers' supportive intentions may be more or less *clear* (ranging from vaguely discernable to overtly obvious), *sincere* (ranging from mild to deep), and *pure* (combined with other intentional elements such as blame and avoidance or exclusively focused on providing help). How targets perceive these qualities of the helper's intentions almost certainly affects the process and outcomes of supportive interactions.

Most often, helpers' supportive intentions are not made explicit in discourse, but rather are "read off" or inferred from their behavior. There are, however, several reasons why helpers should attempt to make their supportive intentions as explicitly clear, sincere, and pure as possible. First, the exact character of another's intent is often a murky matter, even for persons operating under ideal circumstances. Second, many people, especially younger ones, are not particularly adept at recognizing the intentions of others. Research by Dunn and her colleagues (Dunn, 1998, 1999) shows that children and their interlocutors benefit from the explicit "flagging" of intentions in interaction. Third, when people are hurting or in need of support, they may be less able to clearly discern the intentions of others. People experiencing hurt often assume a vigilant posture, defensively interpreting the acts of others that

exhibit an ambiguous or unclear valence as manifestations of negative or hostile intent (see Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). Compounding this problem, many actions by helpers are open to interpretation; advice, suggestions, informative statements, and even expressions of concern can stem from both positive and negative motives. Fourth, people having problems in their relationships with others (one of the most common sources of emotional hurt) are inclined to interpret neutral or ambiguous actions as reflecting hostile intentions; they then act on the basis of this attribution of negative intent (Dodge, 1986). Thus, the very individuals most likely to benefit from the supportive intentions and actions of helpers are prone to misread the helper's intentions, especially when these intentions are not explicitly marked.

For all these reasons, helpers should be trained about *how* and *when* to convey their helpful intentions explicitly. Helpers can enhance the clarity of their supportive intentions by stating them directly ("I want to help") and by making overt statements of availability or underscoring what their presence in the situation means ("I'm here for you; I'm here to help"). Helpers can enhance or intensify the perceived sincerity of their supportive intentions by emphasizing their desire to help ("I *really* want to help however I can"), indexing their relational history with the target ("Hey, you know me; you know that I really care about you"), and by indicating what they personally feel and want ("Helping you with this is important to me"). Helpers can enhance the perceived purity of their supportive intentions by stressing their focus ("All I want to do is help"), the single-mindedness of their purpose ("I *only* want to help you"), and by contextualizing statements that might be misinterpreted ("I'm only saying this because I want to help you do better").

Getting others to understand one's intentions is often a process and sometimes cannot be fully achieved with a single statement. Thus, training should emphasize that helpers may need to clarify and explicate their supportive intentions not just once, but several times during the course of an interaction.

**Facework.** Conveying supportive intentions clearly and unambiguously solves one set of problems in supportive interactions but may raise other problems that need to be addressed. As several researchers (Goldsmith, 1994; Silver, Wortman, & Crofton, 1990) have suggested, the existence of supportive intentions implies that the helper believes the target needs help, cannot (or is not competent to) manage the problem on his or her own, or acted unwisely in creating (or failing to avoid) a problematic situation. These implications can negatively affect the target's self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy (see Nadler, 1986). Exhibiting a supportive intention also implies the helper's right and, perhaps, duty to assist the target, which may constrain the target by making it necessary to at least consider (if not actually accept) aid offered by the helper. Furthermore, many helper actions following from supportive intentions potentially threaten the target's autonomy or positive self-image: Asking questions can challenge privacy, offering advice may undermine autonomy, and making suggestions can imply criticism. Even expressions of sympathy intended to reduce emotional distress can implicitly convey judgments of the target's incompetence and dependency (e.g., "Oh, you poor thing . . .").

Thus supportive intentions and actions can—however implicitly—convey negative evaluations of the target and impose on the target's autonomy. Both helper efforts to provide support and the target's disclosure of a problem or negative feelings can threaten the target's public "face" or status as a competent and independent social actor. Studies indicate that even children are sensitive to such face threats in support situations, sometimes reacting negatively to help from others, especially when

that help takes directive forms (Searcy & Eisenberg, 1992; Shell & Eisenberg, 1996). Furthermore, although certain forms of help (such as directives) magnify face threat, virtually *any* supportive act can threaten the target's face (Goldsmith, 1994). Fortunately, growing research indicates that helpers can effectively redress the face threats intrinsic to the provision of emotional support (Caplan & Samter, 1999; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; MacGeorge, Lichtman, et al., 2002).

Facework or politeness strategies are communicative tactics aimed at buffering the face threats inherent in supportive messages (Brown & Levinson, 1987). *Positive facework* aims to protect the target's desire to be evaluated positively. Positive facework uses verbal devices that express affirming feelings toward, or evaluations of, the target and his or her actions. These include expressions of positive regard for the target ("You're such a great person! I really like you and care about what happens"), admiration for the courage or effort shown by the target ("I can see that you are really trying hard here"), esteem for the target ("I really respect you and what you are trying to do here"), understanding of the target's difficulty or task ("It's a hard thing that you are going through"), confidence that the target will prevail ("I know that nothing can stop you when you decide to do something"), and belief that the target possesses the qualities needed to succeed ("You've got what it takes to overcome this").

*Negative facework* aims to protect the target's desire to be free from constraint or imposition. First and foremost, negative facework involves the avoidance of verbal forms that impose, such as imperatives. Emotional support efforts respectful of the target's negative face rely on indirect verbal forms that seek permission prior to suggesting or advising ("So, do you want input on this?"), express deference ("If you want, maybe we could..."), offer suggestions indirectly ("When I've had a problem like this, I found it helpful to..."), hedge and qualify ("I don't know if this will work for you, but maybe..."), hint ("Hmm. You know, I think Shirley had this come up once, and she tried..."), describe hypothetical options ("One possibility that occurred to me is..."), and otherwise indicate respect for the target's autonomy (e.g., "I don't mean to be pushy, but have you considered...").

**Person-Centered Messages.** A third feature of helpful supportive messages that should be emphasized in training efforts is their person-centered quality. In the context of providing emotional support, *person centeredness* refers to the extent to which message behavior "reflects an awareness of and adaptation to the subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts" (Burleson, 1987, p. 305). Highly person-centered support messages assist the target in developing greater comprehension of the problematic situation and improved perspective on it and are particularly helpful when the situation has challenged or violated the target's views of the world. Such messages also assist targets in developing a deeper appreciation of personal goals and feelings and facilitate the reappraisal of the problem situation and its personal significance.

Helpers manifest a person-centered approach to emotional support by encouraging the target to tell his or her story about the problem or upset ("What happened here? Can you tell me about what happened?"), and continually create the conversational spaces through which extended, detailed versions of that story can be told and retold. Once the distressed target begins telling his or her story, the person-centered helper can do several things to facilitate this process. First, the helper can emphasize that the target should feel free to tell an extended story about the upsetting event ("Go ahead, tell me about it. Take your time. I want to hear the whole story."). While the other person is telling the story, the helper can assist by prompting continuation

and elaboration, making inquiries about the situation and reactions to it (“Um-hum. Yes. And then what happened?”). A variety of verbal tokens (e.g., “oh,” “mm-hm,” or “yeah”) and nonverbal behaviors (e.g., head nods, eye movements, body lean) can function to acknowledge the newsworthiness of a topic and encourage further talk about it (see review by Nofsinger, 1991, pp. 115–121).

Often, it will be essential that distressed targets talk about their feelings and not just external events. Helpers can assist with this when trained to ask explicitly about the other’s thoughts and feelings regarding the situation (“And how did you feel when that happened? What were you thinking when she said that?”). Acknowledgments, “minimal encouragers,” and following responses (e.g., head nods, vocalizations such as “Uh-huh,” “Mm-hmm,” “Yes,” “I see; I understand”) legitimize the expression of feelings and encourage the elaboration of those feelings (Greenberg et al., 1993). The helper can also be trained to encourage the target’s emotion talk (something that many people have trouble with) by learning to use statements explicitly elaborating and legitimizing the expression of feelings (“Say whatever you are feeling. It’s OK to be emotional; it’s OK to cry.”), and can reinforce this by asserting that having the experienced feelings is understandable (e.g., “I certainly understand why you’d feel that way”).

Distressed people typically are most comfortable telling their stories when they feel that helpers understand and connect with what they are saying (“Gee, if that happened to me, I’d be very upset, too. Of course I understand.”). Training helpers to “give voice” to emotions and express empathy for the target should encourage the target’s expression of feelings (e.g., “That had to be really tough; no wonder you’re upset.”). However, expressions of understanding should NOT focus extensively on the helper’s own emotional experiences (that is, helpers should be trained to avoid statements such as, “Gosh, I know exactly how you feel. Something like that happened to me and I felt . . .”) because this may draw attention away from the experiences and feelings of the distressed other.

There are several other “don’ts” that person-centered helpers should be trained to respect. In particular, helpers should avoid: evaluating the other person, his or her feelings, or other people connected with the situation; talking about their own experiences or feelings in similar situations; telling the distressed person how they should think or act in the situation; trying to find the “silver lining in the cloud”; distracting the other’s attention from their painful feelings; and ignoring the other’s feelings. All these behaviors discourage the open disclosure of feelings by the target and undermine the target’s elaboration of sense-making narratives.

## Summary

Considerable research suggests that many people would benefit from having their emotional support skills enhanced through formal training programs. Comprehensive skill enhancement efforts will need to address several psychological abilities and motivational orientations. However, I have suggested that maximally effective programs should adopt a rhetorical approach to skill enhancement, which seeks to develop an appreciation for various message options and the circumstances associated with the appropriate use of those options. At a minimum, these efforts should focus on enhancing rhetorical skills for conveying supportive intentions, facework, and person-centered comforting. Additional rhetorical skills that might receive attention in training efforts include reflective problem-solving, sharing information, and giving advice, among others (see Egan, 1990; Greenberg et al., 1993).

Formal training programs of the sort suggested here have yet to be developed and tested, and some may doubt whether the skills associated with the provision of effective emotional support can be successfully enhanced through such programs. It must be acknowledged that emotional support skills are complicated, even demanding. Still, educators in communication and language departments routinely teach complicated, demanding communication skills to students, often achieving excellent results. If good training can improve students' skills for public presentations, persuasion, interviewing, conflict management, conversation, group decision-making, leadership, and other valued forms of communication, there is no reason to think that emotional support skills cannot be improved as well.

## CONCLUSION

Emotional support is a fundamental form of communication, as basic to the human experience and as pervasive in everyday life as informing and persuading. Done well, emotional support yields numerous desirable outcomes, including the reduction of emotional distress, improved coping and problem solving, enhanced personal relationships, and even improved physical health. Poor-quality emotional support exacerbates an already stressful situation and may contribute to numerous psychological, relational, and physical problems. Thus, emotional support constitutes a social skill that may be enacted with a greater or lesser degree of facility. Research has identified many features of more and less effective efforts intended to convey emotional support, as well as several characteristics of more and less skilled helpers. Communication educators should put this knowledge to use in developing programs that enhance the emotional support skills of everyday actors. Doing so promises to improve the quality of life for helpers, their targets, and our communities.

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CHAPTER

# 15

## How To “DO THINGS” With NARRATIVE: A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE ON NARRATIVE SKILL

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In the 1960s and 1970s our understanding of communication took a linguistic turn (Rorty, 1967/1992). In response to the work of Wittgenstein, Austin and others, the discipline came to recognize that language use is central to communication, and increased its attention to both features and structures of language. In recent years, our understanding of how communication works has taken a narrative turn (Fisher, 1984, 1985; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xiii; Mishler, 1995). We have come to see narrative as central to such communication processes as the transmission of culture, the organization of social knowledge, and the structure of experience. We have also recognized its central role as a form of entertainment in social life. Hinchman & Hinchman (1997, p. xiii) suggested that the human sciences “have assimilated the idiom of literary criticism in which narrative has always played a very big part.” Mumby (1993) noted that since Fisher (1984, 1985, 1987) invoked the “Narrative Paradigm,” scholars have been alerted to “possibilities inherent in the development of a more literary, aesthetic approach to human communication” (p. 1). Bruner (1986) compared two ways of knowing: the narrative mode of knowing, and the logo-scientific mode. Along similar lines, Fisher (1986) suggested that whereas the natural and social sciences have emphasized and privileged “rational action” as our principal way of knowing, we more aptly capture the character of human life when we characterize ourselves as proceeding according to the “narrative” paradigm. That is, we understand, come to know, and formulate our lives and actions as stories.

Although the concept of narrative is clearly a powerful metaphor for understanding and explaining human conduct and reasoning, the influence of literary criticism on how we think about narrative in this context may be problematic, because it may lead us to see narratives as static and like literary texts, rather than as dynamic and interactively constructed in communication. Reconceptualizing narrative outside of a literary frame, as an interactive activity through which experiences are shared as a way of undertaking other social activities, complicates the notion of narrative skill. In

this review, I show how a literary view of narrative may have led to misconceptions regarding narrative skill in everyday conversations and show some of the dividends of transposing a literary view of narrative into a communication perspective, in which narratives are seen to be interactively constructed, told as part of some social occasion, and serving specific communication purposes. In the course of laying out this perspective, I explain the complications for the idea of narrative skill brought by a more dynamic and interactive view of narrative and explore their implications.

Examination of work on narrative in a broad range of fields (anthropology, folklore, performance studies, education, cognitive science, sociolinguistics, literary theory, cultural studies, and communication) reveals that in both vernacular and scholarly conceptions, narratives are seen as monologues. These conceptions are strongly influenced by a literary view of narrative. This is manifested in the following ways: First, often we see narratives as crafted or constructed by an author for a reader, an audience, or a listener, often before the occasion of its telling. Second, frequently narrative is viewed as a monological activity, something an active teller does "to" a passive audience. Clearly if narratives are constructed and produced by tellers, skills of construction and production can be addressed quite explicitly. Thinking of narration as a *communication* activity, however, puts us in the position of seeing storytelling as an interactive, rather than a monological activity. Although stories in conversation may be more or less interactive, they can never be monologues if recipients are present. Once seen as something tellers and recipients construct together, it becomes apparent that storytelling does not simply entertain or reconstruct past events. Rather, communicators produce stories as a method for undertaking a variety of other important activities. The purpose of this chapter is to show that storytelling is a basic method by which we share experiences, and in sharing experience we undertake such important social processes as joking, performing delicate activities, complaining, accounting, telling troubles, gossiping, and constructing relationships, social roles, and social and institutional realities.

Some work on narrative skill or competence has suggested that skill in telling narratives involves the ability to reconstruct past events. Schank (1990) suggested that both lay and professional measures of the ability to tell and respond to stories competently provides information about the intelligence of the storyteller or recipient. This review suggests that communication scholars can see narrative as a communication phenomenon by examining instead how communicators use reconstructions of past events to do communication tasks. Close examination of how narratives are interactively constructed reveals that narrative is a collaborative enterprise between teller and recipients. What a narrative comes to be about is constructed between teller and recipient. Even narratives in which a teller makes a clear point may, through recipient responses, come to be about something else. The "audience" is, in this sense, "co-author" (Duranti & Brenneis, 1986). This suggests that a communication perspective on narrative skill is one that accounts for the interactive work of both the teller(s) and the recipient(s) in working together to construct the meanings of past events, as they are relevant in the service of some present set of activities.

## WHAT IS NARRATIVE?

For narrative to have a distinctive character, it is important to have an understanding of it that clearly distinguishes it from other related phenomena. If all of discourse or interaction, or even social life, is subsumed under the rubric of narrative, the concept loses its informative power.

The word *narrative* is derived from the Indo-European root “gna,” which means both “to tell” and “to know” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xiii). In determining how narrative should be defined, it is useful to distinguish between scholars’ definitions and communicators’ definitions. By communicators’ definitions, I mean practical, enacted definitions that are clearly displayed, and oriented to, by interactants. These “lived” definitions are discovered by close examination of naturally occurring narratives, rather than by postulating native theoretical or vernacular definitions.

Scholars use many terms in referring to the recounting of past experiences. Narrative, narration, account, tale, folktale, myth, discourse, anecdote, replaying, story; “stories, plans, simultaneous blow-by-blow descriptions, generic narratives about ‘the way it used to be’ or ‘what usually happens’ and reporting past activities are all *narratives*—kinds of discourse organized around the passage of time in some world” (Polanyi, 1985, p. 9). Extended units of talk in which past experience is recounted are variously referred to and defined. A feature of this list of terms for *narrative* is that no distinction is made between literary and interactionally produced narratives. This is also the case in many of the definitions of narrative that are offered.

In classic work on the subject, Labov defined narratives of personal experience as “a method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of clauses which (it is inferred) actually occurred” (1972, pp. 359–360). Goffman offered a similar definition:

A tale or anecdote, that is, a replaying, is not merely any reporting of a past event. In the fullest sense, it is such a statement couched from the personal perspective of an actual or potential participant who is located so that some temporal, dramatic development of the reported event proceeds from that starting point. (1974, p. 504)

Brockmeier and Harré (1997, p. 266) offered the following description of narrative:

narrative is the name for an ensemble of linguistic and psychological structures, transmitted cultural historically, constrained by each individual’s level of mastery and by his or her mixture of social-communicative techniques and linguistic skills—*prosthetic devices*, as Bruner (1992) has called them by such personal characteristics as curiosity, passion, and, sometimes, obsession.

These definitions encompass narrative phenomena from the written to the spoken. Stories produced in interactional settings have often been regarded as “the unwritten counterparts of written or literary narratives, with which it is felt they share common formal features and narrative devices” (Georges, 1969, p. 322). Narratives are seen as structured by the experience they recount, rather than as structured by the interaction through which they are produced. Alternatively, they are seen by some researchers as structuring the experience they recount. This treatment of them may be reflected in the term *oral literature* (Ong, 1982, pp. 10–15). The influence of a literary perspective on research into narrative produced in interactional settings is manifested in various ways: through the terms used in the description of it; through the “dramaturgical” view of narrative in which the teller is the active *performer* or *speaker* and recipients are the passive *audience*, or *listeners*; and through the treatment of narratives as proceeding according to “scripts” prescribed by the activities they represent.

Terminologically, *narrative*, *narration*, *discourse*, *story*, *anecdote*, and *storytelling* are used interchangeably. Rarely is a term designated specifically to distinguish a

literary telling from one occurring in interaction. Thus, stories produced orally as performance, those produced in casual interactional settings, and those that are written are treated as the same thing—"kinds of discourse organized around the passage of time in some world" (Polanyi, 1985, p. 9).

Brockmeier and Harré (1997) quoted Harris's (1996) observation that with regard to the study of language, *word*, *sentence*, and *proposition* are "imposed categories." That is, they are theoretical categories that linguists have attempted to graft onto real life. They suggest that in trying to understand narrative, we may run the risk of "a similar process of transubstantiation, changing from a metalinguistic category into a seemingly real entity" (p. 272). That is, we run the risk of reifying narrative or story, when in fact it is something more complex and necessarily located in particular communication moments. They pointed out that it is helpful to remember when trying to understand narrative that, "we are primarily dealing not with a mode of representing but with a specific mode of constructing and constituting reality" (p. 275). That is, there is a fundamental difference between "representing reality," which can be thought of as simply "reporting what happened," and narrative, in which a version of some past event may be interactively reconstructed in such a way as to offer a version of it, often in the service of doing some activity *other than* reporting. Narrative then is not simply reporting. They suggest that we might best understand what it is by looking at "the concrete situations and conditions under which [people] tell stories and in so doing implicitly define what narrative is" (p. 275). Thus, what narrative is can be discerned from people's occasioned telling of stories.

From examining tape-recorded naturally occurring conversations, it becomes apparent that storytelling involves a temporary change in the way turns are taken so that a story can be told. Ordinarily, one speaker speaks at a time, taking fairly brief units of talk, or "turn constructional units" (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). After that minimal unit of talk is complete, another speaker may take a turn. If they do not, the current speaker can continue. This arrangement for turn taking has the implication that if a speaker needs to take a longer turn at talk—that is, one that consists of multiple turn constructional units—they must do something "special" to temporarily suspend turn taking and to alert their potential recipients so that they can attend to the storytelling properly (Sacks, 1974, 1978, 1992). At the possible end of the story, teller(s) and recipient(s) work together to accomplish the resumption of turn-by-turn talk. It is these extended, multi-unit turns that interactants treat as storytellings that provide for an interactive definition of storytelling. In these cases (as I describe in detail later), prospective tellers and recipients work together to take steps to suspend, and later resume, regular turn taking. We also see a range of activities in addition to entertaining being co-constructed by tellers and recipients in and through storytelling. These include joking, inviting, blaming, complaining, accounting, telling troubles, and gossiping, as well as constructing selves, relationships, and institutional settings.

This discussion of narrative indicates two central problems in conceptualizing narrative skill from a communication perspective. First, throughout its course narrative is produced interactively by (prospective) teller and (prospective) recipient. Even if a teller projects a story to tell, or indicates the point or the possible ending of the story in the most skillful way possible, the skillful application of a method (e.g., attempting to force the fellow interactant into recipient position by calling him or her by name, or clearly indicating what is to be made of the storytelling) does not guarantee the particular outcome that the turn can be shown to seek (Lerner, 2002). For instance, even

with the clearest and most compelling of story projections, a fellow interactant cannot be interactionally “forced” into recipient position by a prospective story telling. This is because storytelling, like all interaction, is fundamentally interactive, and is thus based in the to-and-fro between conversation participants. The second difficulty in dealing with narrative skill lies in the fact that, as the excerpt of conversation discussed later shows, although we can say canonically and fairly simply what is involved in “successfully” or “skillfully” bringing a story to the floor, telling it, and getting recipient responses during or after the telling, this view of narrative skill ignores the fact that storytelling is not usually (or perhaps ever) an activity in and of itself. That is to say, storytelling, in the sense of taking an extended turn at talk in which some event is recapitulated, is almost always taken to be a way of undertaking some kind of social activity, such as complaining, blaming, accounting, telling troubles, doing delicate activities, etc. In this sense, then, it is difficult to separate the form and function of narratives. Rather, they need to be understood as a package. Given this, there are times when the teller not introducing the point of the story in an overt or easily graspable way can be seen to be skillful, because it puts recipients in the position of showing their understanding of the teller by discerning a somewhat obscure point. Seeing storytelling as a method for doing other activities seriously complicates how narrative skill can be addressed.

This local, interactional view can be contrasted with another popular view of narrative. As Czarniawska (1997) pointed out, “The idea of social and individual life as a narrative can be found in many texts throughout history” (p. 11). “Metanarratives,” “grand narratives” or “grand récits” are society’s own accounts of the way things are. According to many theorists, although they may obscure the way things really are, all of human social life can be conceptualized in story form. Gergen (1991) suggested that humans have long been prone to think of their lives as “stories.” Giddens (1992) described the “quest romance” as one way that people (typically women) think about their relational futures. Lyotard (1984) distinguishes the grand narrative and the story. Although the grand narrative stabilizes and provides a unitary experience, the story *destabilizes*, is *locally determined* and *temporal*, and disturbs the order of “reason” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 61, in Browning, 1992). Mumby (1993) pointed out that the current interest in narrative provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the current “crisis of representation” (Jameson, 1984, p. viii). Part of the postmodern move in the social sciences is to officially call into question the status of “objective truth” and reality. Narrative, construed interactively, gives us some empirical purchase on just how, through particular ways of talking, “reality” may be constructed and reconstructed. It shows that often these constructions and reconstructions of reality are embedded in a social context, as part of the ongoing social or relational activities that communicators are undertaking.

Difficulty defining just what narrative is indicates some tensions in the study of narrative. Despite the fact that the “Narrative Turn” has made the concept of narrative an increasingly important explanatory rubric in a number of fields, in each of these fields, similar issues are raised. The issues with regard to narrative revolve around the following questions:

1. Do narratives have generic, abstract (or abstractable) structure? How do they achieve their structured character?
2. What is the relationship between a narrative and the “reality” it recapitulates?
3. For what purposes are narratives told?

A great deal has been written about narrative. Much of it concerns narrative as a literary device (Genette, 1980, 1988; Mitchell, 1981). Some excellent reviews of narrative have been written in folklore (Georges, 1969; Robinson, 1981), anthropology (Goodwin, 1990; Polanyi, 1985), linguistics (van Dijk, 1976), education (Mishler, 1986), literary theory (Linde, 1986), and performance studies (Langellier, 1989, 1999). After a discussion of the complex nature of “narrative competence,” I show how a variety of different approaches to these questions have an impact on what we can take to be narrative skill. I then describe the view of narrative and narrative skill from a communication perspective.

## NARRATIVE SKILL

Three ways in which narrative skill can be examined are the cognitive view, the literary view, and the communication view. First, cognitive scientists have examined the ability to recognize and produce narrative. They take these competences to be evidence of mental structures. Taking Chomsky’s position, they see it as part of our innate ability to process and produce language. Polkinghorne (1988) noted that, “The process of seeing human actions as meaningful sequences of events linked together in a causal chain requires cognitive skill, judgment, and the application of previous experiences” (p. 112). According to cognitive scientists, then, narrative skill enables us to process events in everyday life in such a way as to come to terms with causes and consequences, enabling us to make sense of events and their relationship with one another.

Second, the literary view of orally produced stories as a *performance* activity results in the ability to tell and recognize narratives being viewed as a “skill.” “Competence in . . . narration is an essential skill for members of a speech community” (Robinson, 1981, p. 58).

All the problems of coherence, chronology, causality, foregrounding, plausibility, selection of detail, tense, point of view, and emotional intensity exist for the natural narrator just as they do for the novelist, and they are confronted and solved (with greater or lesser success) by speakers of the language every day. (Pratt, 1977, pp. 66–67)

Communities, and individuals within communities, may be judged as “good verbal performers” (Heath, 1983, p. 173). Thus, orally produced stories, like written narratives, may be judged by critical acclaim; they are “successful” or “unsuccessful” (Pike, 1982). The development of narrative skill has been widely studied in research on child language. Often studies have focused on skill in producing and reproducing narrative structure in a non-naturally occurring, and often decontextualized, setting (cf., e.g., McCabe & Peterson, 1991a). In studies of this kind, the goals of narrative may not be articulated. In line with a literary view of narrative, its goal is frequently portrayed as that of entertaining.

That narratives should entertain is emphasized in the criterion stipulated by some researchers that the event recounted should be “remarkable” (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997; van Dijk, 1976; Robinson, 1981, p. 59). It should be presented as exciting or out of the ordinary, designed “for the edification of listeners” (Goffman, 1974, p. 506). This suggests a dramaturgical view of the functions of narrative that echoes Aristotle’s and contrasts with observations of ordinary conversation, which suggest that we tend to tell stories about the mundane details of our lives, packaging them as “news” (Sacks, 1984). This “ordinariness” of narratives in everyday conversation

in both casual and institutional settings leads us to a third conception of narrative skill.

Narrative skill can be thought of as the ability to “use” the sharing or retelling of past experiences for interactional ends. Many have noted that it is difficult to define, let alone measure, competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989); however, communicators may display, in their talk, the extent to which they take others to be competent. The issue is complex. For instance, does a joke after which no one laughs indicate a lack of skill in joke telling on the part of teller or recipients? It is possible that it displays communication competence on the part of a recipient not to laugh at an off-color joke told on the wrong occasion, for instance? Skill, then, is a complex concept. Our skill or lack thereof may be made apparent to us through social sanctions embedded in talk.

Labov was concerned with what constituted an *effective* narrative. He analyzed the structure he found in terms of how it contributed to forestalling a recipient’s “so what” (M. H. Goodwin, 1990, p. 232). This embodies a particular approach to the concept of skill with regard to narrative. It recognizes that narratives are built for particular recipients on particular occasions but does not take the position that the recipient may be key to constructing what it is the narrative comes to be about. For instance, some work on narrative skill takes it to be “decontextualized language, or language that relies minimally on listener inference” (McCabe & Peterson, 1991b, p. 218). In telling stories, communicators accomplish many different activities, however.

A naturally occurring story told at the dinner table illustrates some important considerations in the discussion of narrative skill. The description shows that throughout its course, the teller and recipient are “unskillful” in how they tell and respond. The teller does not produce his storytelling in ways that make it completely clear what he is trying to do with the storytelling. The recipient does not produce immediate or enthusiastic uptake of the beginning, middle, or end of the story. She responds to the telling in inapposite ways. This could indicate a lack of skill on the teller’s part in introducing, telling, and completing the story, and a lack of skill on the recipient’s part in responding to it. On one hand one might consider this a lack of skill, but the description of the social activities accomplished through the narrative and responses to it shows that interactants are undertaking other social activities through the specific ways that the story is told and responded to. This suggests that addressing the skillfulness or lack of skill indicated in the ways in which telling and responding are done is no simple matter, for despite a marked lack of “skillfulness” in the canonical sense, the teller gets his story told and his point across. The recipient responds, and an array of “relational” activities is accomplished through the particular ways of telling and responding used here. This suggests that narrative skill may best be applied as a unilateral concept that is more suited to literary narrative than to the kind of interactional storytelling that occurs in everyday social communication. The skilled beginning, telling, and ending of a narrative, or skilled uptake of the beginning, telling, and ending of a narrative, would seem to preclude the kinds of collaborative nuances of action we see enacted in the telling reproduced here. A brief account illustrates this claim.

The following excerpt is transcribed from a videotape of a couple eating dinner together in their home. It is transcribed using the transcription conventions of conversation analysis. Underlining indicates stress on a word. A colon indicates that a sound is stretched. Square brackets show speaker overlap. Silences are measured somewhat roughly in tenths of seconds (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984, for further details). The couple has been eating ravioli that the husband, Mike, has brought

home from the bar he runs and talking for about 15 minutes. The story transcribed here begins after a gap of about 35 seconds.

- 1 Mike: Dennis came in today:=uh:m (0.2) He wrote this big  
 2 letter to Ford,  
 3 (1.4) ((Kate lifts her eyes to gaze at Mike's face))  
 4 Mike: Cuz his car's been in the shop ya know,  
 4a (1.5)  
 5 Mike: for so long,  
 6 (.)  
 7 Mike: Took 'em like two weeks to fix his transmission.  
 8 (0.4)  
 9 Mike: H[e hadda rent-  
 10 Kate: [So he wrote a complaint?  
 11 (2.0)  
 12 Mike: ·hh Mm hm?  
 13 (4.0)  
 14 Mike: ↑Well, (0.5) he has like: eight hundred dollar in:  
 15 (.) rental cars fer (.) two weeks.  
 16 (0.4)  
 17 Kate: That he has to pay:?  
 18 (1.5)  
 19 Mike: So fa:r,  
 20 (2.0)  
 21 Kate: Then why (°didn't he e-°)  
 22 (8.0)  
 23 Kate: It's just uh transmission an' it takes that lo:ng?  
 24 Mike: No: they screwed up on it twice they ha- they gave  
 25 it- (.) said it'd be ready (at sof-) at one time and  
 26 then they (1.0) ·hh redid it,  
 27 (1.0)  
 28 Mike: Kept saying Oh: it'd be another two days, >another  
 29 two days, another two day:s.<  
 30 (0.4)  
 31 Mike: Didn't do anything to it.  
 32 (1.0)  
 33 Mike: Then they put one in,  
 34 (0.5)  
 35 Kate: Then they should [pay for the rental car,  
 36 Mike: [The next MORning,  
 37 (2.5)  
 38 Mike: he goes out an' there's a big puddle in his  
 39 driveway.  
 40 (0.3)  
 41 Mike: Transmission (0.2) leaked all over his driveway.  
 42 (.)  
 43 Mike: He had t'take it back 'n they kept it for another  
 44 five (to) six days.  
 45 (3.6)

- 46 Kate: Hm.  
47 (1.5)  
48 Mike: °I'd be fuming.°  
49 (3.5)  
50 Kate: Why couldn't that guy just do it. that- thuh guy  
51 you get.  
52 (1.3)  
53 Mike: What.  
54 (.)  
55 Mike: Who does my stuff?  
56 Kate: Mmhmm?  
57 (0.5)  
58 Mike: Cuz, (1.5) it's under:- warranty.  
59 (1.3)  
60 Kate: Oh:.  
61 (4.0)  
62 Kate: Uhhhh.  
63 (6.0)  
64 Mike: Ribbon ravioli stuffed with eggplant parmesan.

By producing an incremental story preface, that does not put Kate in the position of *having* to forward a storytelling (as a strong story preface such as, “Wanna hear what happened at work today?” might), although he may not provide for uptake unequivocally, Mike can test the extent to which Kate might be interested in hearing further details of the possible telling. In addition, without a strong, overt forwarding of the story by Kate, he can shape the story as he wishes, unconstrained by what Kate might have called for in her response to a story preface. In this way, his indication that he may have a story tell is noncoercive and has the potential to be collaborative. Furthermore, it does not strongly project the “point” of the prospective story. While this could present a problem for Kate in figuring out what the story might be about, again, it leaves open the possibility that Kate can participate in collaboratively shaping what the telling comes to be about. Kate’s show of attention by lifting her eyes to Mike, but not taking a speaking turn, is similarly collaborative and noncoercive. It is simultaneously, however, a way of displaying minimal interest in what he may have to tell. A prospective teller could treat such a minimal display as a lack of interest and choose not to elaborate on the mentioned news. These deviations from what might canonically be called “narrative skill” in bringing a story to the floor at the beginning of a storytelling show that skillfulness is a tricky concept in this environment. By not offering and forwarding the story in a “successful” way here, interactants maximize the possibility for collaboration. In this sense, it is difficult to propose what could constitute skillfulness in storytelling, because the outcomes are arrived at interactionally, on the spot, moment by moment. The concept of narrative skill, as it is canonically used, then, seems to embody an evaluation or judgment regarding what is “better” or “best” done in a given communication situation. This is problematic, because what may be “best” done is interactively shaped and negotiated. In measuring skill we must look at outcome—at the very least, the ability to get done that for which the skill is required. For interactants, however, simply getting done the activity of, for instance, bringing a story to the floor, successfully or unsuccessfully, is rarely the only thing that is at stake in beginning a story. Rather, how the story is

brought to the floor is shaped by a range of other considerations, such as the activity a speaker might be taken to be doing by bringing the story to the floor in a particular way, the relationship implications of that method, how it makes the speaker “look,” and so on. This is to say, to claim that a speaker can be more or less skillful in bringing a story to the floor may cause the researcher to overlook the full range of activities a speaker may be undertaking in bringing it to the floor. The concept of “skill” involves an evaluative judgment that may result in our overlooking the methods by which and purposes for which narratives are produced, interactively, by communicators. It’s not that narratives are produced more or less skillfully, but that the different ways in which narratives can be produced may result in different interactional or relational outcomes.

Part of the import of producing a story that does not have a “strong” story preface in which the teller projects what the story is “about,” or what its point might be, is that the recipient must try to figure out what the point could be. Although it begins as a story about Dennis having written to Ford, it becomes an account of the troubles Dennis had with his car. It is hearable that in recounting these details, Mike is making available to Kate what it was that led Dennis to write to the car company. He seems to be attempting to secure Kate’s understanding of why Dennis would do this, and perhaps also to establish that it is justified. In recounting what happened to Dennis’s car, however, Mike relies on Kate’s knowledge of cars, car rental, and car repair for her to infer how to evaluate the details he is reporting to her.

In line 38, Mike produces what could be heard to be a climax in the story: “tlk goes out an’ there’s a big puddle in his driveway.” Although Mike could be faulted for not providing enough information for Kate to figure out that this is a transmission leak, it could also be said that in producing a somewhat incomplete description of the circumstances, he allows his recipient to bring to bear and display her knowledge of cars by producing an appropriately shocked or surprised response. This could be regarded as a skillful narrative technique. She does not show the proper uptake, however. This could be brought as proof that Mike was “unsuccessful” in producing a “skillful” climax to his story, one that was sufficiently recognizable that the “appropriate” response, the one indicated by the details of the story, could be given. Similarly, Kate could be indicted for poor reciprocity, but her lack of immediate response could also be an indication of her lack of interest in the details of the telling, rather than any lack of skill on his part or hers. Similarly, Kate’s questions in lines 10, 17, and 23 might be taken as “unskillful” in the sense that they have the potential to derail the storytelling and display some disjuncture with both the state and content of the storytelling. Yet they display for the teller what she is making of the telling so far, and, without her having to confront him overtly, put him in the position of providing her with more information and guidance regarding what she might make of the storytelling.

At the end of the storytelling too, a disjuncture is apparent between the kind of reaction that might be indicated by the length of time Mike reports it took to fix the car another time: “He had t’take it back ’n they kept it for another five (to) six days” (lines 43–44). This occurrence is clearly egregious in itself, and all the more so on top of the previous failed repairs to the car and the length of time repairs took. Yet there is a 3.6 second gap in line 45, and then a minimal “Hm” from Kate in line 46. This is perhaps the most minimal uptake that Kate could provide—a token that might indicate that she takes this last reported event as news, but shows nothing more about what she makes of it. It shows no uptake of the *character* of the story, or the kind of reaction a reasonable recipient might have to it. This could be construed as unskillful

recipency, but it enables Kate to demonstrate a marked lack of interest in the facts of the storytelling, and some lack of affiliation with, or detachment from, Mike and Dennis.

Although it is possible to critique both Mike and Kate for lacking skill in storytelling, to do so would be to overlook what is accomplished interactionally and relationally by both how Mike tells the story and how Kate responds to it. Mike’s and Kate’s turns as teller and story recipient could be critiqued for lack of skill in storytelling, but it quickly becomes clear that the way they speak has implications that go beyond simple storytelling and that to critique their storytelling skill would belie the character of the kind of actions that storytelling is used to undertake; the specific ways of doing the conversational activities that telling a story involves (for the teller, beginning, unfolding, and bringing the narrative to a close; and for the recipient, showing uptake, ongoing recipency including a display of what she makes of the storytelling, and participating in the return to turn-by-turn talk) may have implications for these actions that go well beyond simple storytelling activities.

What is skillful or unskillful, then, is difficult to determine, because of the complex range of interactional tasks that interactants are undertaking in the course of the storytelling. Although there is a canonical way that stories generally unfold, it is clear that interactants can “play” with this structure so as to undertake an almost infinite range of other activities. These may involve affiliation or disaffiliation with the teller, interest in the topic, attitudes toward a protagonist in the telling, and so on. These concomitant activities, which are undertaken through the sharing of experiences, may shape how a storytelling is undertaken. This suggests that there may be serious problems involved in trying to assess narrative skill. The root of the problem might best be captured by the observation that in the course of telling a story, a teller is never simply telling a story, and a recipient is never simply responding to a story. Rather, to understand narrative, one must understand how the story is told and how the kinds of response that are given are woven through the particular set of activities that telling a story is part of the method for accomplishing.

This chapter, in attempting to build a communication-centered view of narrative skill, first briefly reviews literary critical, cognitive scientific, and anthropological approaches to narrative structure and then focuses primarily on how narrative is used to conduct such delicate actions as inviting, complaining, and blaming; to manage accounts, troubles tellings, and gossip; and to construct selves, relationships, family, and institutions. The particular ways in which the story is told, and responded to in its course, shape the actions that are accomplished by the telling. Presumably, the action that is being undertaken also influences how the story is told; however, as the instance discussed in this section has shown, there is often more than one “layer” of action going on. Not only is there the teller’s recounting of the event—Dennis having written a big letter to Ford—but there is also the issue of what the recipient shows herself to be making of the story—her level of interest in it, her affiliation or lack of affiliation with Mike. One party may be pursuing an apparent “agenda,” or trying to get done something particular and discernible through the storytelling (such as defending against an accusation (c.f., Mandelbaum, 1993), and could therefore be thought to be more or less skillful in telling the story and accomplishing what he or she purports to be trying to accomplish. Nonetheless, the success or failure of that action relies on the responses of fellow interactants. We may therefore need to reconceptualize narrative skill in a dialogic format, because it becomes clear on examining naturally occurring narratives that they are dialogic communication events. It is possible that the difficulty in applying the concept of skill to conversational narrative derives from this:

Skill traditionally conceived is a person's enacted possession; it is a facility in doing a particular action or activity. The description of a naturally occurring storytelling makes it clear that narrative is not simply a matter of a teller telling a story successfully or unsuccessfully. Rather, it is the sharing of experiences, in which the experiences, and what they come to mean for the current interaction, are interactively constructed by teller and recipient(s) working together. It therefore creates a false dichotomy to look at form separately from function, or function separately from form, in attempting to come to an understanding of narrative skill, despite traditional separation of form and function in narrative research. Without consideration of the actions that are being undertaken in and through the telling of the narrative, it is impossible to make any kind of assessment regarding skillfulness. The complexity of judging skillfulness is compounded by the fact that, as is illustrated in the story discussed above, the actions the storytelling accomplishes shift as the telling progresses, as the story-in-progress is interactively constructed by teller and recipient.

## THE STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVES

Next, I describe a variety of approaches to narrative, with particular regard to how narratives are structured. These include the view of narrative structure as universal, narrative as evidence of scripts and abstract structures, and the interactional structuring of narratives. The view of narrative as structured, with a somewhat invariant structure or a consistent set of "universal" components, has motivated the research of theorists in folklore and in artificial intelligence.

### Narrative Structure As "Universal"

Folklorists' research on myths suggests that they may be structured by the society and culture they represent. Research into myths and folktales has isolated "universal" features of narrative (Campbell, 1966; Lévi-Strauss, 1955, 1979; Malinowski, 1926; Propp, 1968). Malinowski (e.g., 1926) treated myths as "universal" phenomena, the function, social meaning, and significance of which are identical in all societies (Georges, 1969, p. 325). Campbell (1968), Propp (1968), and Lévi-Strauss (1955) culled "invariant" features of the structure of myths and folktales from their analyses.

Campbell's (1966) "monomyth" describes such generic features of the structure of classical myths as the hero's "separation and departure," "trials and victories of initiation," and "return and reintegration with society." He proposed that these features characterize a multiplicity of myths and are a basic structural feature of them.

Propp (1968) and Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1979) also examine myths to find the formal, abstract structural patterns underlying them, thus locating them with respect to one another. Their focus is on the language of myths, their constituent units, or "mythemes," and the "relations" between these mythemes (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 210). Although the approaches to myth of Campbell and Malinowski differ from each other and from the approach of the structuralists, each researcher nevertheless attempts to show how the various internal, structural features of the myths that they examined can be abstracted to reveal a universal, underlying structure to all narratives. Although Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss studied myths performed in the particular culture they were examining, they nevertheless treated them as literary texts as distinct from treating them as interactional achievements. In their analyses, the mechanisms through which meanings and structures are achieved are not explicated. Thus, the meanings and structures described are those which are available to the analyst. They

are seen to be inherent properties of the myths, produced by the culture, rather than being produced by the participants in the interactional event in which the myth was performed.

Similarly, researchers in artificial intelligence (AI) regard narrative as having invariant structural features. They have postulated abstract discourse structures (such as “macrostructures”; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1977), external to the event of the narrative’s recounting, in an attempt to understand the production and comprehension of narratives.

## Narratives As Evidence of Abstract Structures

Narratives have been treated by researchers in artificial intelligence (AI) as having “rather simple forms . . . [and] identifiable “schematic” structures” (van Dijk, 1980, p. 2). Researchers have studied subjects’ abilities to remember and reconstruct narratives, thus revealing mental schemata or scripts for “chunking,” “packaging,” and “framing” units of experience (Abelson, 1976; Polanyi, 1981; Rumelhart, 1975; Schank, 1982, 1990; van Dijk, 1976). Discussion of studies of the “universal” components of narratives, and the ways in which they may provide evidence of abstract mental structures suggests that narratives may be seen as structured events. These descriptions propose them to be structured by cognitive predispositions of storytellers, the societies in which they occur, the events which they recapitulate, or by the purposes for which they are recounted. That is, in each case they are seen as constructed by factors exogenous to their actual recounting. AI researchers have sought to produce models of narrative structure. The structure of narratives has been viewed as “abstractable” so that a system of “macrostructures” can be developed to represent the overall global semantic organization of discourse “macrorules.” This understanding of the structuring of narratives was strongly influenced by Minsky’s notion of frames (Minsky, 1975), Schank and Abelson’s (1977; Schank, 1990; Schank & Abelson, 1977) theory of scripts, and the work of Rumelhart (1975) concerning schemata. Each of these constructs aims to achieve “the effective representation of knowledge or beliefs in the memory of language users” (van Dijk, 1980, p. 4).

Winograd (1986, p. 83) suggested that Rumelhart’s (1975) theory of the “story grammar” divides stories into “a sequence of episodes, states, events, and plans, according to a phrase structure grammar” and deals with the organization of stories in terms of time sequence, plans, causality, action, and so on. In this approach the structure of narratives is treated as evidence of cognitive structures for the organization of knowledge and experience. According to many theorists in AI, our ability to encode and decode narratives using story scripts and schemata indicates our competence with the narrative mode of communication.

For researchers in AI, then, narrative structures provide evidence of features of mental processes. These abstract structures are thought to represent the structures with which we understand and produce narrative.

The studies referred to above provide strong evidence for a determinate structure to narratives; however, these studies use narratives of a particular kind, which may differ from narratives in ordinary conversation. Usually the stories used in such studies are invented by researchers or by subjects instructed by researchers to write about a recalled occasion or to reconstruct the story of a book they have read or had read to them or a cartoon or short movie they have seen. Research procedures may involve studying subjects’ abilities to recall, recognize, and summarize stories (Haslett, 1986, p. 88). Research may also be based on the grammatical structure of

reconstructed children's fiction (e.g., Bamberg, 1987). Thus, the stories examined are not naturally occurring. The data are created to fit the contingencies of the study, rather than being produced as part of, contingent on, and exerting contingencies on, some actual ongoing interactional event. It is possible, then, that narratives produced in conversation may be structured by the interaction. This suggests a possible distinction between narratives produced as monological creations of an "author" and those that are produced as part of interaction. Narratives produced in ordinary conversation may be found to be structured differently from those treated as reified, "generic" objects, produced by and instantiating universal abstract structures. This is because, as the storytelling reproduced earlier illustrates, a monological, literary narrative is not produced interactively with the recipient and is thus not subject to the kind of *in situ* revision and collaborative construction that naturally occurring narratives are.

The view taken by much of the research described here suggests a static communication model, whereby a sender has a message to send to a receiver, who is more or less successful in retrieving the intention behind the sender's message. This model may be applied to written narratives produced as monologues by their author and is clearly consonant with a literary view of narrative. A dynamic view of communication suggests that narratives are interactive creations of tellers and recipients, however, produced specifically for particular occasions rather than being "prepackaged." Research has shown that even narratives that may be retold on different occasions are tailored to each occasion on which they are shared (Goodwin, 1981).

In contrast to the monological approach to the structure of narrative, some research has examined structural features that provide a point of access to aspects of interactional behavior. The linguistic structure of narratives has been examined in detail in such a way as to come upon their functions in the cultures in which they occur. Thus, the form of narratives as performances has been examined to delineate their function in displaying features of cultures and language (Bauman, 1977, 1986; Hymes, 1962; Labov, 1972; Sherzer, 1983, 1990).

## **The Interactional Structuring of Narratives**

Sociolinguists, ethnographers of language and communication, and folklorists have looked at the language of narratives. It is described as evidence of aspects of culture-in-use and language-in-use. Researchers have shown how knowledge of a culture may explain its narratives. This approach contrasts with that of the work mentioned earlier because of its treatment of narrative as *performed*, which enables it to take into account the fact that narratives are produced in *interaction* (Bauman, 1977, 1986; Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzsky, 1967/1997; Sherzer, 1983, 1990).

Bauman (1975, 1977, 1986) wrote that "oral literary texts" are analyzed to develop an understanding of "verbal art as performance, as a species of situated human communication, a way of speaking," (1975, p. 291), for "performance sets up, or represents, an interpretive frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood" (p. 292). Narratives are described as "framed," made recognizable to audiences, by way of "culturally conventionalized metacommunication" (p. 295). Bauman provided a list of "formal and conventional" devices that accomplish this framing, including special codes such as archaic or esoteric language, special formulae that signal performance, figurative language such as metaphor, formal stylistic devices (such as rhyme and vowel harmony), and special patterns of tempo, stress, or pitch. Presumably a skilled narrator of stories in this genre is one who is best able to combine these elements in the telling of a story; however, research in this

domain has focused less on the aesthetics of performance and more on the cultural information embedded and transmitted in the stories and their telling.

Although narratives are seen to have some generic features, as in AI descriptions, these generic structural features have interactional motivation. In his chapter on the “frame analysis of talk” (1974, pp. 496–559), Goffman took a similarly “dramaturgical” view of storytelling. He described how storytellers may enact different characters by producing talk in a particular way so as to “key” for listeners that they are enacting a different character (see also Holt, 1996).

Another instance of the linguistic features of narrative which have been examined appears in Sherzer’s (1983, 1990) description of tellings and retelling of narratives of the Kuna Indians of South America. He described details of Kuna narratives’ linguistic construction in an analysis of the relationship between tellings and retellings. He showed how such details as “the interplay of allusive and non-allusive language, rhetorical strategies in speech, the verbal expression of news or new information, and the Kuna theory and practice of magic and of narration” are revealed through narratives’ linguistic details. Sherzer described not only what these details show about the culture in which they occur, but also what they mean to the audience of the performance. In this respect, the presence of an audience is integrated into the analysis of the narrative’s structure, showing it to be an interactional structure.

These ethnographies of performance describe how performances are communicatively keyed in particular cultures and communities. Performances are described as patterned by setting, act sequence, and cultural rules for performance. In this approach, the narrative is understood as the performer’s responsibility: “performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence” (Sherzer, 1983, p. 293). Thus, this work shows a concern for the narrative as the teller’s performance for an audience. The recipients’ work is to understand what the teller is keying or displaying, rather than to participate in its creation. This is also the case in Labov’s (1972) analyses of narratives of personal experience.

Labov’s work represents an important departure from traditional linguistics, in that he moves sociolinguistics to the analysis of units larger than the sentence (M. H. Goodwin, 1990). In analyzing narratives, Labov posited an abstract structure that describes his collection of narratives and enables them to perform their “evaluative” and “referential” functions. Labov’s discussion of these abstract structures should be distinguished from the macrostructures and scripts of artificial intelligence theorists, because Labov is dealing with structures of narrative that enable them to perform evaluative and referential functions.

Labov noted that the narratives he analyzed “occur in response to a specific stimulus in the interview situation” (the question “Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed, where you said to yourself, *“This is it?”*”). In response to this question, the speaker “seems to undergo a partial reliving of that experience, and he is no longer free to monitor his own speech as he normally does in face-to-face interviews” (1972, p. 355). Labov examined the narratives elicited in this way “to see what linguistic techniques are used to evaluate experience within the black English vernacular culture” (p. 355). A definitional property of personal narratives for Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) and Labov (1972) is that they are structured in the same chronological order as the events they relate. Rather than being modeled on mental schemata, templates, or scripts as AI research proposes, Labov’s linguistic model sees past experience as recapitulated “by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred”

(1972, p. 360). Labov described narratives as generically consisting of the following form: (a) abstract, (b) orientation, (c) complicating action, (d) evaluation, (e) result and resolution, and (f) coda. Labov proposed that narrative is organized around a framework of these listed components, and forms a series of answer to underlying questions:

1. Abstract: what was this about?
2. Orientation: who, when, what, where?
3. Complicating action: then what happened?
4. Evaluation: so what?
5. Result: what finally happened (p. 370)

Labov did not specify *whose* questions these are, the narrator's or listener's. If they are seen as interactants' questions to which narratives provide answers, some empirical evidence for them might be found in stories in which certain parts of the narrative do not occur and recipients seek them by way of such questions.

Labov provided an account of the form of narratives elicited by the "Danger of Death" question. He was also concerned with their function. Labov treated narrative as an interactional activity insofar as it is discussed as the product of an elicitation question. The turns of the listener are included in parentheses in the transcriptions of narratives. Although this acknowledges their presence, it subordinates them to the teller's turns. His description is of the form and function of the narrative itself. The influence of the listener's turns on the shape of the narrative is not described. So far, then, the research discussed has taken narrative structure to be largely exogenous to the occasion of telling, if sometimes influenced by it in particular ways.

## NARRATIVE AS THE INTERACTIVELY CONSTRUCTED SHARING OF EXPERIENCES

Schegloff (1997) pointed out that storytelling is studied widely as a discursive unit, a genre, and an activity. It is as a genre that it has been studied most widely in a broad array of fields. Yet when we look at ordinary talk, we see that for everyday interactants storytelling is primarily a discursive unit and an activity. In addition, it is an activity through which other activities may be carried out. It is helpful to think of narrative as "sharing experiences." Framing it in this way puts it firmly in the realm of social actions, formulating it as a fundamentally interactive occurrence. This puts us in the position of asking how, when, and for what purposes do interactants share experiences so that we can further our discussion of narrative skill.<sup>1</sup>

### How and When Experiences Are Shared

Labov and Waletzky's (1967/1997) finding that narratives are structured by the time sequence of the original event that the story recapitulates contrasts with Sacks's treatment of stories in his lectures (1992) and elsewhere (1974, 1978, for instance). Sacks has shown how, rather than seeing something outside of the occasion of

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<sup>1</sup>It is important to distinguish narrative as a discursive unit through which communicators share experiences, so as to avoid assuming either that all communication involves sharing experiences or that all communication is narrative.

the storytelling as structuring it, we can look at the storytelling itself to see how, at each point, interactants work together to structure it. The anthropologists and sociolinguists whose work was discussed earlier in this chapter collect their stories in various ways from informants in the field, often asking that they tell a story. This may explain why research has tended to focus on the story and its production at the expense of the interactional situation storytelling is usually part of, and the social activities storytellings may undertake. A by-product of this method of collecting storytellings is that the processes through which storytellings are occasioned and warranted often cannot be studied (Goodwin, 1990, pp. 234–235).

Narratives in conversation generally fall into three parts that involve different kinds of interactive work. First, a prospective teller offers to tell a story or indicates that there may be something to tell. This can be forwarded or not by prospective recipients. Next, the teller recounts the event, and recipients produce turns that range along a continuum from “passive” to “active” with regard to the extent to which their turns shape what the teller says next. Finally, the teller may show that the telling is possibly complete. Recipient uptake of or alignment with the possible ending of the story is necessary for the resumption of turn-by-turn talk. I outline each segment of the storytelling more fully in the following sections, to show the extent to which one can discern how storytellings may be undertaken more or less skillfully.

**Beginning a Story.** Sacks (1974, 1978, 1992) pointed out that, as Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) had observed, ordinary conversation unfolds one minimal unit of talk, or turn constructional unit (TCU), at a time. A TCU can consist of a word, a clause, or a sentence. At the end of each TCU, the next speaker can take a turn. Ordinarily, a speaker needs to do something special (such as initiate a list or rush through into the next unit (Sacks et al., 1974) to indicate that he or she wants the floor for more than one minimal unit of talk. To tell a story, then, which consists of more than one TCU (a story is a multi-unit turn), a prospective teller needs to do something special to get the floor to take a turn with more than one TCU.<sup>2</sup> Prospective tellers’ attempts to get the floor for an extended turn can be described as falling along a continuum from turns that actively request to tell, to those that simply indicate that there may be a tellable, to a series of turns that simply begin a story by moving stepwise into it.

Sacks (1974) showed that we can offer or request to tell quite overtly (“You wanna hear a story my sister told me last night?”). This puts recipients in the position of forwarding the story, or not. Cohen (1999) explored utterances in which speakers indicate that there may be more to tell, but these *could* be treated as complete announcements in their own right. For example, turns such as “My husband said something really funny last night,” or “Shane ate lobster (.) this afternoon” *could* be heard as brief announcements in their own right but may be followed either by a recipient turn that forwards a telling or simply by an elaboration by the same speaker in the form of a telling. Where more than one party knows of the events alluded to, such a turn can work as a “story prompt” (Lerner, 1992), putting the other knowledgeable party in the position of telling a story. Jefferson (1978) showed how a prospective teller may move stepwise from some related topic through a series of turns into a storytelling. Each of these options has as a crucial feature the fact

<sup>2</sup>A story may also be elicited by a prospective recipient, such as when a police officer or a therapist encourages a prospective teller to tell a story; however, there has usually been some prior indication that there is, indeed, a story to tell.

that prospective tellers and prospective recipients must work together to suspend regular turn taking in favor of one party taking the floor for an extended turn at talk, with fellow interactants aligned as recipients. At its beginning, then, conversational storytelling is interactively constructed.

**The Body of the Telling.** The body of a telling may consist of distinct sections (C. Goodwin, 1984, pp. 226–227). It may begin with relevant background information, and then proceed to a climax. If, in the course of telling, the teller realizes that more information is needed for recipients to be able to understand the details of the account, a parenthetical section may be inserted. This usually takes the form of further background information that is embedded disjunctively into the ongoing telling. The story proceeds as a “series of connected sentences that have that connectedness built in such that it is required for the understanding of any one of them” (Sacks, 1992, p. 232). That is, one of the constitutive features of a storytelling is that the separate sentences are heard as part of an ongoing whole. Each individual sentence in a storytelling makes sense only when understood as part of an ongoing whole. C. Goodwin (1984) pointed out that part of the work of being recipient of a story is showing, through particular kinds of responses, what one takes the teller to be doing in a given part of the narrative. That is, different sections of the story make different requirements of recipients.

The recipient role is thus an interactive one in the body of the story also. Research has shown that recipients’ turns have an important impact on how the storytelling unfolds. Recipient responses can range along a continuum from “passive” to “active.” In storytellings, a passive response is one that minimally constrains what a teller can do next. Often these turns consist of “mm hm” or “uh huh” (Schegloff, 1982). Through turns of this kind during the course of a storytelling, “[their] producer is proposing that his coparticipant is still in the midst of some course of talk, and shall go on talking” (Jefferson, 1983, p. 4). A response of this kind contrasts with more “active” recipiency, in which the speaker produces a turn that requires a particular kind of response from the teller and may thus influence the course of the storytelling to come. Active recipient turns may even “exhibit a preparedness to shift from recipiency to speakership” and in this way threaten the storytelling. Although such turns as “mm hm” and “uh huh” may seem negligible in terms of their semantic content (and are often referred to as *back channels*) they clearly play an important role in the continuation of the storytelling, because they show that the recipient is attending and expects the teller to continue (see Drummond & Hopper, 1993, for a treatment of problems regarding the concept back channels). Their impact on an ongoing storytelling is minimal, because they do not show what the recipient is making of the storytelling beyond that they expect it to continue. In this way, they do not constrain the talk that the teller can produce next; however, their consequentiality is evident, Schegloff (1982) shows, when they come at the end of a storytelling when the recipient could (or should) show the understanding that the story may be complete. Producing a continuer such as “mm hm” or “uh huh” displays the expectation that the storytelling is ongoing. This puts the teller in the position of recompleting the storytelling, because it shows that the recipient is aligned as the recipient of an ongoing storytelling, rather than one that is possibly complete (Schegloff, 1982). This demonstrates that tellers monitor recipient responses closely. The experience that occurs on the telephone, when one party is taking a multiunit turn, does not hear an “mm hm” from a recipient for some period of time, and asks, “Are you still

there?” adds anecdotal weight to the analytic observation that tellers monitor closely even apparently minimal recipient responses.

More active recipient responses (that is, turns that exert more of an influence on what tellers can say next) include assessments, such as “wow!” or “how awful!” (C. Goodwin, 1986a; Pomerantz, 1984), because they show what the recipient is making of the events of the storytelling. Recipients can affiliate or disaffiliate with the line a teller is taking, and that alignment will often be displayed in an assessment. If a report of bad news gets a “great!” the teller may shift the way the story is being told so as to get a more affiliative response.

The most active recipient responses are first pair parts (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) such as questions. These actively shape or constrain what the teller can say next and may actually shift the course of the storytelling. The impact of a recipient turn on the course of the telling can be seen in the telling discussed above. Other work has shown how the recipient of a storytelling can ask questions that result in a story shifting from apparently being about how someone had an unfortunate restaurant encounter with a lobster, to how they got a good deal on their lobster lunch (Mandelbaum, 1989). These active recipient responses, which actually shape what the teller can do next, highlight the interactive character of storytelling.

This is also revealed at the end of a storytelling, where, as an “mm hm” demonstrates, the recipient needs to show that they take it that the story is over, and that turn-by-turn talk should resume after what has been told has been assessed. The consequences of a recipient turn that does not show full uptake of the story ending is also illustrated in the storytelling discussed earlier. After a story is shown by the teller to be over and treated by the recipient as over, it may be followed by a second story (Ryave, 1978; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, in press). Here, a story is told that is clearly constructed as related in some way to the prior. In the way that it makes that connection, it may show the second teller’s understanding of what was consequential about the first telling.

Throughout its course and in its aftermath, we see that conversational storytelling is not a preconstructed monologue. Rather, the storytelling itself, and what it comes to be, are interactively shaped by teller and recipient working together.

## ACTIVITIES ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH SHARING EXPERIENCES

Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) saw the functions of narrative as referring to and evaluating the experiences that the tellings they looked at recapitulated. We can sometimes see these elements in storytellings; a concern by the teller to get the order of events right can be shown when, for instance, a teller stops, backs up, and inserts a detail that is thereby produced as having been missing. This suggests that tellers are presenting their story as related to some actual series of events. Also, in the way that the events are recounted, tellers clearly indicate for recipients what they could or should be making of the story. Yet these functions of narrative are the tip of the narrative iceberg. Schafer (1983, p. 240) pointed out that Freudian psychoanalysis relies on analysts assisting analysands in transforming their narratives as told into others that are “more complete, coherent, convincing, and adaptively useful than those they have been accustomed to constructing.” Psychoanalysis thus takes as central the role of narrative in constructing everyday lives. The precise nature of these narratives is unclear, however. Narratives told to analysts in the office are different in various respects from the narratives constructed with other communicators in everyday casual and professional settings. They may serve the explicit function of

trying to make sense of one's life. In everyday conversations, stories are occasioned in different ways and may be methods for enacting a variety of activities.

Storytellings in conversation are rarely, if ever, taken by interactants as told just to "tell a story" or entertain. Rather, storytelling in everyday conversation often occurs as part of some line of action and in this way is often a method for doing some other practical activity. Storytellings may be used to do joking (Sacks, 1974, 1978, 1992), but even in a case that we think of as the epitome of entertaining, we find that these narratives perform some subtle social "tasks." Narratives may also be used as an interactive method for undertaking delicate activities, such as inviting, blaming, complaining, telling troubles, accounting, and gossiping. Additionally storytellings and how they are responded to by recipients may show us practices through which reality, self, and relationship may be interactively constructed, as well as activities in families, organizations, and other professional settings such as the legal and medical settings. I address briefly each of these in turn. Fuller discussions of the different actions interactively accomplished in the course of sharing experiences shows how sharing experiences is an important resource for accomplishing these actions. I also discuss implications for narrative skill.

## Joking and Laughter

The claim that storytelling, as an interactive practice in everyday conversation, is not simply a medium for entertainment but rather is used to enact a range of social activities is reinforced by looking at joke telling in everyday conversation. Conventionally, jokes are regarded as a mode of entertaining fellow interactants. Joke tellers are commended and may be renowned for their skill at joke telling; however, jokes produced in conversation can be seen to perform social tasks in addition to simply entertaining. In fact, whether they are entertaining to those to whom they are told is partially shaped by social factors.

Sacks (1974, 1978, 1992) examined some technical and social aspects of the telling of a dirty joke. First, he suggested that jokes, unlike storytellings, can be produced almost anywhere in conversation. Sacks claimed that they are unlike storytellings in this regard, because prospective tellers often go to great lengths to make a story part of ongoing talk. Sacks showed how jokes are brought to the floor in much the same way that storytellings are; the prospective joke teller must seek a suspension of regular turn-by-turn talk, and fellow interactants can align or not as prospective recipients. Then, the joke teller produces the joke. Sacks (1978) showed in detail how each part of the tight structuring of the joke provides for its understandability. In this way, jokes may be more tightly structured than ordinary stories, with little room for deviation in each retelling. Joke telling differs from storytelling in that recipients of jokes, unlike recipients of storytellings, who can produce a range of turns that have an impact on the course of the story, have limited ability to produce turns that shape the joke as it is produced. Also in jokes, unlike storytellings, the teller is rarely if ever the hero of the telling. The endings of storytellings and jokes both rely on recipient responses. In the case of jokes, appropriate recipient responses ordinarily consist of laughter (and possibly groans). If they are missing at the conclusion of a joke, this may be a measure of the joke's success or failure. In structural terms, then, there are points of similarity and points of difference between jokes and storytellings.

Sacks (1978) pointed out that in addition to entertaining, jokes do some particular kinds of "social work." He showed how a joke he examined is designed as a kind of "newsletter" for girls in early adolescence. Although the joke might be glossed

as a joke about oral sex, when examined carefully it becomes clear that although it is ostensibly about oral sex—and “tests” recipients’ knowledge of oral sex—it simultaneously takes up various issues that might be relevant to girls in early adolescence. These include the relationship between mother and daughter; girls’ concerns about losing their friends when they marry; the difficulties children experience in trying to figure out which parental rules are the ones to follow on a given occasion, etc. It addresses fears, concerns, and mysteries experienced by 13-year-old girls that they would not be able to put into words. In joke form, these issues are addressed *sub rosa*, thereby providing the intended recipients with reassurance and information. The “packaging” of this “information” in the format of a dirty joke provides for limits on to whom it is told. Mandelbaum (n.d.) showed that jokes told by college students display similar “social work.” Many of the jokes examined concern sex but pick up particular aspects that are specifically relevant to many college students: fear of getting pregnant, issues of contraception, managing multiple partners, which sexual activities are appropriate and which are not, and so on. The jokes also pick up quite subtle aspects of the life experience of college students. This is embodied in the fact that a large number of the jokes concern toys, superheroes, sex, indestructability, or combinations of these. That is, the jokes college students tell reflect the liminal stage that college represents in their lives. They seem to be specifically designed so as to capture such complex elements of the experience of late adolescence and early adulthood as sexual activity, while managing a lingering interest in the toys and fantasies of childhood. Similarly Mandelbaum (n.d.) found that older people told jokes that take up such concerns as memory problems, whereas young children told jokes about such things as “finding words”—the kinds of mysterious activities children are sometimes asked to engage in at school.

This discussion of jokes indicates that even these rather formulaic conversational objects constitute more than simply entertainment. Rather, they also perform a social “job” in interaction. Foot (1997) suggested a number of social tasks for which humor, more broadly, may be used. These include searching for information (including social probing and social acceptance); giving information (including self-disclosure, self-presentation, denial of serious intent, and unmasking hypocrisy); interpersonal control (including expression of liking and affiliation and dislike and hostility, controlling social interaction, and ingratiation); group control (including intragroup control and intergroup control); anxiety management (including saving face, coping with embarrassment, and as a safety valve for under- and overarousal); and changing and sustaining the status quo (including freedom from conventional thought and reinforcement of stereotypes). Foot also outlined several psychological tasks that laughter may fulfill: humorous, social, ignorance, evasion, apologetic, anxiety, derision, and joyous forms of laughter (pp. 273–275).

Jefferson (1985) showed how laughter can be precisely placed and that we can learn a lot from examining its precise placement. For instance, she showed how the placement of laughter particles on the word “organ,” which can be heard as a sexual double entendre, partially obscures the problematic word. In this way, it puts interactants in the position of applying their “dirty minds” to understanding the word as “organ.” When they show this understanding of the word that is partially obscured by laughter, they engage in a collaborative arrival at an obscenity. This case shows that we can learn about quite unexpected aspects of social organization through the close examination of the exact placement of laughter. Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff (1987) described how laughter may be used in the interactive construction of intimacy, where the withholding of laughter after an impropriety may constitute a rebuff of

an attempt at intimacy embodied in the impropriety, whereas joining in laughter at an impropriety may constitute a complicitness that may be taken as intimacy. These findings suggest that there is a great deal of interactive subtlety associated with the use of humor and laughter in interaction.

The multiple functions that humor and laughter may perform indicate that pragmatic knowledge is necessary for the deployment of laughter and humor in the appropriate environment. More work needs to be done to come to an understanding of how laughter and humor are interactively enacted (cf. Glenn, 1992, 1995). To date, research has not addressed issues of skillfulness regarding the telling of jokes and the production of laughter in conversation. It is clear from the description above, however, that skillfulness in joke telling cannot be captured simply in terms of the logistics of production, for joke telling and laughter both have complex social functions that may not be measurable in terms of success and failure.

## **The Bipartite Structure of Storytelling As a Resource in Sharing Experiences**

I have discussed the bipartite, interactive character of storytelling. The description shows that the ways in which a storytelling comes to have meaning are interactively arrived at. This characteristic may become a resource for both tellers and recipients. This is most clearly apparent in the case of brief reports. Next I describe how the interactive character of storytelling may provide a resource for inviting, blaming, accounting, complaining, telling troubles, and gossiping.

**Inviting.** Reduced stories, or reportings, may be used in a bipartite technique for managing invitations (Drew, 1984). By reporting a candidate social event, such as, "Uh nex'Saturday night's s'prise party here fer p-Kevin" the speaker can put the recipient in the position of inferring that the social event may be available for him or her. The recipient then has the choice of treating the report simply as news, which the potential inviter could take as an indication that the recipient is not interested in attending or alternatively respond by self-inviting, or at least indicating some interest. In this way, a minimal report of a potential social event, followed by self-inviting or some other invitation-relevant uptake, or alternatively treating the report simply as news, provides a collaborative method for managing invitations without explicitly engaging in an activity that could result in the inviter being turned down.

**Blaming.** A similar bipartite technique may be used for managing blame. For instance Pomerantz (1978) showed how a speaker may take the first step in indicating that something blameworthy has happened, without officially laying blame. This may be accomplished when a speaker reports an "agentless, unhappy event"—some "negative" circumstance for which the agent is not officially designated. This puts the recipient in the position of inferring from the reported circumstances that someone is to blame. In turn, they could assign responsibility, or report some other circumstance that shows they are not to blame.

[In Pomerantz, 1978, p. 118, instance (4)]

R: L:liddle (kaak) has been eading pudding.

C: You've been *feeding* it to im.

Here in R's turn she offers a minimal report of an agentless unhappy occurrence, the baby eating pudding. Here the object to whom something happened (the baby) is

referred to as a subject. The protagonist in the feeding of the baby is the candidate blamed party. In the next turn, the recipient transforms that event into a consequent event by describing an event that is chronologically prior to the “unhappy incident,” R feeding pudding to the baby. If an event can be turned into a consequent event, then an agent for it can be specified. C, the recipient of the report of the agentless unhappy event thus attributes blame for it by describing the preceding event. Reporting here provides a method for a speaker to make attributing responsibility relevant, without overtly engaging in blaming. Claiming responsibility thereby becomes voluntary and collaborative. In both inviting and blaming, the technique of presenting a neutral brief story or report, that puts the recipient in the position of inferring the “upshot” or consequences, provides a method for undertaking a delicate activity.

**Accounting.** Managing issues of responsibility is often dealt with under the rubric of *accounts*. Although the term accounts is used to characterize a variety of actions (described in the paragraphs that follow), in its strongest sense it refers to stories with which we attempt to remediate some wrong. Deriving the concept from Burke (Scott, 1993), Scott and Lyman (1968) examined “talk that shore[s] up the timbers of fractured sociation” (p. 46). Often, they found, this involves telling some aspect of the event that occurred that provides an explanation or justification for its having happened. A great deal of work in a number of fields has examined this phenomenon.

Buttny (1993) described four ways that the concept of accounts has been taken up. First, the telling of accounts in conversation has been seen by some as strongly related to remediating social wrongs, especially as this activity relates to matters of face preservation (Goffman, 1967). Within the communication field, work has focused in this domain (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985, 1988, 1990; McLaughlin, Cody, & O’Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983). Second, in the work of Antaki (1988) and Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990), accounts focus on explanation of everyday activities, with less of a focus on remediating social wrongs. A third sense of accounts forms part of the attribution theory literature, where accounts as explanations of actions, whether the actions are problematic or not, are not limited to verbal accounts but may form part of private cognitions (Antaki, 1987; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Weiner, Amirkham, Fokes, & Verette, 1987). Fourth, for ethnomethodologists, social actors treat their everyday activities as “accountable”—that is, sensible, normal, and proper. Accounting processes offer one method by which everyday persons treat and come to see their actions as ordinary. Rather than being a feature only of remediation, for ethnomethodologists, they are part of the everyday work of constructing the social fabric of everyday life, even though they are often “seen but unnoticed” (Garfinkel, 1967; Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Sacks, 1972, 1984).

For obvious practical reasons, much work on accounts has relied on reconstructed or remembered accounts, or accounts produced in response to hypothetical situations. As they occur in naturally occurring interaction, however, accounts are often found in narrative structures. Labov and Fanshel (1977) found them in the psychotherapeutic setting as part of justifications for actions. Gergen and Gergen (1983) and Weber, Harvey, and Stanley (1987) found them being used to explain failed relationships. Buttny (1993) pointed out that “Narratives as a discourse genre work as accounts when tellers re-present past events in such a way to defend their conduct. Narratives allow the teller to offer explanations at a greater length” (p. 18). Work on how accountings are produced targets excuses and justifications, explanations, and so on, often told in narrative form. Again we see a focus on the teller as primary communicator, with the active role of the recipient disattended. In this sense,

accounting is seen as consisting of strategies, often used in narrative form, with research offering the possibility of predicting which strategy might be used in a particular situation (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985, 1988, 1990; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983). In this research, situation is often glossed as "the activity for which an account is being used." This line of research could usefully be extended by examining the sequential environment and actual circumstances in which the account becomes necessary.

**Complaining.** Although not formally addressed as accounts, some work on how interactants manage issues of responsibility in longer stories shows that accounts may be brought to the floor in a way that provides for the delicate management of complaints. Here, a structure is used that is similar to that described earlier with regard to the use of short reports in constructing blame, in which the story is told neutrally, leaving the recipient to infer what is being done. In these longer complaints, however, tellers may first set up a frame that provides for recipients to infer the negative or problematic character of the neutrally recounted events. The frame puts recipients in the position of collaborating with the teller to discern, and show the appropriate reaction to, the complainable events the teller recounts. In Mandelbaum (1991/1992) we see a teller, Ronya, setting up a frame for the events she is about to tell: "n he really doesn't' know where he is. He always gets mixed up." This puts the recipient in the position of listening to the story, with this frame in mind, for events in the telling that could be understood to be evidence of the fact that "he really doesn't' know where he is. He always gets mixed up."

Here we see a method for complaining that is similar to the one discussed above with regard to blaming, where a brief reporting leaves the recipient to formulate its implications. In this particular instance, the recipient, Marilyn, does not take up the complaint-worthy character of the reported protagonist's actions. Instead, she ultimately asks a question that results in a shift to a story of her own, about what *she* did that afternoon. Accounts of why Marilyn does not take up the complaint and tells a neutral story of her own next are speculative, but it is possible that the relational complications of engaging in criticism of her brother-in-law (by affiliating with Ronya's complaint) outweigh the consequences of disattending the complaint. Nonetheless, it is clear that this method for providing a frame and then laying out a story in a neutral fashion involves the recipient in co-constructing with the teller what the story comes to be about. It is likely that interactants are sensitive to the relational delicacy of affiliating and disaffiliating with complaints and that whether a complaining story is treated as a complaint or simply as an account of an activity may be shaped by relational considerations.

Thus, one begins to see that how stories are told and responded to—the interactive work engaged in by teller and recipient—may be shaped at least partially by relational considerations. In this way, we come to see sharing experiences as a way of engaging in relationship-relevant activities. In the case of complaints—sharing a kind of trouble—multiple relational issues may be at stake. These might include affiliation between teller and recipient and also relational issues with regard to those about whom the complaint is made. Again, the multiple activities that are accomplished in a storytelling make it difficult to address the issue of narrative skill in this environment.

**Telling Troubles.** Clearly, telling personal troubles is a delicate matter; it is not simply a matter of conveying information or "getting something off one's chest." Rather, as the communication view of storytelling suggests, when a teller reports troubles, the

recipient must choose to align in a particular way. Each choice embodies a particular alignment (affiliative or disaffiliative) between interactants. Jefferson (1980a, 1980b, 1988; Jefferson & Lee 1992) pointed out that the telling of troubles is managed as a delicate matter. Telling another our troubles can constitute an imposition, in the sense that in doing so we put the recipient in the position of offering, for instance, advice or sympathy. Choosing to treat another's report of troubles simply as “news” may also embody a stance with regard to that other person. Telling and responding to troubles, then, like complaining, is laden with relational significance. The complicated social nature of the activity of telling troubles may explain why it is that, as Jefferson described, we often enact a sequence in which troubles are interactively brought to the floor step-by-step, rather than simply announcing them. Jefferson (1980a, p. 163) found that troubles announced “cold” are often met with resistance. Instead we may premonitor troubles by offering a downgraded response to “how are you,” such as “Oh, okay I guess,” for instance. The downgraded response may make it hearable to a prospective troubles recipient that there could be some sort of trouble to tell. Prospective recipients can then choose whether or not to take up the troubles. In the next example, the downgraded response to inquiry is taken up as indicating possible troubles to tell:

(Jefferson, 1980a, p. 153, instance [1])

- Bob: How Are you feeling now.
- Jayne: Oh:..? pretty good I gue..fliss:
- Bob: [Not so hot?  
(0.8)
- Jayne: I'm so:rt of waking u:p,
- Bob: Hm:m,

In the following example, it is not taken up:

(Jefferson, 1980a, p. 15, instance (3))

- Pete: How'r you:
- Marvin: I':m great,
- Pete: Goo:d.
- Marvin: How'r you.
- Pete: Pretty good?
- Marvin: Hey we're having a meetin:g Tuesday night,

Coming to talk about bad news, then, can be a collaborative effort. When prospective troubles tellers make it available that they may have troubles to tell, recipients may either forward talk about the troubles or turn to some other matter. The delicately downgraded response to inquiry alerts the prospective troubles recipient to the possibility that there may be troubles to tell, but does not coerce them into the position of troubles recipient. Rather, its subtle character provides for the voluntary character of troubles recipiency, because not taking it up is not an overt turning down of someone's offer to tell a trouble. Thus entry into a somewhat delicate activity, the telling of troubles, is managed in a delicate way that may be taken to preserve the social fabric of cooperation and affiliation. If collaborative arrival at troubles talk is valued, this would be regarded as a technique that is indicative of competence; however, if recipient uptake is the goal for a troubles teller, more “coercive” or less “collaborative” techniques may be necessary. This may be seen in the case of young children who

burst into tears to gain the floor to tell troubles to a parent or caretaker. Clearly, the ability to both tell and encourage the telling of troubles is enormously consequential in the domain of social support. Issues of collaborativeness and coerciveness make judgments about skillfulness in this activity particularly complicated.

This discussion further indicates the interactive character of storytelling and the social ramifications that it may have. This is similarly illustrated in a use of storytelling that is often regarded as storytelling at its lowest: Gossip.

**Gossip.** Some extensive studies of gossip have shown it to be a complex social activity with a particular structure that relies on the interactive character of storytelling. Bergmann (1993) pointed out that gossip involves "morally contaminated material" (p. 85). Indeed, it has been defined as, "nasty, deprecatory, ugly talk about one's neighbor." (p. 26). Yet gossip is an important ingredient in social life. What is transmitted, and to whom, both constructs and informs us about social networks and relationships and about social norms of appropriateness (Bergmann, 1993, p. 48).

Descriptions of how gossip is enacted show that it is a tightly structured activity that may involve a series of steps. First, there is some complexity associated with determining who is a suitable recipient of gossip. Appearing too eager to tell or too eager to be the recipient of gossip each has its own moral consequences. Bergmann suggested that "the gossip producer's morally contaminated information can also, à la radioactive substances, morally "pollute" anyone who reaches out for it unprotected" (p. 91). The telling of gossip therefore involves a careful invitation by a potential gossip recipient, or a careful proposal by a potential purveyor of gossip. In addition to establishing a mutual willingness to gossip, a prerequisite for gossip is that both parties have some familiarity with the prospective subject of gossip. This must be established also. This, and the actual purveying of gossip are done following a series of interactive steps (Bergmann, 1993). Bergmann suggested that gossip may work as a form of social control by establishing what is socially appropriate and what will be judged inappropriate. It may also preserve social groups by reinforcing the validity of the moral norms and values of a group (p. 144) and by limiting the right to gossip about one another to members of the group (p. 145).

M. Goodwin (1990) showed that gossip may be used strategically, describing how young teenagers may use a report of what a third party said about the gossip recipient as a means of "instigating" a confrontation between the gossip recipient and the third party. The interactive structure of the gossip telling allows the teller to structure it in such a way as to attempt to put the recipient in the position of committing him- or herself to confronting the third party at some future time. In this way, the study of storytelling as part of gossiping shows how it may be used to pursue social relational activities. Who tells what to whom has symbolic ramifications that participants seem to manage delicately in how they tell their gossip stories and to whom.

## CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL REALITIES THROUGH STORYTELLING

Berger and Luckman (1966) first began to formalize the claim that reality is socially constructed. Since that time, it has been amplified and explored in various branches of the social sciences particularly through ethnomethodological approaches and through social constructionism. Because narrative deals with the reconstruction of past events in communication, it provides a useful site for investigating the specific details of just how reality might be reconstructed in and through particular ways of

talking. It is rare, though, that the explicit purpose of communication is the construction of reality. Rather, we see issues of reality construction embedded in other social activities (Mandelbaum, 1993). In the following sections, I show how storytelling provides a resource for constructing and managing self, relationships, family, organizations, legal settings, and medical settings.

## Social Construction of Self and Relationships

Gergen (1991) proposed that the postmodern age, in which our lives have become saturated with numerous social contacts, helps us to see the “self” as “relational.” That is, he suggested that we construct multiple selves in a somewhat fluid and contingent manner in and through our relationships with multiple others. Gergen wrote of “multiphrenia.” We consist of a “multiplicity of self-involvements.” Along similar lines, Davies and Harré (1991/1992) distinguished between the “E-” or “enlightenment-” model of the self, and the “P-” or “post-structuralist” model. The “E-” model sees the individual as a “unitary rational being who is separate from the social world and its discursive practices” (p. 8). In contrast, the “P-” model shifts the focus from the person to the discursive practices through which personhood is constructed. Narratives provide ways for interactants to present and negotiate versions of “self” in multiple relationships. In recounting an event in which a person participated in some way, he or she offers a version of him- or herself. Given the interactive character of storytellings in conversation, when a version of an event is negotiated, the “self” of protagonists may be negotiated also. For instance Mishler (1986) offered the symbolic implications of a lengthy story told by an interviewee in the course of an interview. The interviewee recounts in some detail how (among other things), despite an adverse financial situation, he rejects a doctor’s offer to reduce his medical bill. Although the interviewee does not explicitly state the implications of his storytelling, (except, at the interviewer’s prompting, that this is “a low point” in his life), Mishler suggested, “It becomes a narrative of triumph over adversity while at the same time it presents the respondent as a person with a valid social identity, as a responsible man who pays all bills, including the “monster” doctor’s bill, despite financial strain” (1986, p. 73). A teller may attempt to portray a particular version of self through a narrative, but there are two considerations that have an impact on what we can learn about the self from looking at narratives. First, although narratives may portray versions of self, they often are designed to accomplish some other activity, such as to defend against an accusation (e.g., Mandelbaum, 1993). Second, what that version of self comes to be is often negotiated through recipient responses to the narrative.

Storytelling provides us with particularly compelling insight into how these inferential processes regarding the self may work in talk. In particular, stories about the actions of someone other than the teller, told in the presence of that actor, show how strong inferences about issues of the self may be made available. In responding to tellings about themselves, recipients display the extent to which communicators are alert to implications regarding their “self” that may be presented in talk. C. Goodwin (1984) described how recipients may demonstrate their alignment through their body movements while a story about them is recounted in their presence. This is further illustrated in the phenomenon of responses to teases. The mildest of indictments is a tease: One party censures another in a joking way, calling attention to some mildly egregious action. Drew (1987) pointed out that responses to teases are notable because despite the fact that a prerequisite for a tease is that it should be done in a joking fashion, teases very frequently are responded to seriously. We could infer that

interactants may be showing a concern for self-presentation when they replace the teasing version of their action with a serious one.

In the following instance, Annette offers a teasing formulation of two people stopping to chat: "you started yacking." Immediately this is rejected by the recipient of the tease ("No(hh)o"), who then proposes an alternative version of what occurred: "I give her a lift back." Although laughter tokens are incorporated in the rejection of the teasing version, "No(hh)o", suggesting the recipient's recognition that "you started yacking" may be offered in jest, the recipient nonetheless offers a serious response. She rejects the teasing version of what she did and replaces it with what "actually" happened.

Drew (1987, p. 222, fragment (2))

(The visitor has just come into the house with Annette's mother).

- Annette: Hello:  
 Visitor: [He:llo:: how are you:...]  
 Annette: [Alright thank you?  
 Visitor: I saw your Mum at the bu:s stop so I  
     [(give her a li(h)ft)]  
 Annette: [(and) you started ya]cking  
 ==> Visitor: No(hh)o I give her a lift ba]ck  
 Annette: [Oh:::

In replacing "yacking" with "giving a lift," the alternative version of what happened is clearly one that replaces a "negative" version of the visitor's action with one which casts her in a positive light. Given the action of replacing a description with possible negative implications, albeit a joking one, with one that has more positive implications for the "self" of the protagonist, we have some grounds for claiming that the work of self-construction may be going on here. Again, though, along with the interactants, we are left to infer a possible concern with self.

Sometimes what appears to be a relatively simple case of a story being told to make fun of another becomes more complex in terms of its relational implications. For instance, when a storytelling is told in such a way as to tease someone present, the teased party may respond with an alternative version of the events that put them in the position of being teased, one that potentially exonerates them (Mandelbaum, 1993). The first story, then—the tease—is a way in which one party can attribute responsibility to the other. The retelling of the event by the "accused party" is a rebuttal. In this particular case, we see storytelling as a method for dealing with issues of responsibility. Competing versions of reality are consequential for the implications they make available about the protagonists in the event being told and then retold. In this way, through their conduct, interactants show their alertness to the implications that may be drawn about them from a storytelling. In such cases, storytelling may become a way of constructing competing versions of self and reality, in which "what really happened" is tied up in issues of responsibility. Again, theoretical concepts can perhaps be documented by seeing storytelling (here, specifically in the environment of teasing) as a method through which self and reality are managed.

Here, storytelling provides interactants with a means to propose and correct versions of actions. The correction appears to address not just the facts of the occurrence, but its *symbolic implications* as well. In this way, storytelling can provide for implications and inferences about the self in a collaborative, yet unspoken way. It should

be noted, however, that social roles often are best thought of as by-products of some main activity. Sacks (1984) showed how, by choosing to recount unusual events in a matter-of-course fashion, interactants construct themselves as ordinary members of society, or “do being ordinary.” The way people tell stories about their experience becomes a way of positioning themselves. As noted in the discussion of storytelling and complaints, in the telling of and responding to storytellings, relational activities may be managed (Mandelbaum, 1991). In this way, we begin to see that conversational storytelling is one among a collection of communication practices for interactively proposing, constructing and enacting relationships.

Cohen (1999) further showed this to be the case. In describing the sharing of experiences in infertility support groups, Cohen showed that the ways women in these groups tell and respond to stories about injurious comments made to them constitutes an important way in which empathy, a kind of social support, is interactively constructed. By telling stories neutrally, injured parties put others who may have had similar experiences in the position of using their own experiences as a resource for understanding when a display of sympathy is relevant. In this way storytelling structures allow participants to display empathy rather than simply claiming it.

Relational matters may also be dealt with through other activities that storytellings are designed to accomplish. For instance, I showed how the “butt” of a tease that is done through a storytelling may be “rescued” when a recipient asks questions of the teller that result in a shift in the direction of the storytelling (Mandelbaum, 1989).

Storytellings may also be methods for constructing social roles. Mandelbaum (1987) and Lerner (1992) showed how particular ways of telling stories about shared events can be methods by which interactants produce the appearance of, in Goffman’s terms, being in a “with” or being “together.” For instance, one member of a couple may recognize another’s remote reference to a tellable shared past event and forward a storytelling about it. In this way, the couple displays “private” understanding. The ability to recognize the tellable shared past event from a remote reference and forward a telling about it may constitute a kind of “couple expertise,” because it involves a close monitoring of ongoing talk for couple-relevant material and constitutes a display of mutual understanding. In these cases, however, the production of the appearance of being together is not the main business of the storytelling.

Blum-Kulka (1997) described family stories, showing how stories told among family members at the dinner table are often what she calls “today narratives”—narratives told about what happened during the day when family members were apart. These may be initiated by “self”—the person whose day is being recounted, or by “other,” as in the question, “So how was your day.” She suggested that “today narrative events act as critical socializing contexts for the acquisition of narrative skills” (p. 112) and showed how conversation over the family dinner table can become an opportunity for family members to model for one another what constitutes appropriate responses to “How was your day?” In telling stories in response to this question and in recipient responses to the tellings, children learn how to tell stories. Blum-Kulka explained that young children may be taught how narratives proceed by having them elicited (Ninio, 1988; Sachs, 1979) or through stories told jointly with adults (Heath, 1982, 1983; Snow, 1991). Children are also shown how to order the events of the story, how to show that they have reached the story’s climax, and so on.

Blum-Kulka suggested that today stories serve different functions in families than they do in the workplace, for instance. She suggested that in the workplace, they may “serve mainly phatic interactional goals, aimed predominantly at the maintenance of social relations rather than the transmission of information” (p. 119). In families, the

information contained in the tellings is important. In addition, the telling of the today story “provides conventionalized ways for the show of reciprocal interest and affect in the family, simultaneously serving as a socializing context for transmitting cultural notions of appropriate ways to transform tales into tellings” (p. 120).

Family dinner time is an “opportunity space” in many families (Ochs, Smith & Taylor, 1989, p. 238) in that families may come together at the end of the day, providing a time when family members can talk. Gergen (1991) suggested that with the advent of the postmodern era, and the speeding up of everyday life, this previously inviolate opportunity may become rare. Ochs et al. named the genre of stories they see occurring at dinner time “detective stories” because they involve family members acting as conarrators by eliciting information that will help the primary teller solve the problem raised in the narrative. They suggested that “joint problem-solving through narrative gives structure to family roles, relationships, values, and world views” (Ochs et al., 1989, p. 238). Through conarration, family members come to co-own these roles, relationships, values, and world views.

Taylor (1995) showed how storytelling at the dinner table, and co-constructing the meaning of stories in their aftermath, may be an important way for parents to teach children how to understand and manage the emotional impact of events in which they coparticipate. She suggests that storytelling and the reframing of it in its contested aftermath may provide a method for parents to rationalize, reassure, and restore family face in the aftermath of a troubling interaction (p. 312).

The various sets of activities that can be conducted in and through conversational storytelling suggest that close examination of storytelling puts us in a position to add to the body of work that is beginning to lay out the details of the kinds of interactional work that may be involved in constructing relationships, selves, and reality. One begins to see these concepts, then, as collections of interactional practices (of which storytelling is but one example).

Although the account so far of the variety of activities for which narratives are used locates them in casual, everyday conversations, clearly they are widely used in professional settings as well. Drew and Heritage (1992) described how ordinary talk can be used in specialized ways so as to construct and sustain professional settings. In the settings discussed in the following sections, it becomes clear that tellers construct narratives in professional settings in ways that are attentive to distinctive features of the particular setting. Here, I review work on narrative in the business, legal, and medical settings. The discussion suggests that narratives in these settings involve specialized forms of storytelling procedures within ordinary conversation (Heritage, 1984; Maynard, 1990).

## Constructing Social Realities in Organizations

Czarniawska suggested that, “[t]he claim that the main source of knowledge in the practice of organizing is narrative is not likely to provoke much opposition” (1997, pp. 5–6). She illustrated this by asking how academics learn their dual research and teaching profession: “From the two-by-two variable models, or by asking their colleagues how they went about it? In all their different versions, organizational stories capture organizational life in a way that no compilation of acts ever can; this is because they are carriers of life itself, not just “reports” on it” (1997, p. 21). Drawing on Bruner (1986), Czarniawska suggested that narrative is particularly useful in the organization because multiple narrative versions of a singular event allow for negotiation and management of “reality.”

Browning (1992) cited Lyotard's (1984) claim that “lists and stories are the language game in organizations.” Lists have the rational, orderly character that is stereotypical of “business” communication, whereas stories are characterized by a relaxed requirement for carefulness (Weick, 1980). Browning suggested that people see stories as “flexible, evolving, and changing” (p. 287). Their role in organizations is crucial in orienting newcomers. “Stories fill the breaks in technical rationality” (p. 292). Furthermore, stories are widely used in organizations as a means for constructing and passing on organizational culture.

Research has attested to the important social roles of well-constructed narratives. They are useful for “emotionally involving both teller and listener, provoking attention, interest, and absorption” (Bormann, 1983; Wilkins, 1978, cited by Witten, 1993). Witten (p. 98) explained that the co-orientation of teller and listeners around a narrative's central characters and events may result in their achieving “a sense of collective participation, shared experience, and psychological investment” (Bormann, 1983; Fisher, 1984; Martin, 1982). Narratives may also be powerful vehicles for the exercise of covert control in the workplace. Through the telling and retelling of narratives in organizations, “hierarchical relationships . . . are imaged, workers are taught the parameters and obligations of their roles, and behavioral norms in service of the organization's ends are conveyed” (Witten, 1993, p. 98). Witten described how these organizational narratives provide a means for social control within the organization, providing exemplars of permissible behavior, imparting values affecting problem definition, and embodying anticipated reactions. Thus, narratives, although told for many different social interactional reasons, may become a tacit means for constructing and reinforcing ideologies.

## Reconstructing Reality in the Legal Setting

In building legal cases in courtrooms, witnesses and defendants reconstruct past events. Often, these narratives are elicited by lawyers, utterance by utterance. In this respect, narratives in the courtroom are “driven” by one recipient, for a number of “overhearing” parties—judge, jury, defendant, attorneys, and so on. Drew (1985) showed that quite subtle features of how an event is retold may have a great deal of impact on the case being made. For instance, lexical choice may be consequential. Using the word *bar* instead of *club* to describe where the victim met the defendant before the rape may portray the victim as the kind of person who frequents bars. Drew showed how a victim replaces the word “bar” from the defense attorney's question with “club” (p. 138) in responding to a question about where she met the defendant. Lawyers and witnesses may produce alternative competing descriptions and thus show alertness to the consequentiality of lexical choice in reconstructing the crime for the court.

The role of narrative is also seen as crucial in the informal, negotiative activity of plea bargaining in the legal system. “[T]hrough narratives and narrative structure, as elements of a robust and impermeable interaction order, participants bring to life such factors as the law, organizational ‘roles,’ and even the identity of a defendant, as part of mundane negotiative discourse” (Maynard, 1990, p. 66). Maynard pointed out that unlike the personal narratives found in everyday conversation and the law courts, in plea bargaining “third person narratives” are found, because storytellings are “parasitic on the tellings and writings of primary observers (offenders, witnesses, victims) and secondary interpreters (e.g., police)” (1990, p. 67). He found that these narratives are adapted to the purpose they serve and have an identifiable format that

differs slightly from the format of narratives in casual conversations. Narratives in plea bargaining have the following format (Maynard, 1990, p. 68):

- A. Story entry devices by which participants warrant the telling of a story, such as
  - Naming of the case
  - Synopsis
  - Transition to story
- B. The story itself, including
  - A background segment
  - An action report
  - A reaction report
- C. Following the story, a defense segment, which consists of
  - Denial
  - Excuse

In explicating these sections, Maynard showed that “from the outset stories are not neutral renderings of “what happened” but aim toward or intend the kind of bargaining stance that teller ultimately takes” (p. 70). In this regard plea bargaining stories resemble the accounts given in law courts as well as in everyday conversation: They are told in such a way as to make a particular point. Maynard also noted that the use of narrative is sensitive to who the audience is. Narratives are recounted when judges (who may not be familiar with the case) are present at plea-bargaining sessions, but very rarely when the session is held with only attorneys (who are familiar with the case) present. Thus “through narrative and other interactional structures, participants constitute the reality of facts, character, rules, and law as features of situated activity” (p. 88).

## **Constructing Symptoms in the Medical Setting**

Halkowski (in press) pointed out that patients going to the doctor's office face a dilemma. While on the one hand they must be sufficiently attentive to their bodies' functioning to be aware of symptoms when they develop, they should not be overly attentive to their bodies, since that would constitute hypochondria. One of the tasks that patients must manage in the doctor's office is the “accurate and appropriate witnessing and experiencing of their bodily state” (Halkowski, forthcoming, p. 2). Through their narratives of symptoms they portray themselves as “reasonable” patients. Two forms that these narratives may take are (1) packaging the narratives as “a sequence of noticing,” and (2) a format consisting of “at first I thought “X”, and then I realized “W”” (Halkowski, in press, p. 5). Where in the course of the office visit a narrative of symptoms occurs also is important. It may occur in response to a physician's eliciting question such as, “How can I help you?” If it comes at the start of the visit in response to the doctor's question about what brought the patient in, it may have the character of the patient trying to discern whether what he or she is feeling is indeed medically relevant. Formatting one's concern as a “narrative of problem discovery” may be a way for a patient to solve the problem of how to formulate a health problem, the name of which one does not know (Halkowski, in press, p. 9). When narratives of problem discovery come during the history-taking component of the medical interview, they attend to the likely medical relevance of the problem because the doctor has already treated the problem as possibly medically relevant. Halkowski emphasized that in formulating their narratives of symptom discovery,

patients are managing the “patient’s dilemma” and that medical professionals should attend to this aspect of their possible enterprise, rather than assuming that patients are not telling their stories in the most useful clinical way possible.

The ways narratives are told in organizations and in legal and medical settings indicate that tellers are alert to particular “problems” posed by participation in these settings. The adaptations of storytelling format and use are adapted to, informative about, and participate in constructing the particular character of the respective institutions.

**Storytelling as Methodology.** Narratives in monological form are often used as ways of working through or inspecting certain issues. Hanne (1994), quoted by Geist (1999), said of college professors: “Their narrations can be viewed as a prime mechanism by which they negotiate their way through dilemmas, searches, tensions, and challenges of their daily lives as academics within established contexts of power.” Bochner and Ellis (1992) showed how independently and then cooperatively narrating an abortion experience can be a way for a couple to work through the experience and make sense of it in retrospect. Narrative is frequently used to gain access to people’s reasoning and sense-making processes in retrospect. Theorizing that people naturally tell stories to make sense of their experiences, many researchers use this resource to understand a variety of personal and interpersonal issues. Bruner (1992) described having families tell their stories in an attempt to understand how identities are constructed within families. Mishler (1992) showed how a narrative told to the researcher displays the well-constructed format expected of narratives in Western culture. It consists of a temporally ordered series of events (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997), is coherent at several levels, and has the expected agent-conflict-action structure (Rumelhart, 1975, 1977). Furthermore, it has a “point” (Polanyi, 1985). After pointing this out, Mishler cautioned that as researchers it is important to sustain a reflexive awareness of the role of the interviewer and interview situation on co-producing with the narrator these features of the story’s orderliness (1992, p. 35). Thus, narratives provide a resource for research by virtue of the way in which they package information and reconstruct events. They also provide a resource for researchers to trace how orderliness is constructed in and through methods of data collection.

## CONCLUSIONS

The point here regarding both how we tell stories and what we use them to do is that storytellings and the activities we undertake when we share experiences are interactively constructed. Looking at the details of interaction puts us in the position of laying out the details of how these various activities are done by tellers and recipients working together. Conversational storytelling provides a particularly nice method for undertaking such delicate activities as inviting, blaming, and complaining because events can be laid out neutrally, putting recipients in the position of formulating the possible implications available in the storytelling or simply treating the account as news. Sharing experiences is one member of the collection of practices involved in a range of social activities, including accounting, telling troubles, and gossiping, as well as constructing selves, relationships, family, organizations, and legal and medical settings.

Narratives of personal experience, then, for communication scholars, are markedly different from narratives within a literary genre, for they show themselves to be collaborative constructions, deployed in the service of conducting the interpersonal

business of everyday life. Understanding how conversational narratives are undertaken and what they are used to do may provide insight into a range of conceptual taken for granteds, including relationships, selves, and reality.

## NARRATIVE SKILL REVISITED

I have made the claim that a communication conception of narrative involves seeing it as an interactive, situated activity, that is, although the teller may produce the narrative, it is produced in and through interaction with recipients, who have a defining role in co-constructing what a narrative comes to be. The "audience" is the "coauthor" (Duranti & Brenneis, 1986). An interactive view of narrative has important implications for our understanding of narrative skill. This is demonstrated in Halkowski's (1999) account of the narrative produced by a man with aphasia. He showed that although on objective measures the man does not have the linguistic or narrative competence to produce a narrative, he is able to tell an interviewer about how he knew he was having a stroke. Halkowski pointed out that tests often measure linguistic competence in a "desocialized and detemporalized" situation by looking at it only as "the sole product of an individual's speech" (1999, p. 265). In contrast, narratives are produced interactively. They are produced for and with other people, in social settings, to undertake discernible interactional tasks. Because telling a story seems never to be an end in itself or a singular activity but is rather a method for undertaking a broad range of other activities, often shifting and negotiated in their course, narrative skill goes beyond the individual's ability to construct a coherent, cohesive narrative that makes a point. From a communication perspective, narrative competence involves the ability of tellers and recipients to "do things" with narratives in interaction.

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PART

# IV

## SKILLS IN CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS



CHAPTER

# 16

## FRIENDSHIP INTERACTION SKILLS ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN

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By the early part of the second year of life, children begin to direct markedly social behaviors toward one another (Brownell & Carriger, 1990; Ross & Lollis, 1987). These behaviors soon become increasingly complex and organized. At first, a toddler might simply look and smile at a peer; next he or she might look, smile, vocalize, and wave a toy, all at the same time. Relatively quickly, such actions are combined to form complex routines that contain all of the basic features of adult interaction. By age two-and-a-half, children can signal interest in one another, exchange roles, sustain a common focus in play, and make repeated efforts to gain each other's attention (Haslett, 1983; Rubin, 1980). It is through such primitive "conversation" that youngsters develop specialized patterns of interaction leading to their earliest friendships. By age 4, children actually begin to use the word *friend* to distinguish between familiar and nonfamiliar peers (Hartup, 1983).

Over the next several decades, the time individuals spend with their friends will wax and wane depending on a variety of factors including age, gender, marital status, and work. What it means to be a friend—and the specific functions this relationship serves in people's lives—will change as well. What remains constant across the life span, however, is the significance of friendship to one's physical and emotional well-being. Studies show that children who lack friends experience a variety of concurrent and long-term adjustment problems. These problems include academic failure, truancy, school dropout, drug and alcohol abuse, antisocial conduct, juvenile delinquency, and suicidal ideation (for a review, see Ladd, 1999). Adults suffer similarly adverse outcomes when their needs for affiliation are not met. A lack of friendship in adulthood has been found to predict morbidity, depression, anxiety, and fatigue (for a review, see Fehr, 1996). In short, Bette Midler was right: "You've got to have friends."

The relationship between communication and friendship has been examined in a variety of ways. Researchers have, for example, identified broad behavioral categories that distinguish children who have friends from those who do not (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993a, 1993b); they have examined the content or themes of conversations

between friends (e.g., Aries & Johnson, 1983); they have described communication variables that discriminate among types or levels of friendship (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973); researchers have even sketched how communicative factors (and their underlying cognitive processes) contribute to friendship development and decline (e.g., Elicker, Englund, & Sroufe, 1992). Few studies, however, have explored the *specific interaction competencies* necessary for what Cook (1977) called the “skilled performance” of making (and keeping) friends. “As a result,” argue developmental researchers Jeffrey Parker and John Seal, “the field does not yet possess sufficient understanding of the social skills and behaviors that contribute to friendship’s success” (1996, p. 2251).

Studies of friendship conceptions and expectations do, however, offer a rich source of information regarding (a) how individuals conceptualize or define friendship, (b) the activities they believe to be indicative of friendship, and (c) what they expect from real as well as ideal friends. Understanding what people think of and do with their friends—that is, understanding the *nature* of friendship and how it changes over time—is thus essential to identifying the kinds of skills most relevant to success within this relationship. In other words, the communication skills required for successful friendships vary as a function of the conceptions and expectations people have for this relationship. As these conceptions change over the life span (and in conjunction with other variables such as gender and culture), so do the skills needed to develop and maintain mutually satisfying friendships. As Zarbatany, Hartman, and Rankin (1990, p. 1069) argued, “Behavioral expectations regulate [people’s] social interactions by imposing constraints upon the range of behavior that is permissible and by providing prescriptions and proscriptions regarding behavior that is particularly desirable and undesirable.”

Throughout this chapter, such behavioral expectations serve as a framework not only for identifying communicative competencies relevant to friendship formation and maintenance, but also for understanding why these skills relate to friendship success at different points in time. Three broad developmental periods are explored: (a) childhood, (b) adolescence and young adulthood, and (c) middle and late adulthood. For each period, studies examining people’s beliefs about friendship, the activities that occupy the time they spend with friends, and the structural qualities that define their relationships are reviewed. The extent to which gender influences such conceptualizations, activities, and structural components is also explored.

The skills that emerge as a result of such an analysis can be loosely classified in terms of whether they focus on interaction (e.g., conversation initiation and management), affect management (e.g., comforting, ego support, and self-disclosure), entertainment (e.g., joking, gossiping, storytelling), or relational repair (e.g., conflict management). In many ways, these categories mirror three tasks that Burleson, Metts, and Kirch (2000) argued are addressed through communication in all personal relationships: instrumental tasks, relationship maintenance tasks, and interaction management tasks. Just how the skills that accomplish these tasks are played out in friendship at different life stages is the focus of the remainder of this discussion. The chapter ends with a brief look at the effects of social skills training on the remediation of deficiencies in communicative abilities relevant to friendship formation and maintenance across the life span.

Before embarking on such a review, it is important to define some key terms, not the least of which is *friendship*. Definitions abound; for example, Reisman (1979) conceptualized a friend as “someone who likes and wishes to do well for someone else and who believes that these feelings and good intentions are reciprocated by

the other party" (pp. 94–95). Wright (1984), on the other hand, described friendship as involving "voluntary or unrestrained interaction in which the participants respond to one another personally, that is, as unique individuals rather than as packages of discrete attributes or mere role occupants" (p. 119).

Although definitions such as these vary in their specifics, most researchers agree on at least three core features, namely, that friendship is *voluntary*, that it is a relationship based on *equality*, and that some measure of *reciprocity* must be present for friendship to endure (see Rawlins, 1992). There is also general agreement that friendship can take a variety of forms. Most often, different types (or forms) of friendship are characterized according to demographic features (e.g., men's friendships, women's friendships, same-gender friendships, cross-gender friendships) or their level of intimacy (acquaintance vs. close vs. best friend). It is of no small consequence that this latter classification can make comparisons across studies difficult—one researcher's friendship may be another's acquaintanceship.

It is also important to distinguish between what is meant by *social competence* and what is meant by *social skill*. For the present purposes, social competence indexes a pattern of performance in the environment; it is, in effect, a generalization based on one's overall track record of behavior (Masten et al., 1995). In contrast, social skill is taken to refer to a person's ability to engage in behaviors that accomplish specific social tasks suggested by the demands of particular relationships at particular points in time (McFall, 1982). Social competence can thus be regarded as the overall manifestation of the various social skills a person possesses. Both competence and skill are evaluated with respect to normative expectations for people of a given age cohort, and both are always defined within a particular historical and economic context (Ladd, 1999; Masten et al., 1995). In keeping with these definitions, this chapter seeks to highlight specific communication skills relevant to the formation and maintenance of close, same-gender friendship. The vast majority of work relevant to this focus has centered on friendships among majority members of Western cultures. The subsequent review necessarily reflects this bias; however, when possible, studies examining the communicative predictors of same-gender friendship among members of different ethnic groups are included. Working with an overarching life-span framework, the chapter begins with children.

## FRIENDSHIP IN CHILDHOOD

### Peer Acceptance Versus Friendship

Children participate in a variety of relationships with their peers. Several researchers (e.g., Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; George & Hartmann, 1996; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997) have argued that to understand how peers affect children's adjustment, we must gather data on the multiple forms of relationships they establish and sustain. Two types of relationships, defined by the extent to which a child is liked or accepted by the peer group and the extent to which he or she has friends, have received widespread attention.

The general degree of liking (or disliking) children experience among peers is typically referred to as their "sociometric status" or "group acceptance." Levels of sociometric status are determined by asking members of an intact social system (e.g., a classroom, a playgroup, etc.) to nominate a finite set of peers "they most like" as well as those "they least like" or to rate their peers on some relevant criterion (e.g., fun to play with, good to work with, starts a lot of fights, etc.). Using the

nominations or ratings, children are then classified into one of five status levels: popular, accepted, neglected, rejected, and controversial (see Coie & Dodge, 1990; Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). Acceptance is regarded as a "unilateral construct" in that it captures the group's view of an individual (Parker & Gottman, 1989). On the other hand, friendship is thought of as a "bilateral construct" that indexes a mutual relationship between two people (Masten et al., 1995). Friendship is often assessed through reciprocal nominations, that is, two people are considered friends if they nominate each other as one of their most liked peers (Asher & Parker, 1989; Furman & Robbins, 1985).

Thus, although connected, friendship and acceptance represent distinctly different ways in which youngsters can relate to one another. Recent studies suggest several reasons why it is important to distinguish between the two. First, friendship and acceptance make significant, independent contributions to various forms of adjustment throughout childhood and adolescence. In general, peer acceptance appears to be more closely related to outcomes such as social dissatisfaction, isolation, and academic readiness, whereas friendship is more closely tied to self-esteem and loneliness (Coleman, 1993; Ladd et al., 1997).

Second, friendship and acceptance appear to serve related but distinct functions in children's lives. At least from preadolescence on, the close, mutual connection between two friends provides opportunities for intimacy, companionship, emotional support, and understanding (Berndt, 1989; Hartup, 1996). Friendship also appears to provide a context in which children learn important lessons about equality, mutual understanding, reciprocity, and negotiation—lessons that the hierarchical structure of the parent-child relationship precludes (Youniss, 1980). On the other hand, the peer group functions more as a source of social comparison. Hanna (1998) argued that because children expect understanding and support from friends, they look to peers for "honest evaluations" of themselves.

Relatedly, some scholars even suggest that friendship and acceptance represent different developmental achievements. For example, Sullivan (1953) was among the first to propose that gaining acceptance within the peer group is a key developmental task faced by children, whereas forming stable and ongoing friendships becomes the primary exigency of adolescence. In support of these claims, friendship, not acceptance, has been found to be the strongest predictor of self-esteem among preadolescent and adolescent youngsters (Bishop & Inderbitzen, 1995).

Third, a great deal of evidence indicates that popularity does not guarantee that one has friends and, conversely, that rejection should not be equated with friendlessness. Parker and Asher (1993a, 1993b) reported that a significant minority of highly accepted children did not receive any reciprocated friendship nominations. They also observed that more than 50% of all poorly accepted youngsters in their sample had at least one mutual friendship.

Such differences suggest that the social skills that enable children to access the peer group may be somewhat different from those that allow them to initiate and maintain friendships. In fact, some scholars (e.g., Burhmester & Furman, 1986; Hanna, 1998) have argued that friendship may be more complex than peer acceptance. Whereas characteristics such as niceness, likability, and cooperation are common to both forms of relationships, friendship involves the additional features of intimacy, security, emotional support, and so forth. As Hanna (1998) explained, "Although elements important to peer acceptance are likely to make [an individual] seem an attractive potential friend, additional elements may be necessary for developing high quality friendships" (p. 311).

Unfortunately, we know relatively little about the specific abilities through which the “additional elements” of friendship are realized because most work in this area is grounded in the sociometric tradition (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Rose & Asher, 1999). According to Parker and Seal (1996), sociometric studies are useful for capturing the kinds of behaviors associated with judgments of attractiveness and likability. However, if Hanna is correct, children cannot form friendships with those to whom they are not attracted. From this perspective, then, the communicative abilities that predict children’s social standing may also limit the field of potential partners with whom they can become friends. In support of this logic, George and Hartmann (1996) found that fifth- and sixth-graders who had difficulty interacting at the group level also had trouble establishing reciprocal friendships. Other researchers have observed that popular children possess behavioral repertoires that promote success in both friendship and acceptance (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993). Sociometric studies examining the communicative correlates of peer acceptance throughout childhood are, therefore, included in the subsequent discussion.

## The Nature of Friendship Across Childhood

***Friendship Conceptions and Activities in Young Childhood.*** Very young children do not understand that others possess thoughts and feelings that differ from their own. Because the subjective nature of friendship eludes them, youngsters in early childhood fail to recognize that they might choose friends on the basis of personal characteristics and qualities. Instead, friends are described as “nonspecific” others who share activities, time, and or materials (see Damon, 1977; Youniss, 1980). For many children of this age, play and friendship are equated. Anyone with whom a child plays would be considered a friend, but the relationship lasts only as long as the interaction. The process of becoming friends is a simple matter of sharing toys and playing together; when these activities are absent, friendship and liking cannot occur. Being kind to someone means *more* sharing and *more* play. On the other hand, nonfriends are considered those who do not play, who are not in geographical proximity, and who do not have good toys to share.

***Friendship Conceptions and Activities in Midchildhood.*** Play remains an important feature of friendship throughout middle childhood, although it tends to be focused on highly organized games. In fact, Boulton (1993a, 1993b) observed that one of the most common causes of fighting among middle school children was over some aspect of a rule-governed game. According to this author, competent play in middle childhood may thus require “an interest in winning, together with the ability to adhere to the rules of the game” (p. 497).

Throughout this period, youngsters also begin to understand that others have thoughts and feelings that differ from their own. They recognize that people develop subjective opinions about each other and that these opinions can be positive or negative. But children in middle childhood cannot simultaneously account for their own and another’s perspectives, nor can they understand themselves from another’s point of view. Thus, youngsters define friends as people who help *them* or do things for *them* (Damon, 1977; for a review, see Haslett & Samter, 1997). Help can take a variety of forms, including acts focused on the recipient’s welfare, help with schoolwork, general assistance, and acts that alleviate loneliness (Youniss, 1980). Only the most rudimentary forms of character admiration enter children’s conceptualizations of friendship at this stage.

Middle childhood is also a time when youngsters show increasing concern with peer approval. In fact, Parker and Gottman (1989) argued that the strong need for "fitting in" actually drives friendship at this age. The desire for belonging and acceptance makes youngsters in midchildhood somewhat insecure, both about themselves and their status within the peer group. Friendship provides a context in which the rules of the larger social system can be learned, practiced, and reinforced.

In addition to changes in children's beliefs about friendship, many structural features of peer relationships shift across childhood as well. Middle childhood is marked by an increase in the number and stability of children's friendships. Research indicates that youngsters in this age group have an average of five best friends (more than during either preschool or adolescence; Hallinan, 1980) and that many of these relationships have existed for a year or longer (Berndt, Hawkins, & Hoyle, 1986). Shared knowledge between friends also increases with age. Studies have found that older children actually know their friends better than younger children do (e.g., Diaz & Berndt, 1982; Ladd & Emerson, 1984).

**Gender Differences in Children's Friendships.** The preference for same-gender peers emerges in nursery school (somewhere between the ages of 3 and 4) and continues to strengthen throughout childhood. As Daniels-Bierness (1989) suggested, "there is clear evidence that boys' and girls' peer relationships are sex-segregated from a very early age and that the structure of these all-boy and all-girl groups differs in terms of intensity, exclusivity, stability, reciprocity, and hierarchical organization" (p. 118). The activities in which young friends engage are certainly influenced by gender. For instance, Maccoby and Jacklin (1987) observed that girls had more intervals of typically feminine play (e.g., playing house or dress-up), whereas boys had more intervals of typically masculine play (e.g., playing with trucks, blocks, or imaginary guns). Boys have also been found to engage in more rough-and-tumble activities than girls (e.g., DiPietro, 1981; Maccoby, 1988; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and to prefer "run and chase" games that require large spaces and many playmates. In contrast, girls tend to play closer to the school building in small groups (Thorne, 1986). For this reason, girls' friendships are generally characterized as exclusive and dyadic, whereas boys' friendships are regarded as inclusive and group-oriented (e.g., Berndt, 1983; Eder & Hallinan, 1978).

In terms of actual interaction, by midchildhood, girls spend more time talking to their friends than boys do (Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), and their conversations appear to be more collaborative in nature. Compared with their male counterparts, young female friends are more likely to express agreement, acknowledge what a previous speaker has said, show concern for turn taking, and refrain from interruption (e.g., Leaper, 1994; Maltz & Borker, 1983). On the other hand, boys have been found to be more concerned with establishing a hierarchy in their social interactions with one another (Thorne, 1986). Studies have also demonstrated that boys are more competitive with their same-gender friends than girls are (Berndt, 1981a, 1981b).

Clearly, research has uncovered differences in the ways boys and girls relate to their same-gender friends throughout childhood. However, similarities have been identified as well. For example, boys and girls do not appear to differ in the overall levels of nurturance, helping, and generosity that characterize their friendships (Ladd & Oden, 1979) or in the general expectations they have for friends during childhood. Furthermore, boys and girls have been found to be equally compliant in social settings and to express similarly high levels of interest in peers (Maccoby,

1988; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987). In fact, a recent investigation by Lansford and Parker (1999) failed to uncover many of the behavioral differences traditionally thought to coincide with male and female friendship throughout early development. Gender did not influence the extent to which members of friendship triads were responsive to one another, displayed exuberance, stayed on task, or oriented toward individual versus collective action. Such results led the researchers to conclude that "when viewed more comprehensively, boys' and girls' experiences with peers have many commonalities as well as some differences" (p. 90).

**Summary.** Young children define friends as nonspecific others with whom they share toys and time. With development, friends come to be seen as helpers, but the assistance they offer is mostly instrumental or physical in nature. Throughout childhood, play is a key activity in which friends engage; in early childhood, play is spontaneous and creative, whereas in middle childhood, it revolves around structured, rule-governed games. Thus, as Buhrmester argued (1990, p. 1102), "Because childhood friendships center around play activities and group acceptance, being a competent friend involves knowing how to enter ongoing games, being a fun and nice play partner (i.e., sharing and helping), and refraining from insulting or aggressing against one's friends."

In all likelihood, the skills leading to initial attraction and friendship formation are probably different from those related to its continuation (Fonzi, Schneider, Tani, & Tomada, 1997). Emotion regulation, pragmatic skill, and sociability may be most relevant to the early stages of friendship development. Such competencies enable children to engage their peers, and it is through repeated engagement that youngsters move from acquaintanceship to friendship; thus, these skills are reviewed first. Conflict management, on the other hand, is perhaps more closely tied to friendship maintenance; its relevance to friendship success is discussed at the end of this section.

### **Friendship As a Function of the Production, Interpretation, and Regulation of Emotion**

The activities in which young children engage with peers can be highly arousing. Thus, it is not surprising that the ability to manage the many, varied emotions felt during peer interaction is an important skill for youngsters to possess. As Eisenberg, Fabes, and Murphy (1996, p. 2228) explained:

Children are most likely to behave in a constructive, socially competent manner if they learn to express their emotion, albeit not in an unregulated manner. If children can avoid becoming overaroused in emotional contexts, they are more likely both to react in a regulated and constructive manner and to learn about emotion related issues in the emotionally charged context.

At least two distinct forms of emotional communication have been linked to young children's success with peers: expressive knowledge and emotion regulation. Gertner, Rice, and Hadley (1994) defined expressive knowledge as the ability to comprehend and accurately label displays of emotion. Most *comprehension* studies have examined children's capacity to recognize facial expressions. In general, this work indicates that, compared with their disliked counterparts, popular youngsters are better able to identify various emotional displays (Buck, 1984; Denham & Holt, 1993). Popular children have also been found to better understand normative reactions to

emotion-eliciting situations and to differentiate emotional states that are discrepant from normative reactions (Janotti, 1985).

Early research on affect *production* focused on the connection between children's emotional displays and their level of acceptance within the peer group. This line of work suggests that children who are well liked often show positive affect, whereas children who are rejected frequently exhibit negative affect (Stocker & Dunn, 1990; for a review, see Carson & Parke, 1996). More recently, scholars have drawn distinctions between two aspects of affect production: emotionality and emotion-regulation skills. Eisenberg and her colleagues (e.g., Eisenberg, et al., 1993; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992a, 1992b), proposed that emotionality is best conceptualized as an aspect of a child's temperament and includes negative affectivity as well as emotional intensity. Regulation, on the other hand, concerns his or her ability to cope with intense feelings by switching attention to different aspects of the situation, avoiding the situation, or becoming involved in a distracting activity (called attentional control). Both have been shown to influence children's standing among peers.

Why have such strong and consistent connections been obtained between emotional communication and peer acceptance among young children? Researchers argue that affect can either enable or disable the social-cognitive processes that underlie behavioral production during social situations. Children who can control their emotional reactions and expressions may be better able to reflect on various elements of social situations—especially problematic social situations—than children who are less capable of emotion regulation. In support of this reasoning, Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, and Holt (1990) found that youngsters who were emotionally positive, and/or normatively expressive, responded to hypothetical peer dilemmas with sadness and prosocial behavioral choices, whereas those who were emotionally negative and/or nonnormatively expressive responded with anger and aggression. As these authors argued, “social cognition cannot be divorced from affect; together, they mediate behavior toward peers” (p. 2).

## Friendship As a Function of Pragmatic Competencies

Pragmatic skill generally involves “the appropriate use of language in context” (Gertner et al., 1994, p. 914). An extremely wide array of pragmatic competencies has been identified. Depending on the researcher, for instance, pragmatic skill can refer to behaviors as specific as using proper forms of greeting or as broad as maintaining the logic of a conversation (Becker, 1988; Place & Becker, 1991). In general, however, it is useful to think of these varied abilities as factoring into one of three categories: skills related to speech production, skills related to the give-and-take of interaction, and skills related to peer group entry.

**Skills Related to Speech Production.** Children with speech deficiencies suffer at the hands of their peers. Gertner et al. (1994) asked preschoolers to nominate classmates with whom they would most like to be during a dramatic play session. Results indicated that children with language limitations were least likely to be nominated as preferred peers. Along similar lines, Rice and her colleagues (e.g., Rice, 1993; Rice, Hadley, & Alexander, 1993) observed that 3- and 4-year-olds who were sought out as “preferred conversational partners” exhibited normally developing language skills, whereas those who were avoided had speech impairments or used English as a second language. Apparently, even minor articulation errors can affect children’s perceptions of one another. In a study of elementary school students, Crowe-Hall

(1991) found that children who consistently made mistakes on /r/, /s/, and /z/ were rated less positively by their peers than youngsters who did not make such errors.

**Skills Related to the Give-and-Take of Interaction.** Pragmatic competence also involves a set of skills through which children can engage their peers in conversation. At the very least, this requires the ability to take turns, respond when spoken to, maintain coherent discourse, be a receptive listener, make appropriate requests, and communicate clearly. Researchers have demonstrated correlationally that popular children possess these skills, whereas unpopular children do not.

For example, Black and Hazen (1990) observed that, compared with popular youngsters, those who were unpopular made more irrelevant comments, were less responsive, and failed to be clear in directing social initiations toward both familiar and unfamiliar peers. In another study, Hazen and Black (1989) reported that socially accepted preschoolers were better than unaccepted youngsters at initiating, maintaining, and reentering discourse across contexts. Interestingly, evidence suggests that some conversational behaviors may be particularly salient for youngsters with speech and language impairments (S/LI). In a study of preschoolers, S/LI children with age-appropriate receptive listening skill received fewer negative nominations than average, whereas S/LI children with deficiencies in this area received more negative nominations than average (Gertner et al., 1994).

The ability to make appropriate requests has also received some attention within the literature. This is not surprising given that requests account for between 25% and 50% of young children's utterances (Dore, 1977; Ervin-Tripp, 1977). Mishler (1975) argued that requests are especially important as a mechanism through which youngsters initiate and sustain social interaction. Research indicates that a child's social status determines the kinds of requests he or she will direct toward same-aged peers. For instance, Wood and Gardner (1980) observed that dominant 4- and 5-year-olds used more direct requests with their less dominant counterparts. In contrast, submissive youngsters made fewer requests overall, and the ones they did make were indirect, especially when aimed at dominant peers. Apparently, the importance of appropriate requests is not limited to young children; 10- and 12-year-olds have been found to rate same-gender peers who demonstrate pragmatic competence when making requests (e.g., taking turns, avoiding interruptions, using polite speech) as more likable, more attractive, and more intelligent than same-gender peers who exhibit incompetence (Place & Becker, 1991).

Studies of referential communication also underscore the role that conversational abilities play in peer relationships throughout development. For example, a long line of research has shown that children who communicate their intentions in a clear and articulate manner are better liked than youngsters whose interaction patterns are garbled and confusing (e.g., Burleson, et al., 1986; Gottman, Gonso, & Rasmussen, 1975). This work also indicates that although the ability to communicate clearly is important during early childhood, its significance as a correlate of peer acceptance declines throughout midchildhood. One explanation for this is offered by Burleson et al. (1986), who argued that throughout childhood most youngsters demonstrate steady improvement in their ability to communicate clearly. Thus, by late grade school years, even those youngsters with comparatively poor referential skills have become adept enough to convey information in a sufficiently clear manner.

**Skills Related to Peer Group Entry.** Some scholars have suggested that youngsters with limited language and conversational abilities may not enjoy a high degree of

social acceptance because they cannot access peer activities. In other words, a lack of pragmatic competence may prohibit youngsters from interacting with their peers. Others have noted the connection between a child's ability to enter the ongoing activities of the group and his or her level of success with peer relationships. Studies of peer entry behavior suggest that it requires more than simple facility with speech and conversation.

Putallaz and her colleagues (Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Heflin, 1986; Putallaz & Wasserman, 1990) observed that children who fail to gain access to ongoing group activities typically employ one of four strategies: They disagree, ask questions, say something about themselves, or state opinions and feelings. Putallaz proposed that these strategies meet with resistance because they divert the group's attention away from the fun of the activity. In contrast, youngsters who are more successful at entering peer activities integrate their behavior with the ongoing conversations of the group. Studies have shown that the use of integrative behaviors is associated with social acceptance throughout childhood.

## **Friendship As a Function of Sociability**

Newcomb et al. (1993) argued that although the majority of children's "preferred relationships" originate because of proximity, they are maintained because of mutual enjoyment. According to these authors,

Social availability allows children to establish both their degree of similarity with the other child and the extent to which interactions with the other child are rewarding. The rewards of interaction are evidenced at a number of different psychological levels. Most fundamentally, children seek out other children who are fun to be with. (p. 119)

Although not widely researched, there appears to be a uniform set of behaviors that leads children to judge others as fun and entertaining.

Parker and Seal (1996) charted trajectories of friendship involvement among children attending a summer camp. Children who developed friendships were seen by their peers as having a good sense of humor and engaging in playful teasing. Chronically friendless youngsters, however, were perceived by others as shy, timid, preferring to play alone, not being able to take teasing, and easily angered. Similarly, Asher and Williams (1987) found that, compared with youngsters without friends, those with friends engaged in behaviors that led peers to conclude they were entertaining, pleasant to converse with, and desired social interaction. Not surprisingly, what is considered "fun" varies with age. According to sociometric studies, for young children such behaviors may include (among other things) participating in play activities, engaging in social conversation, asking questions, giving instructions, and exhibiting actions that reflect affection, cooperation, and leadership (for a review, see Newcomb et al., 1993). Among older children, having good gossip may be especially relevant to judgments of likability and attractiveness. In middle childhood, gossip often revolves around discussing someone who has violated important norms such as not sharing, being a crybaby, telling lies, or crossing gender boundaries. According to Parker and Gottman (1989), talk about such issues "serves at once to reaffirm membership in important same-gender peer social groups and to reveal the core attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that constitute the basis for inclusion or exclusion from these groups" (p. 114). Thus, children who have good gossip may be appreciated by

peers, but they are also helping others understand what the larger peer group will and will not tolerate.

## Friendship As a Function of Conflict Management

Studies indicate that most children expect their interactions with friends to be free of conflict. When asked why people do not become friends, youngsters between the ages of 6 and 10 mention disagreements as the most frequent reason (Smollar & Youniss, 1982). However, although episodes of disagreement may prevent children from *becoming* friends, conflict has been found to be an inevitable part of *established* relationships. In one study, for example, Houseman (1972) observed 847 fights in 62 hours of videotaped interaction among 37 preschoolers. The number of conflicts per child ranged from eight to 47. Thus, there appear to be considerable individual and dyadic differences in the rates of conflict behavior among friends.

**Conflict Issues.** The issues about which peers conflict change across the span of development. Disagreements between toddlers and preschoolers often revolve around object control (e.g., wanting the same toy as another peer) and social control (e.g., refusing to do something another wants such as adopting the correct role during play; see Corsaro, 1985; Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981). Physical assaults can also prompt conflict among young children (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992a, 1992b). Regardless of the true precipitating circumstances, young children typically see the cause of conflict as unilateral, with the *other* being the responsible party (Selman, 1981).

With age, children increasingly recognize that conflict is inherent in all close relationships and that "acceptable resolution strategies must satisfy both parties" (Hartup, 1989a, p. 60). Youngsters in midchildhood distinguish between minor conflicts and those that threaten the existence of a friendship (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980; Parker & Gottman, 1989). They even believe that conflict can strengthen a relationship if handled properly. Children of this age typically fight about the rules and norms associated with particular social groups (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Selman, 1981) and particular peer activities (Boulton, 1993).

**Conflict With Friends Versus Nonfriends.** The topics over which children argue do not vary according to whether they are interacting with friends or acquaintances (Hartup, Laursen, Stewart, & Eastenson, 1988). However, friends and nonfriends can be distinguished by the frequency of their conflicts and by the strategies they use to manage them. Early research in this area seemed to indicate that although children experienced more conflict with friends than nonfriends, they were also more prosocial and equitable when managing disputes with liked versus neutral others (Green, 1933; Hartup et al., 1988). More recent work, however, suggests that conflict behavior between friends is largely dependent on whether children find themselves in closed- versus open-field settings.

According to Hartup, French, Laursen, Johnston, and Ogawa (1993), a closed-field setting occurs when children occupy small spaces, when resources are limited, when play equipment requires joint use, and when partners cannot be easily switched. Because there is little danger that the interaction will break down when the partner is a liked other, friends in closed-field settings conflict more frequently and more intensely than nonfriends. On the other hand, an open-field setting is characterized by relatively large spaces and few limitations on resources; moreover, a variety of play

partners are readily available. Under these circumstances, friends appear to conflict less frequently and less intensely than nonfriends (Hartup, 1989a, 1989b; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). Apparently, open-field situations induce conflict attenuation between friends of all ages, perhaps because of the very real possibility that interaction can be terminated in favor of a more cooperative partner.

**Management Strategies.** Studies of children's friendship thus suggest that youngsters can be both more competitive and more cooperative during conflict interactions with friends. Among very young friends, the most common responses to conflict include venting angry feelings (especially for boys) and resisting others in active, nonaggressive ways (especially for girls; see Eisenberg et al., 1993; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992a, 1992b). Although they are relatively rare, physical assaults tend to elicit from victims either aggressive retaliation or adult-seeking (Eisenberg et al., 1991). As children mature and gain more opportunities to interact in open-field situations, friendship success is predicted by behavioral routines that enable youngsters to negotiate with one another, to reach equitable solutions, to compromise (as opposed to demand or assert), and to disengage when conflict becomes too intense. In fact, naturalistic studies indicate that whereas negotiation occurs relatively infrequently, disengagement happens quite often (Hartup et al., 1988; Vespo & Caplan, 1988). According to Parker and Gottman (1989), this is because prolonged sequences of conflict—and conflict discussion—interfere with the ability to sustain coordinated play. This raises the possibility that, at least where young children are concerned, sensitive negotiation of conflict issues may be important—but less salient—to friendship than the ability to disengage.

Children rejected by their peers appear to be particularly poor at refraining from conflict escalation. The aggressive responses characteristic of some low-status children typically escalate (as opposed to diffuse) problematic situations. In fact, rejected youngsters have been found to be involved in more conflicts—and more aggressive conflicts—than their accepted counterparts (e.g., Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Putallaz & Sheppard, 1990). Aggression in the face of provocation may thus prevent children from establishing ongoing friendships with peers. Literature pertinent to this claim is reviewed below.

**Conflict and Aggression.** Contrary to popular belief, aggression is not a terribly common occurrence during young children's play. For instance, Shantz and Shantz (1982) found that only 5% of all the tactics observed during conflict involved physical attacks and only 4% were verbal assaults (for similar results, see Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981; Hay & Ross, 1982). Also contrary to popular wisdom, both liked and disliked youngsters can be aggressive toward friends. Such behavior becomes problematic when it is used as the predominant form of interaction with peers and as the typical mechanism for solving disputes. This is precisely the profile of what Dodge and his colleagues (e.g., Dodge, Coie, Pettit, & Price, 1990) call the "rejected-aggressive" youngster.

In one study, for example, Dodge et al. (1990) found that, among first- and third-grade boys, accepted and rejected children did not differ in the rates with which they engaged in rough-and-tumble play; however, their responses to this context did vary. Probability estimates indicated that, given an immediately preceding episode of rough play, rejected boys had a greater chance of engaging in aggression than did accepted boys. Rough-and-tumble play represents an ambiguous situation in which boys are pretending to be angry with one another. Research on the social-cognitive

correlates of peer standing indicates that when faced with ambiguous situations, rejected youngsters often infer hostile intent on the part of others (Dodge, 1980; Dodge & Frame, 1982). This raises the possibility that the children in Dodge et al.'s study interpreted the pretend hostility of their peers as real and intentional. Other work has shown that rejected youngsters tend to underestimate their degree of aggression and overestimate their level of social competence (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990). Together, these tendencies may create what Patterson, Kupersmidt, and Griesler (1990) called a "protective defense" against a relatively painful reality of poor peer relationships; however, such protective avoidance can also undermine the motivation to change.

Dodge et al.'s results are consistent with a long line of investigations indicating that, across childhood, many rejected youngsters—particularly boys—tend to respond to provocation with reactive aggression. For example, Fabes and Eisenberg (1992a, 1992b) observed that, compared with their popular counterparts, unpopular boys were more likely to show visible signs of anger and to use aggressive response strategies that failed to address the conflict. In a somewhat different vein, Rose and Asher (1999) found that among fourth- and fifth-graders, the number and quality of friendships children reported were negatively associated with (a) endorsing revenge as a viable goal during conflict and (b) perceiving hostile strategies as an acceptable means of management.

Recently, Crick and her colleagues (e.g., Crick, 1995; Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996) argued that studies of aggression are limited because of their focus on forms of antisocial behavior most salient for boys (e.g., physical fighting, verbal threats). Indeed, the literature shows that when the definition of aggression is expanded to include relational aggression (behaviors "that inflict harm on others by manipulating their peer relationships"; Grotjahn & Crick, 1996, p. 2329), girls can be as aggressive as boys. Both overt and relational aggression appear to be associated with atypical friendship relations.

Recent studies have also suggested that aggression is not distributed evenly across peers. Rather, a small but consistent group of children appears to serve as victims (e.g., Olweus, 1978, 1984). In fact, Elicker et al. (1992) argued that peer victimization should be regarded as a relational category rather than as a child characteristic because it is marked by a "unique patterning of interactions that endure over time" (Ladd, 1999, p. 346). Perry, Willard, and Perry (1990) observed, for example, that across grades 4 through 7, victimized children were likely to reward their attackers with tangible resources and signs of distress and unlikely to punish them with retaliation. Preschoolers have also been found to reinforce their attackers by giving into demands, crying, and failing to fight back (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). "Ineffectual victims" are a subclass of victimized children who themselves are somewhat aggressive and defensive. These youngsters tend to get involved in conflicts but end up losing the battles amid exaggerated displays of frustration and upset. Ineffectual victims tend to be the most highly rejected members of the peer group (Perry et al., 1990) during childhood. Studies of victimized children have also illuminated features of young aggressors. On a rather disturbing note, they have shown that aggressive children do not feel bad when causing suffering in a victim and often escalate their attacks to produce signs of pain and submission indicative of successful domination (Perry & Bussey, 1984, Perry & Perry, 1974).

**Summary.** Studies of friendship conceptions and activities indicate that gaining acceptance within the peer group is the primary task of social development faced by

children. In fact, Buhrmester (1990) argued that childhood friendships center around peer acceptance. Indeed, at no other point in development will friendship and acceptance be so inextricably linked. Being well liked—or having lots of friends—is largely predicated on being considered a good playmate by peers. For very young children, this translates into spending time together, having good toys, and engaging in uninterrupted sequences of coordinated play. For older youngsters, being a good playmate involves following the rules of group games and providing physical assistance to others. At least four broad types of communicative competencies appear to promote enjoyable play and are thus indicative of friendship success throughout childhood.

First, children must learn to control their emotions and emotional displays in the face of highly arousing peer activities. The production of intense and unregulated negative affect appears to be particularly problematic not only because it disrupts ongoing group activities, but also because it interferes with children's cognitive processing of social situations. Second, communication skills that foster peer interaction are important, because such interaction is the mechanism through which children progress from acquaintanceship to friendship. Using appropriate requests, making one's intentions clear, facilitating smooth conversation through turn taking and on-topic talk, and gaining access to ongoing group games have all been found to predict a child's social standing. Even slight imperfections in speech production are associated with decreased liking among peers. Third, although children's friendships are born out of proximity, they are sustained because of fun. Behaviors related to sociability thus represent yet another dimension along which youngsters judge one another. For young children, possessing a good sense of humor and engaging in playful teasing have been found to predict friendship formation and maintenance; among older children, being a source of good gossip appears most relevant. Finally, given the frequency with which interpersonal disputes arise between young friends, children must learn effective ways of addressing conflict. Studies suggest that friendship success is dependent on both the ability to cooperate with others and to disengage when the struggle's intensity poses a threat to ongoing play. As the next section illustrates, many of these communication skills endure in their importance to friendship throughout adolescence and young adulthood; however, the specific ways in which they are manifested in exchanges between friends will change.

## FRIENDSHIP IN ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

### The Nature of Friendship in Adolescence and Young Adulthood

***Friendship Conceptions and Activities in Adolescence.*** During adolescence, children develop the capacity to step out of any given interaction and take the perspective of a third party. Selman (1981) argued that this ability "leads to the awareness of the mutuality of human perspectives and hence of the self–other relationship" (p. 251). Adolescents thus see friendship as an intimate relationship built over time on mutual support, reciprocity, concern, and understanding. Friends are also seen as the primary source of psychological and emotional assistance in adolescents' lives (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Talk is highly valued not only as a mechanism for "psychological assistance, secret sharing and the establishment of mutual understanding" but also as an activity in and of itself (Damon, 1977, p. 164). Friends "speak the same language" and, as a result, feel they can "be themselves" with one another. In fact, Gottman and Mettetal (1987) argued that the primary goal of peer relationships in adolescence is

understanding the self; this is achieved, in part, through honest self-disclosure in the context of close friendship.

Preadolescence (i.e., late childhood) is a particularly interesting time. For one thing, it is the period during which a best friend emerges. Sullivan (1953) was among the first to argue that the esteem of a best friend—or “chum”—is key to the preadolescent’s self-worth. Several researchers (e.g., Fullerton & Ursano, 1994; Parker & Gottman, 1989) have since suggested that an important feature of chumship is the consensual validation it offers.

In addition to fostering a sense of self-worth and belonging, best friendship also provides a context in which certain traits and competencies develop. Compared with preadolescents without chums, those with chums are better able to identify another’s emotions (McGuire & Weisz, 1982). Boys with best friends also show higher levels of intimacy, attachment, frankness, spontaneity, sensitivity, expressivity, and sharing in their interactions with others than boys who lack a best friend (Mannarino, 1978). Such findings have led researchers (e.g., Fullerton & Ursano, 1994; Sullivan, 1953) to suggest that the experience of having a best friend in preadolescence provides the foundation on which supportive relationships in adulthood are built.

Preadolescence is also the time when empathy and altruism emerge (e.g., Buhrmester & Furman, 1986; Grunebaum & Solomon, 1982; Strickland, 1981). These traits are believed to underlie the development of a greater social awareness among preadolescents and this, in turn, gives rise to a concern for prosocial behavior. In a study of 6- through 13-year-olds, Gamer (1978) observed that youngsters aged 9 and 10 saw their friends as reliable and supportive and said they would be willing to risk their own safety to help a partner. By ages 12 and 13, preadolescents believed that best friends were *obligated* to put a partner’s wishes before their own. Berndt (1981a, 1981b, 1983) also reported that older children direct more prosocial intentions and behaviors toward their friends than do younger children.

Given their expectations, it is not surprising that adolescents not only report high levels of intimacy in their friendships, but also engage in behaviors designed to promote such intimacy. Compared with children, adolescents perceive their friendships as having a greater degree of commitment, loyalty, acceptance, tolerance, and support; interactions with friends are believed to revolve around confiding in one another, consulting one another, and sharing intimacies with one another (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Reisman & Shorr, 1978). In addition, adolescents view spending time with friends as their most enjoyable activity and report that they consult with friends regularly on significant issues as well as on more mundane, daily events (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990).

**Friendship Conceptions and Activities in Young Adulthood.** Studies show that many of these same features characterize the friendships of young adults. Among university students, for example, Tesch and Martin (1983) found that the most highly valued aspect of friendship was reciprocity in the form of dependability, caring, commitment, and trust. Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) observed that sharing similar experiences and reciprocating help and support were the most common features of young adults’ descriptions of actual friends. When asked to rate the importance of certain factors to various levels of friendship ranging from acquaintance to best friend, students in a study by LaGaipa (1977) identified authenticity, similarity, positive regard, strength of character, helping, and self-disclosure as increasing in importance with friendship level. From these (and other) investigations, it appears that the loyalty, warmth, and sharing of personal experiences characteristic of adolescent friendship remain important throughout early adulthood.

**Gender Differences in Adolescent and Young Adult Friendship.** A fairly consistent pattern of gender differences in friendship beliefs and activities has been observed across this period. The results of a classic study of adolescent boys and girls summarize this pattern. Douvan and Adelson (1966) interviewed more than 3,000 youngsters (aged 14 through 16) about the nature and functions of their same-gender friendships. Content analyses of the descriptions revealed that boys did not consider close friendships to be as important as girls did, nor did they place as much emphasis on the dimensions of closeness, mutual understanding, and support.

Since this early study, many others have demonstrated that throughout adolescence and young adulthood, males are more likely than females to define friends as companions and to place less value on features such as intimacy, trust, reciprocity, and mutual support. (e.g., Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; McCoy, Brody, & Stoneman, 1994; Reis, 1988; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981). Given such beliefs about friendship, it is not surprising that gender differences have been observed in the activity preferences of same-gender friends. Studies indicate that adolescent boys see sports and games as playing a central role in their relationships with friends. Adolescent girls, on the other hand, view talk as the critical, defining feature of their friendships (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). Research further demonstrates that boys actually spend twice as much time on sports and games as girls do (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson; 1984) and that girls spend significantly more time talking with friends than boys (Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989). These patterns continue into young adulthood, with men reporting that they spend time with friends engaged in active pursuits and women noting that talk is the activity in which they engage most frequently.

Obviously, it would be incorrect to assume that throughout adolescence and young adulthood, young men do not converse with their friends; however, gender has been found to influence the topics about which friends talk. For instance, when asked to list three topics they typically discussed with their best friend, young-adult women mentioned "feelings," "problems," and "other people" most frequently (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). In contrast, the conversations of young-adult men revolved around sports, work, and vehicles. Similar findings have been obtained by other researchers (e.g., Aries, 1976; Johnson & Aries, 1983; Williams, 1985). In general, then, adolescent boys and young-adult men are less likely than their opposite-gender counterparts to confide in close friends, to demonstrate affection, or to discuss personal issues.

Because of these differences, male friendships are often portrayed as "nonintimate," "unsatisfying," and "instrumental/agentic," whereas female friendships are typically regarded as "intimate," "satisfying," and "expressive/communal" (see Wright, 1988, 1998). Recently, however, the validity of these depictions has been questioned. Several researchers have begun to suggest that the "robust" and "consistent" differences observed between adolescent boys and girls—or adult men and women—may be the result of methodological error. Most studies make only between-gender comparisons, which, as Burleson, Kunkel, Samter, and Werking (1996) argued, inflate differences between men and women. When similarities and differences are examined, the picture of gender-based communication changes.

In studies of friendship beliefs that use both within- and between-gender comparisons, both men and women have been found to identify connection as the most important goal of same-gender friendship (e.g., Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Rose, 1985; Wright, 1998), to report that trust is the quality they most value in their friends (Bell, 1981a, 1981b), and to regard empathy and altruism as key components of this relationship (Fox, Gibbs, & Auerbach, 1985). A similar pattern of findings emerges when similarities and differences in the perception or performance of communicative

behaviors relevant to friendship are compared. For instance, studies show that both men and women perceive self-disclosure as the most typical meaning of intimacy in same-gender friendship (Monsour, 1992) and both rate skills focused on the management of affect as more important for same-gender friends to possess than skills focused on the management of behavior (Burleson et al., 1996). In addition, both men and women have been found to be more overtly expressive than instrumental in their same-gender friendships (Duck & Wright, 1993). In each of these studies, the differences that did emerge between genders were small and relative (i.e., one gender scored slightly higher on a given measure than did the other).

The case for similarity between men and women is further bolstered by evidence showing that both genders suffer in the absence of close friendship. Research indicates that the adverse effects of lacking an intimate, same-gender friendship are as severe and pronounced for young men as they are for young women. Adolescents of both genders have been found to report increased feelings of loneliness and depression as the result of having no friends or as the result of having poor quality friendships (Samter, 1992, 1994). As a whole, then, arguments for robust differences in the ways men and women approach same-gender friendship may be overstated. This would suggest that the same communication skills ought to predict friendship success for both males and females throughout adolescence and young adulthood.

**Summary.** Studies of friendship conceptions and activities suggest that communication becomes increasingly important throughout adolescence and early adulthood. Not only is talk highly valued, it is also an activity that frequently occupies the time friends spend together. Even among young men, such talk often revolves around personal disclosure and problem solving. As Jack, a 13-year-old boy in one of William Damon's studies explained, "you don't really pick your friends, it just grows on you. You find out that you really can talk to someone, you can tell them your problems . . . you understand each other" (1977, pp. 163–164).

Buhrmester (1990) argued that this increased emphasis on intimacy, understanding, and mutuality in same-gender friendship requires the adolescent to possess a unique set of social competencies, some of which are different from the skills necessary for friendship success in childhood. As he explained (p. 1102),

Adolescent friendship demands greater facility in a number of *close relationship* competencies. . . . To a greater extent than is true of younger children, then, adolescents must be capable of initiating conversations and relationships outside of the classroom context. They must also be skilled in appropriately disclosing personal information and tactfully providing emotional support to friends. . . . In addition, adolescents are expected to express honestly their opinions and dissatisfactions with other while at the same time effectively managing conflicts.

The next section addresses how such skills influence friendship formation and maintenance across adolescence and young adulthood.

## Friendship As a Function of Pragmatic Competencies

As noted earlier, pragmatic competence generally refers to the appropriate use of language in context (Gertner et al., 1994). Like their younger counterparts, adolescents

and young adults must be able to access peers to form friendships. Across development, some components of pragmatic skill fade in their significance to friendship as children acquire baseline levels of competence (e.g., referential abilities). Other components appear to remain important throughout childhood and adolescence, however. These include verbal and nonverbal responsiveness as well as the ability to initiate and sustain interesting conversation.

Studies show that people are attracted to others who are responsive. In a series of investigations, Davis and Perkowitz (1979) explored the impact of responsiveness on young adults' perceptions of potential friends. In one study, confederates acted either responsively toward strangers (by answering their questions) or nonresponsively (by avoiding their queries). In a second study, they were trained to stay on topic with participants' naturally occurring utterances (the responsive condition) or to change the subject (the nonresponsive condition). Participants in both studies perceived responsive confederates as more interested in them and more likable than nonresponsive confederates. Responsive confederates were also seen as the type of people with whom participants "could become friends."

In a somewhat different vein, Jones (1981; Jones, Hobbs, & Hockenbury, 1982) examined whether the content and structure of young adults' conversations with strangers would vary according to levels of loneliness. Results indicated that lonely people made fewer statements focusing on the partner, changed the topic of discussion more frequently, responded more slowly to the partner's previous statement, and asked fewer questions than nonlonely people. Bell (1985) has also observed that as communicators, lonely people are generally passive and nontalkative. Such findings suggest that the restrained, inward focus characteristic of lonely individuals may lead others to perceive them as unresponsive and therefore undesirable as friends.

In addition to verbal behaviors such as asking and answering questions, responsiveness also includes nonverbal behaviors such as gaze and expressivity. In an early study, Argyle, Lefebvre, and Cook (1974) found that abnormal patterns of gaze decreased liking between a confederate and a stranger. More recently, Riggio and his colleagues (Friedman, Prince, Riggio, & DiMatteo, 1980; Riggio, 1986) have observed that individuals' nonverbal expressiveness during an initial encounter was positively associated with how much their partners liked them.

Skills relevant to initiating conversation are also important components of pragmatic competence for adults. In a longitudinal investigation by Shaver, Furman, and Buhrmester (1985), relationship initiation skills (e.g., introducing oneself) were found to be the best predictors of students' satisfaction during their first semester of college. This is not surprising given that the transition from high school to college is a time for meeting—and conversing with—new people. Several researchers have also examined the conversational skills of young adults experiencing dating anxiety. Although not directly associated with friendship, the results of these studies do suggest that initiation competencies are important in the general process of relating to others. Individuals taught how to start conversations, respond to others' approaches, give compliments, and extend interaction have been found to increase in dating frequency and decrease in social anxiety (e.g., Lindquist, Framer, McGrath, MacDonald, & Rhyne, 1975; McGovern, Arkowitz, & Gilmore, 1975). Not surprisingly, there is some indication that initiation skills become less important as friendships develop. Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, and Reis (1988) found that when interacting with a same-gender acquaintance, young adults' satisfaction was most strongly associated with the other's skill at initiating interaction; however, when conversing with a same-gender friend, satisfaction was least highly correlated with initiation

competence and most highly related to self-disclosure, emotional support, and conflict management. It is to these skills that the discussion now turns.

**Friendship As a Function of Self-Disclosure.** Considerable evidence illustrates that throughout adolescence and young adulthood, self-disclosure is a key feature of both friendship formation and friendship maintenance. Altman and Taylor (1973; Taylor & Altman, 1987) were among the first to posit that self-disclosure increases in both breadth and depth as relationships develop. According to social penetration theory, the exchange of increasingly intimate information thus represents the mechanism through which relationships are formed as well as a reflection of their degree of closeness. Social penetration theory has generated a number of findings relevant to adult friendship; some of these confirm Altman and Taylor's original propositions, and some do not.

**Self-Disclosure and Friendship Formation.** Several studies using strangers indicate that people who engage in intimate disclosure are better liked than people who limit disclosure to nonintimate topics (for reviews, see Collins & Miller, 1994; Fehr, 1996). Consistent with social penetration theory, this suggests that individuals are attracted to others who reveal personal information because such disclosure signals a desire for closeness. In the early stages of a friendship, however, disclosures that are too intimate can hinder relational development. Disliking has been found to occur when strangers reveal highly personal information (e.g., Cozby, 1972; Rubin, 1975). There is even some indication that within a single conversation, personal information revealed later in the interaction is better received than personal information revealed earlier. Finally, reciprocity in the length, timing, and content of disclosure has also been linked to liking among both adolescents (Rotenberg & Mann, 1986) and young adults (Berg & Archer, 1980).

A study by Meill and Duck (1986) indicates that such findings from laboratory studies of strangers generalize to friendship formation in the real world. Meill and Duck asked college students how they would gather information about a possible friend, decide whether to pursue the relationship, and modulate the rate of its development. Two main processes were identified. The first process, labeled "gathering information," included asking questions, being responsive, observing the target, and reciprocating self-disclosure. The second process involved tactics designed to protect oneself from revealing too much information too quickly (e.g., being polite and reserved, discussing only a limited range of topics, and so forth). Students reported that both processes operated in their interactions with potential friends until a decision was made about whether to continue the relationship.

Other studies exploring actual friendship formation support many of the propositions laid out by Altman and Taylor. For instance, Hays (1984, 1985) tracked relationship development among college roommates during their first year on campus. Consistent with social penetration theory, roommates who developed the closest friendships reported exchanging more information—and more intimate information—across all categories. In another study, Berg (1984) found that satisfaction and liking among roommates was positively correlated with self-disclosure over a 6-month period.

In addition to monitoring the content, timing, and reciprocity of one's own self-disclosure, studies suggest that *eliciting* self-disclosure from others may be important to friendship formation. Miller, Berg, and Archer (1983) developed the Opener Scale to index one's ability to elicit self-disclosure. Compared with young adult women

with low scores on this measure, those with high scores have been found to receive more disclosures in general and to be better at extracting personal information from typically low-disclosing others. As Berg (1987) explained, the responsive actions of high openers convey to others that they are liked.

***Self-Disclosure and Friendship Maintenance.*** Aside from contributing to the initiation of friendships, self-disclosure is also a skill through which friends maintain their relationships. In fact, there is some evidence that young adults consciously employ intimate disclosure as a way of sustaining their friendships. For example, Rosenfeld and Kendrick (1984) found that the most common reasons young adults had for disclosing to friends were relationship maintenance and enhancement.

A sizable literature indicates that friends can be distinguished from nonfriends in terms of both the quantity and quality of their disclosure. As one would expect, pairs of close friends not only disclose more information than pairs of strangers or acquaintances, but they also disclose more intimate information. In one investigation, Hornstein and Truesdell (1988) recorded the telephone conversations of female college students. Compared with conversations between strangers and conversations between acquaintances, phone calls between friends contained a high degree of personal disclosure, especially regarding intense feelings and judgments.

Obviously, best friends are more likely than nonintimate relational partners to receive highly personal disclosures; however, the bulk of self-disclosure within close friendship appears to revolve around nonintimate topics. For instance, in the study of first-year college students noted earlier, Hays (1984, 1985) found there was more casual and superficial disclosure among friends than there was intimate disclosure. Similarly, Won-Doornink (1985) observed that young adults classified as "middle acquaintances" exchanged the most personal information, whereas best friends exchanged only moderately personal information. Apparently, people recognize that mundane forms of disclosure play an important role in maintaining their friendships. Research by Rose (1985) indicates that young adults consider self-disclosure—in the form of everyday talk—the primary mechanism of implicit friendship maintenance.

Recently, many researchers have begun to explore the benefits of topic avoidance within adolescent and young adult friendship. Scholars argue that topic avoidance is a way of establishing boundaries between partners, regulating relational growth (Petronio, 1991), and maintaining a degree of privacy, without which "emotional overload, increased conflict, and excessive dependence" would arise (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998, p. 232). Studies show that same-gender friends do indeed avoid disclosure on certain topics, particularly those involving negative life experiences and relationship issues (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). The most common motivation underlying such topic avoidance is the desire to protect one's self-image and autonomy (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Rosenfeld, 1979). Thus, to a certain extent, skilled disclosure may involve knowing when topic avoidance is functional to friendship and when it is not. Obviously, these findings stand in stark contrast to tenets put forth by social penetration theory.

## **Friendship As a Function of Emotional Support**

For adolescents and young adults, the emotional support provided by same-gender friends is an important vehicle through which minor hurts and disappointments are managed. Emotional support is both a key feature around which adolescents and

young adults organize their friendships and a significant communicative activity in which they engage. Studies have shown, for example, that young adults not only rate communication skills focused on the management of affect as the most significant for same-gender friends to possess (Burleson et al., 1996; Burleson & Samter, 1990), but they actually turn to friends for help and advice during times of distress (e.g., Buhrmester, 1990). Such tendencies have led Hoffman and his colleagues (Hoffman, Levy-Shiff, Ushpiz, 1993a, 1993b) to label adolescents and young adults as "active consumers of emotional support." It is not surprising, then, that among members of this cohort, relationship quality is predicted by a partner's ability to provide sensitive and effective support messages (e.g., Samter & Burleson, 1990; Sprecher, Metts, Burleson, Hatfield, & Thompson, 1995).

Obviously, however, friends are not always successful at making another's hurts and disappointments disappear. This may be due, in part, to the complexities underlying support situations. As Barbee and Cunningham (1995) explained, on the one hand, *help-seekers* must balance the tension between needing assistance and attending to their self-presentation needs. On the other hand, *help-givers* are forced to reconcile issues of loyalty and affect for a distressed target with possible attributions of blame and the recognition that their own ability to deal with the situation may be limited. It is no wonder, then, that friends often experience ambivalence when faced with the need to elicit emotional support or to provide it (Barbee, 1990).

**The Provision of Emotional Support.** One form of behavior that appears to be particularly salient to the provision of emotional support is comforting, a strategic communicative activity aimed at lessening or alleviating another's everyday hurts and disappointments (Burleson, 1984, 1994). Several lines of research suggest that the most effective comforting messages are those that acknowledge, elaborate, and legitimize a distressed other's feelings and perspectives (for a review, see Burleson, this volume; Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). Referred to as "person centered" in nature, such messages are seen as sensitive, helpful ways of alleviating distress because they are listener centered, evaluatively neutral, accepting of the target, and likely to contain a cognitive explanation of emotions (Burleson, 1994; Burleson & Samter, 1985). Person-centered comforting efforts are thus thought to help individuals understand their feelings and to reach a healthy reappraisal of the circumstances surrounding those feelings (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998).

There is, however, some indication that what constitutes effective emotional support between friends varies according to ethnic background. In a recent study, Samter, Whaley, Mortenson, and Burleson (1997) found that, compared with their African American counterparts, European American women (a) attached significantly more weight to the ability of same-gender friends to provide emotional support, (b) placed greater emphasis on emotion-focused (as opposed to problem-focused) goals when addressing another's distress, and (c) discriminated more sharply among comforting strategies varying in the degree to which they acknowledged, elaborated, and legitimized a distressed other's feelings. Samter et al.'s findings are consistent with other studies examining the role of "feeling talk" in African American friendships (e.g., Hammer & Gudykunst, 1987; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984).

**The Elicitation of Emotional Support.** In addition to the role that support providers play in the comforting process, Barbee and her colleagues (e.g., Barbee, 1990; Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Barbee, Gulley, & Cunningham, 1990) argued that help-seekers are relevant as well—and that, sometimes, support efforts between

friends fail because requests for assistance are unclear. In line with this reasoning, Barbee's work indicates that comforting is more likely to ensue when a distressed other employs direct verbal and nonverbal requests for support (e.g., asking questions about how to handle problems, telling how one feels, crying) than when he or she uses indirect requests (e.g., complaining about the problem, denying the severity of the problem, sighing). These findings thus bolster the notion that part of the support process within friendship may hinge on one's ability to ask for help in clear and nonambiguous ways.

## Friendship As a Function of Conflict Management

Throughout adolescence and young adulthood, individuals' relationships with friends increase in intimacy but decrease in negativity (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Claes, 1992). In fact, Laursen (1993) found that, for individuals in this age group, conflict with friends was less intense than conflict with siblings, parents, or other peers. Adolescents and young adults not only distinguish between major transgressions (e.g., betraying a confidence or trust) and minor ones (e.g., engaging in annoying behavior) within friendships (Hartup & Laursen, 1993), but also recognize that they can both support a friend as well as conflict with him or her (Berndt & Perry, 1986). When conflict does occur, adolescents and young adults typically try to understand a friend's motivation, recognizing that others have legitimate reasons for their behavior (Berndt & Perry, 1986; Canary et al., 1995). Thus, cooperative forms of conflict management have been found to contribute to friendship success (Faubert, Forehand, Thomas, & Nierson, 1990). An interesting exception to this rule occurs among a deviant subgroup of adolescents and young adults in which aggression actually promotes friendship. This subgroup is discussed below.

***Conflict, aggression, and delinquency.*** Research shows that from late childhood on, aggressive individuals spend increasing amounts of time with other aggressive, deviant peers who "accept, reinforce, or approve of their rule-breaking behavior" (Masten et al., 1995, p. 1655; also see Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991). During adolescence, deviance often turns into delinquency, a term used to identify "a pattern of illegal behavior committed by a minor" (Shaw, 1983, p. 880). Although friendships among delinquents appear to provide for the individual's intimacy and identity needs, they have also been found to be more conflictual, shorter in duration, and less stable than the friendships of nondelinquents (Claes & Simard, 1992). Delinquent adolescents and young adults are also likely to hold beliefs supporting the use of aggression—both toward individuals within their own cliques as well as toward the general population. Slaby and Guerra (1988) found that delinquents believed aggression was a legitimate response to conflict, that it increased self-esteem, that it helped avoid a negative image and that it did not lead to suffering on the victim's part. They also reported that when presented with hypothetical conflict situations, delinquents were more likely than nondelinquents to define the problem based on the perception of hostility, to set a goal consistent with that perception, to search for less information, to generate fewer alternative solutions, to produce fewer consequences for aggression, and to prioritize in favor of ineffective, aggressive strategies.

A disturbing pattern, then, emerges with respect to the relationship between aggression and friendship throughout development. Whereas aggressive, antisocial children are rejected by their peers, aggressive, antisocial adolescents and young

adults are accepted by others with similar values and behaviors. Unfortunately, such acceptance is both contingent on, and reinforcing of, further aggression and antisocial behavior.

**Conflict Issues.** Few studies have examined either the issues that provoke conflict among more normative populations of adolescents and young-adult friends or the strategies through which they successfully address it. Canary et al. (1995) suggested that this lack of research may reflect a cultural assumption that romance and family should take precedence over friendship throughout early adulthood. It may also reflect the ideology that conflict is contradictory to the very nature of friendship itself. Several authors have noted that friendship is one of the few voluntary, noninstitutionalized relationships in which we engage (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Rawlins, 1989). Unlike marriage or work partnerships, friendships have no legal mechanism that binds people together. Thus, there may be an implicit assumption that friends do not (or at least should not) conflict because the relationship lacks institutional norms that make exiting difficult.

Despite cultural assumptions regarding the precedence other relationships should take over friendship and the purity of the friendship bond itself, there is reason to believe that adult friends do, in fact, conflict. Argyle and his colleagues (Argyle & Henderson, 1985; Argyle, Henderson, Bond, Iizuka, & Contarello, 1986) identified at least four types of rules specifically relevant to sustaining adult friendship: exchange rules (e.g., friends should repay debts and favors), intimacy rules (e.g., friends should trust and confide in one another), third-party rules (e.g., friends should be tolerant of each other's relational choices), and coordination rules (e.g., friends should respect one another's privacy). The fact that a consistent set of rules for friendship can be identified indicates that violations of such guidelines could spark conflict.

This assumption has been confirmed in a handful of studies exploring the topics about which adult friends conflict. For instance, Davis and Todd (1982) found that more than one third of their adult participants reported having been betrayed by a best friend, and 37% said that they themselves had committed a friendship violation. In a study by Jones and Burdette (1994), spouses were found to be the most likely source of betrayal for women (28.1%), followed closely by a same-gender friend (26.5%). In a somewhat different vein, Samter and Cupach (1998) asked young adults to report on their most recent conflict episode with a best friend. For participants in this study, disapproval about a friend's choice of relationship partners was the most common source of conflict. According to the authors, this finding implies that close, same-gender friends may feel comfortable offering critical feedback to one another, but that such feedback is often met with consternation.

**Management Strategies.** Relatively little is known about how adult friends manage conflict. The evidence that does exist, however, suggests that both avoidant and integrative strategies play a significant role in friendship maintenance. For instance, many of the respondents in Samter and Cupach's (1998) study went out of their way to suggest that they rarely had conflict with their friends, that disputes were resolved quickly and without much fanfare, and that there was a great degree of mutual tolerance and agreement to disagree. If an ideology of conflict avoidance is salient to friends, then knowing when not to raise problematic issues may be part of a skilled approach to conflict management. Consistent with this line of reasoning, Fitzpatrick and Winke (1979) found that, for minor conflicts, manipulation (an avoidant strategy) was positively associated with satisfaction among relational partners, whereas

empathic understanding (an engagement strategy of direct discussion) was negatively associated with satisfaction.

Obviously, not all conflicts can (or should) be avoided. When conflict engagement is necessary, management strategies focusing on the needs and desires of both parties appear most strongly related to friendship success. In a series of studies, Sillars (1980, 1981) examined how the use of various conflict tactics by female roommates influenced the duration and frequency of arguments they reported, their satisfaction with the outcomes of such dilemmas, and their views of one another. Results indicated that although integrative tactics were positively linked to being satisfied with roommates, they were negatively associated with the frequency and duration of conflict. Work by Waldo (1984) and Guerney (1977) points to a similar pattern. In separate investigations, these researchers found that individuals who said they would discuss conflicts in a "sensitive" way reported higher levels of satisfaction and adjustment in their relationships with friends. Consistent with these findings, other studies have shown that responding to anger with retaliation typically escalates conflict between friends, whereas responding with conciliation and apology often facilitates successful resolution (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1989, 1990).

As was the case with emotional support, there is some evidence that the use—and perception—of integrative tactics during conflict between friends may vary as a function of ethnicity. For instance, work by Ting-Toomey (1986) indicates that in conflict episodes, African Americans view loudness as an expression of sincerity and conviction; however, Collier's studies of communicative competence (e.g., Collier, 1988, 1990; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993) suggest that African American norms for appropriate conflict management also call for a "problem-solution" approach in which credible arguments are constructed and offered. Thus, for African Americans, skillful conflict management may translate into a highly animated style of conversation in which the discussion of intense, negative emotions is minimized.

A recent study by Samter and Burleson (1998) suggests that integrative strategies may not represent a particularly skilled form of conflict management among Asian American friends. These researchers found that Asian Americans placed significantly less emphasis on the ability to manage interpersonal disputes through talk than did European Americans. This raises the possibility that talk focusing on negative emotions, or on one's own needs, may be particularly uncomfortable for members of this ethnic group. Such an hypothesis is consistent with other work demonstrating that members of Asian cultures do not endorse rules for showing distress in front of friends (Argyle et al., 1986), typically engage in less frequent and less intimate disclosure with friends than Westerners do, and regard demonstrative behavior between friends as taboo (Goodwin & Lee, 1994).

## **Summary**

Whereas peer acceptance is the primary concern of childhood, establishing an enduring and intimate relationship with a best friend becomes the key developmental task adolescents and young adults must accomplish. Both types of relationships are predicated on niceness, likability, and cooperation; however, adolescent and young adult friendship involves the additional components of intimacy, security, and emotional support (Buhrmester & Furman, 1986; Hanna, 1998). Friendship during this period thus emerges as more complex and subtly nuanced than peer acceptance—and, for that matter, as more complex and subtly nuanced than friendship in childhood. Self-disclosure and emotional support have been identified as particularly salient to

success within this relational domain, largely because such skills enable the functions of intimacy, security, and support to be obtained. Although men report experiencing less intimacy and support from same-gender friends than women do, such components nevertheless remain important to their friendships.

During the early stages of friendship development, competent disclosure involves reciprocal exchanges; individuals must monitor the timing of their disclosures and match their partners in terms of the intimacy of information revealed. Once formed, friendship hinges on individuals' abilities to (a) employ disclosure as a strategic, purposeful way of maintaining the relationship, (b) recognize that the vast majority of disclosures between friends center on mundane, everyday issues, and (c) realize that some topics (e.g., negative life events, relationship issues) are perhaps best avoided. Effective emotional support, on the other hand, necessitates active participation from both parties. Help-seekers must make their need for support clear. Help-providers must create an environment in which the distressed other's feelings and perspective are acknowledged, elaborated, and legitimized.

In addition to the emergence of these "new" skills, pragmatic competencies continue to be salient throughout adolescence and adulthood in that they allow individuals to access and engage peers. Yet throughout this developmental period, pragmatic competencies are focused on responsiveness and conversation initiation as opposed to speech production and peer entry bids. Finally, like their younger counterparts, adolescents and young adults believe that conflict is contradictory to the very nature of friendship. Despite such an ideology, however, studies show that friends do, in fact, conflict with one another—and that fairly prosocial management strategies such as integration and avoidance are related to friendship success.

## FRIENDSHIP IN MIDDLE AND OLDER ADULTHOOD

### The Nature of Friendship in Middle and Older Adulthood

***Friendship Conceptions and Activities in Middle and Older Adulthood.*** Within the literature on adult friendship, researchers have distinguished between the "middle-aged," the "young-old," and the "old-old." Individuals falling into the first two categories are similar both to one another and to young adults in terms of their beliefs about friendship. In fact, continuities in friendship conceptions across this period appear to be the rule rather than the exception (e.g., Sapadin, 1988; Candy, Troll, & Levy, 1981).

Only a handful of studies have revealed differences between the friendship conceptions of young and middle-aged adults, and these differences appear to be relatively minor in nature. For instance, Tesch and Martin (1983) found that college alumni showed greater appreciation for the uniqueness of friends than did students still enrolled in school. In a related vein, Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) observed that middle-aged and retiring adults placed less emphasis on similarity than did 12th-graders or newlyweds. In addition, the discrepancies between descriptions of actual versus ideal friends decreased with age, suggesting that people either become more selective or more realistic in their friendship choices across adulthood.

Many of the structural features of friendship remain similar as well. Studies (e.g., Reisman & Shorr, 1978) indicate that the number of friends in an individual's social network does not vary much across this time period. Networks continue to be fairly homogeneous throughout middle and older adulthood with friends exhibiting a high degree of similarity in age, gender, socioeconomic status, values, interests, shared

experiences, and political ideology (Bleizner & Adams, 1992; Roberto, 1997; Rose & Roades, 1987). There is some indication, however, that middle adulthood carries with it the most potential for diversity in friendship. Nahemow and Lawton (1975) found that both young and old respondents were more likely than those in middle age to select friends who were similar in age and race. Other evidence suggests that across adulthood, men have less gender-homogeneous networks than women do (Booth & Hess, 1974; Dykstra, 1990).

Even into the early part of old age, men and women remain actively involved with friends, seeing them on the average of once or twice a week (Rose & Roades, 1987). Such contact continues to provide opportunities for companionship and sociability as well as intimacy and emotional support (Roberto, 1997); however, older friends provide relatively little instrumental assistance to one another. Studies show that, among the young-old, friends rarely function as caregivers, especially to those whose families are available (Adams, 1985/1986; Johnson, 1983; Scott & Roberto, 1987). Research by Felton and Berry (1992) suggests that older people actually feel better when their instrumental needs are met by family members and their emotional needs are addressed by friends. Other work has demonstrated that contact with friends (versus family) is related to increased self-esteem (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1993) and well-being (Nussbaum, 1983, 1985) among individuals in early old age.

**Gender Differences in Middle and Older Adult Friendship.** The benefits of friendship throughout middle and older adulthood vary as a function of gender. Like their adolescent and young-adult counterparts, older adult men report less intimacy, less complexity, and less contact in their same-gender friendships than adult women (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Mercier, Shelley, & Powers, 1996). In contrast, older women report greater continuity in their long-term friendships than older men and see them as having played an increasingly important role in their lives over time (Roberto, 1997; Wright, 1988). Such differences in levels of intimacy and connectedness are, at least in part, a function of the way men and women relate to friends. Topics that dominate the conversations of same-gender friends throughout this period are remarkably similar to those observed in the interactions of adolescents and young adults (e.g., Davidson & Duberman, 1982; Haas & Sherman, 1982). In fact, studies show that men generally rely on their spouse for emotional support, whereas women generally confide in their same-gender friends (Depner & Ingersoll, 1982). There is compelling evidence that throughout middle and older adulthood, women value talk with their friends more than talk with their husbands (Oliker, 1989). Given this trend, it is not surprising that women's emotional well-being has been found to be more contingent than men's on maintaining social contacts outside the home (Szinovacz, 1982).

**Friendship Conceptions and Activities Among the Oldest Old.** The literature on friendship in later life has grown in recent years, but there is still a noticeable gap in knowledge about individuals who live into their 80s and 90s. This gap is unfortunate because, according to Johnson and Troll (1994, p. 79), "the life styles of those at age 65 have more in common with those at age 45 than people at 85 years or older." What little evidence there is tends to indicate that friendships change rather dramatically at the end of life. As people move into the later stages of older adulthood, their physical functioning decreases. Declines in health restrict mobility and the capacity to socialize with others (Rook, 1989). Living arrangements change and geographical

distance separates friends; this, in turn, can interrupt well-established patterns of relating to one another. Network size decreases as long-term associates die; morbidity also shrinks the pool of similar others from whom the elderly can draw new friends (Matthews, 1986; Paine, 1969).

Despite such daunting obstacles, the oldest old do indeed manage to initiate and maintain friendship. In one of the few longitudinal investigations of this age group, Johnson and Troll (1994) tracked the friendship patterns of individuals aged 85 and older living in nonresidential communities. Fifty-three percent of the men and women in this study reported still having at least one close friend, and 78% said they were in weekly contact with others whom they considered "close." Surprisingly, more than half of the sample said they had formed new friendships since age 65, and 45% reported having made new friends after age 85. Interestingly, elders who remained active with friends actually altered the criteria they used to define friendship. According to Johnson and Troll, these new conceptualizations differed from the friendship beliefs of younger people in three fundamental ways. First, the oldest old did not require propinquity or face-to-face contact with friends. For them, letters and phone calls were enough to sustain closeness. Second, the notion that friends should be equivalent in status was abandoned. The boundaries of who could legitimately qualify as a friend were thus expanded; friends could now include acquaintances, hired help, or whole categories of people (e.g., "Everyone at my church is my friend"). Finally, the expressive and affective dimensions of friendship were minimized. Friends were not identified as sources of emotional support, but rather as companions with whom to share a laugh and have fun. By downplaying the importance of intimacy and emotion, the oldest old were able to accept relationships of decreased commitment, support, and shared understanding.

Few, if any, studies have examined the interaction competencies associated with friendship success among those entering the last stage of life; however, the companionate nature of elderly friendship suggests that certain forms of communication may be related to its failure. As Johnson and Troll (1994, p. 85) explained of their over-85 sample, "While friends are most commonly sources of fun and amusement, they do not necessarily function as confidants. In fact, most members of this cohort did not tend to have confidants; in our repeated contacts, they told us they felt it was inappropriate to bother others with their problems."

Thus, one might expect emotional support to wane in importance as individuals traverse old age. So, too, might intimate forms of self-disclosure come to be regarded as highly inappropriate, even offensive. Finally, because expressiveness is frowned on, conflict engagement might be problematic as well. Indirect evidence supporting these hypotheses is reviewed below. Investigations of pragmatic competencies associated with older adult friendship are also discussed.

## **Friendship As a Function of Pragmatic Competencies**

There is a formidable literature on the language performance of older adults. This work has examined (a) how declines in cognitive capacities affect the elderly's ability to produce and comprehend discourse; (b) how negative stereotypes of older adults influence people's perceptions of their communicative competence; and (c) the nature and functions of intergenerational talk. Although not directly related to friendship, these literatures suggest several features of communication that may function to detract from—or enhance—the formation and maintenance of friendships among the elderly.

**Cognitive Declines and the Production and Comprehension of Discourse.** Several elements of conversation may prove difficult for the oldest old. Declines in working memory capacity and processing speed have been found to affect the elderly's ability to produce and comprehend complex syntactical structures (e.g., Kemper, Kynette, Rash, O'Brien, & Sprott, 1989; Norman, Kemper, Kynette, Cheung, & Anagnopoulos, 1991). Losses in hearing and vision may further exacerbate problems in discourse exchange by limiting the older person's ability to detect and respond to relevant social cues (see Maurer & Rupp, 1979).

Despite such limitations, older people appear to be fairly resilient at developing strategies that mitigate interaction problems. For instance, Stine and Wingfield (1987) found that older adults often rely on prosodic cues such as pauses and inflection to overcome recall problems associated with increased speech rates. Elders have also been found to employ processing strategies that enable them to decode and recall propositionally dense statements as accurately as young adults (Nussbaum, Hummert, Williams, & Harwood, 1996). Other work has shown that, compared with their younger counterparts, older adults have a more expansive vocabulary (Kausler, Salthouse, & Saults, 1988; Salthouse, 1988) and engage in conversational narratives judged to be both more interesting and more clear (Kemper et al., 1989). Taken together, then, these findings suggest that the ability to weave an interesting tale, and to do so in a way that employs frequent pauses and tonal variation, may be especially important to friendship success among the oldest old. Certainly, such competencies are commensurate with Johnson and Troll's (1994) notion that older adults appreciate the companionship and laughter friends provide. In fact, compared with young and middle-aged adults, elders have been found to place greater value on "talk for talk's sake" as opposed to seeing it as a means to an end (Giles, Coupland, & Weimann, 1990).

**Negative Stereotypes and Overaccommodation.** Research conducted within communication accommodation theory (CAT; Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988; Hummert, 1994) points to other pragmatic skills that may relate to older adult friendship. CAT posits that linguistic choices in conversation are partly governed by the beliefs one holds about a partner's level of communicative competence (see Hummert, 1994; Nussbaum et al., 1996). Substantial evidence indicates that members of all age groups (including the elderly themselves) perceive older adults to be less socially and communicatively skilled than younger counterparts, especially when the elderly activate negative stereotypes such as being impaired or despondent (for reviews, see Giles, Fox, Harwood, & Williams, 1994; Nussbaum et al., 1996).

Such negative stereotypes of the elderly's communicative competence often lead others to engage in a modified form of speech alternatively known as "overaccommodation," "elder speak," and in its most extreme form, "secondary baby talk." Overaccommodation is marked by the use of simplified speech (e.g., low grammatical complexity, heightened articulation), a demeaning emotional tone (e.g., either overly direct or overly familiar), high pitch, and what Nussbaum et al. (1996) called "low quality talk" (i.e., superficial conversation). Such patronizing speech is not at all well received by the elderly.

Unfortunately, recent studies indicate that caregivers, service providers, family members—young and middle-age adults in general—commonly employ elements of overaccommodation in their conversations with the elderly (Kemper, 1994). Moreover, this has been found to occur even when there is no indication that the individual is suffering from decreased functional capabilities (Caprael & Culbertson,

1986; Montepare, Steinberg, & Rosenberg, 1992). If the elderly do indeed expand their friendship networks to include others of nonequivalent status (i.e., younger caregivers and service providers), this raises the possibility that the majority of their interactions with both family and friends may be characterized by highly unsatisfying forms of speech. This is particularly troublesome given recent evidence that exposure to negative images of aging actually increases the chances that elders will, in fact, "act older." According to Giles et al. (1994), "as attributional principles would attest, hearing different people in various contexts inform you (indirectly by overaccommodations or through societal images . . .) that you are 'over the hill' will ultimately induce many a recipient to accept this as reality" (p. 142).

**Negative Stereotypes and Underaccommodation.** Friendships with members of a younger cohort may also be marked by underaccommodation, a linguistic phenomenon in which older adults engage in egocentric topic selection during conversation. Underaccommodation was first noted in a study of intergenerational discourse among women living in Wales (see Coupland, Coupland, & Giles, 1990; Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Wiemann, 1988). In this investigation, elderly women were found to spend about one sixth of their time disclosing painful information (e.g., accidents, illnesses, deaths), whereas younger women rarely engaged in such an activity. Since these initial investigations, other work has shown that (a) older adults tend to introduce painful self-disclosures into conversations of their own initiative (e.g., Shaner, Hummert, Kemper, & Vandepuute, 1994); (b) "underaccommodative negativity" discriminates satisfying from dissatisfying intergenerational encounters (Williams, 1992); and (c) young people typically perceive elders as not listening, prone to interrupting, being out of touch, and forcing unwanted topics on conversational partners (Williams & Giles, 1995).

Gold and her colleagues (Gold, Andres, Arbuckle, & Schwartzman, 1988) have identified an extreme form underaccommodation labeled "off-target verbosity" (OTV). They describe OTVs as "a series of loosely associated verbalizations that stray more and more from the original topic. Conversations with individuals who produce high levels of OTV quickly lose their interactive nature as the talk becomes a monologue" (Gold, Arbuckle, & Andres, 1994, p. 107). Significant negative correlations have been observed between the size of an individual's social support network and his or her tendency to be an "extreme talker" (Arbuckle & Gold, 1993; for a review, see Gold et al., 1994). Studies of underaccommodation thus suggest that the pool from which the oldest old draw their friends (i.e., younger caregivers and service providers) may be somewhat put off by the self-focused and sometimes off-topic nature of old-to-young speech. At the very least, it's likely that younger companions would find interaction with elders to be communicatively demanding.

## Friendship As a Function of Emotional Support and Self-Disclosure

Obviously, same-gender friendships among the elderly are not devoid of emotional support. In fact, one strain of research within the social support literature indicates that being able to discuss the loss of a spouse with close friends helps men and women cope with widowhood (see Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990, for a review); this is especially true for adults in middle age as well as those in the earliest phases of old age. The studies described here also make it clear that even the oldest old disclose negative information about illnesses, accidents, and the loss of loved ones; however, these disclosures center largely on negative events, not negative feelings.

Indeed, Roberto (1997) argued that any intense focus on personal issues and concerns among the oldest old tends to be short-lived. In a recent study, she elicited descriptions of interactions with best friends from women aged 65 to 89. Respondents exhibited high levels of socioemotional involvement with friends and reported having told companions things “never shared with others.” However, there were also clear limits to what many women would disclose, even to their closest friends. The two most taboo topics were “views on sexuality” and the women’s “most personal secrets.” Consistent with Roberto’s results, Dykstra (1990) found that only 22% of elderly Dutch men and women revealed their deepest feelings to best friends. The vast majority of their conversations centered on everyday matters. Similarly, Mercier et al. (1996) found that the use of “feeling expression” to close others was inversely associated with self-esteem and relational satisfaction among elderly Catholic nuns. Although preliminary, such findings suggest that talk centered on feelings, whether in the form of revealing personal secrets or disclosing negative affect, may be detrimental to friendships among the oldest old.

### **Friendship As a Function of Conflict Management**

In one of the few investigations to examine what sparks conflict between older adult friends, Bleizner and Adams (1998) asked participants aged 55 through 84 to describe “problematic issues” in their close, same-gender friendships. Analyses revealed that complaints about another’s behavior were mentioned most often. Such behavioral complaints typically centered on making excessive demands for instrumental aid (e.g., frequently asking for rides to medical treatment) and, among the oldest old, on pressuring the other to be “too close.” These areas of conflict are consistent with the earlier noted findings that friends (a) rarely provide tangible, instrumental assistance to one another and (b) are seen as companions, not close confidants. A study by Fisher, Reid, and Melendez (1989) further suggests that older adults can be angered when friends fail to live up to role expectations (e.g., when they do not act in accord with their age).

No studies have explored how older adults manage conflict with friends in the later stages of life (or, for that matter, *if* they do). There are at least two reasons to believe that explicit confrontation is rare, however. First, although the criteria for defining friends becomes more liberal with age, the willingness to tolerate difficult companions decreases. Allowing friendships to end gracefully may thus be favored over explicit discussions of issues with “troublesome” others. Second, today’s cohort of elderly was not schooled on what Parks (1982) terms the “ideology of intimacy”—a belief system in which open communication is seen as a moral imperative for close relationships. Quite to the contrary, members of today’s older population were reared on the notion that “nothing good can come of conflict.” Direct and honest communication about relational problems may therefore be foreign and uncomfortable for older adults. Given such trends, conflict avoidance is likely to be especially salient to maintaining friendships among the oldest old.

### **Summary**

Individuals in middle adulthood, as well as those in the initial stages of old age, appear to have more in common with young adults than they do with the oldest old. Like their younger counterparts, middle-aged and older adults not only define friendship

in terms of intimacy and connection, but also form close relationships with others who are similar in age, race, gender, values, and so forth. Throughout this period, gender continues to influence both the rewards men and women reap from their same-gender friends and the topics that dominate their conversations. Few studies have examined the specific communicative competencies related to friendship in middle and older adulthood; however, the parallels between friendship during this stage and friendship during young adulthood provide little reason to believe that skills contributing to its success would differ.

In contrast, individuals in the latter stages of old age appear to define friendship in distinctly different ways. For them, friendship is no longer rooted in intimacy and support, nor is it necessarily marked by high levels of closeness and emotional intensity. Instead, friendship is organized around companionship and fun, and “friends” can be virtually anyone with whom the elderly have ongoing contact. As noted earlier, by downplaying the importance of intimacy and emotion in friendship, the oldest old are able to accept relationships of decreased commitment, support, and shared understanding. Such reconfiguring of the friendship relation in later life may represent the ultimate in social competence, that is, elders who remain high on friendship activity are those who have clearly adapted their beliefs and values to fit the changing demands of the environment. This new conceptualization has obvious implications for the role of “feeling talk” in the friendships of those entering the last stage of life. In particular, it suggests that whereas self-disclosure, emotional support, and the open discussion of conflict issues may decline in their importance to friendship among the oldest old, “talk for talk’s sake” may increase. Finally, regardless of the particular communicative endeavor in which they are engaged, there is some indication that the elderly and their friends may encounter difficulty managing interaction, either because of overaccommodation on the part of young people or underaccommodation on the part of older adults themselves.

## REMEDIATING DEFICIENCIES IN FRIENDSHIP SKILLS

The communicative competencies relevant to friendship at different life stages are remarkably malleable—both in terms of their initial shaping via socialization and, to a lesser extent, in terms of intervention once deficient patterns of interaction have been established. Researchers generally agree, for example, that children’s relationships with parents and peers are intimately intertwined. Obviously, a review of the socialization literature is well beyond the scope of the current chapter; however, it is worth noting that this literature suggests parents can influence their children’s social relations either indirectly (through personality characteristics, disciplinary style, and attachment quality) or directly (by providing opportunities to interact with other children, monitoring peer activities, and coaching appropriate social skills). Studies of indirect effects typically posit a mediational model in which parental behavior influences children’s communication skills via their level of social-cognitive development. In other words, the manner in which parents communicate to their children directly affects how those children perceive the social world; such perceptions are then believed to guide youngsters’ interaction with peers which, in turn, shapes the level of friendship success they obtain (for reviews, see Hart, Olsen, Robinson, & Mandleco, 1997; Ladd, 1999). On the other hand, studies of direct effects indicate that parental monitoring of peer activities generally interferes with the development of social competence; however, providing opportunities for contact with a variety of

peers and modeling appropriate social behavior both within the marital relationship and the parent-child relationship has been found to increase competence (Ladd & Golter, 1988).

Interventions are another method through which communication skill deficiencies relevant to friendship can be changed. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, *social problem solving* training and *social skills* training represent two distinct forms of intervention. Grounded in the work of Spivack, Platt, and Shure (1976), social problem solving (SPS) generally refers to an individual's ability to think critically and creatively about social situations, particularly stressful social situations. SPS is seen as a "primary link in a sequence of interpersonal behavior that may eventuate in positive social functioning or substance abuse and psychopathology" (Elias, Gara, Schuyler, Branden-Muller, Sayette, 1991, p. 409). Interventions designed to remediate difficulties in social problem solving often target alternative thinking, means-end thinking, consequential thinking, and causal thinking as important areas of change (see Moote, Smyth, & Wodarski, 1999). On the other hand, social skills training is an intervention approach that assumes people lack specific behavioral routines known to predict successful interactions with others (see, for example, Beelman, Pfingsten, & Losel, 1994). Within this perspective, interventions typically use four components to teach relevant social skills: modeling, role playing, performance feedback (coaching), and transfer of training (Choi & Heckenlaible-Gotto, 1998). Often, elements of both social problem solving and social skills training are included in a single intervention study.

The majority of work on training has been conducted with children and adolescents. Such efforts can focus on teaching behaviors (and cognitive strategies) designed to accomplish a particular communicative goal. For example, programs exist for helping youngsters overcome problems with emotion identification and regulation (Stoia, 1997), peer entry (Mesarosova, 2000), and conflict management (Webster-Stratton & Lindsay, 1999). More often than not, however, training efforts seem to target more molecular behaviors (and their cognitive antecedents) that are useful components of a variety of skills. For instance, Elliott and Gresham (1991) identified five dimensions of social behavior in their Social Skills Intervention Guide: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and social control. In earlier studies, Oden and Asher (1977) targeted cooperation, participation, communication, and validation-support for training, whereas Ladd (1981) taught children how to ask questions, make suggestions, and offer supportive statements. Interestingly, Erwin (1994) argued that although training such skills may improve children's performance in casual social encounters, "further attention to the skills required to maintain and deepen friendships is needed" (p. 308).

Indeed, the success of intervention programs designed to remediate both cognitive and communicative skill deficiencies in children and adolescents is unclear. Recent meta-analytic reviews of studies examining the effects of training have produced mixed results regarding whether such programs (a) promote the acquisition, performance, and generalization of prosocial behaviors and (b) facilitate positive peer relationships. For example, Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, Rutherford, and Forness (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 training studies targeting children with emotional and behavioral disorders (mean age = 12). Their results yielded an average effect size of .20, indicating "only a small gain as a result of social-skill intervention" (p. 58). In contrast, Beelman et al. (1994) observed an average effect size of .47 in a meta-analysis of 49 social skills training studies of children ages 3 through 15; interestingly, stronger effects were observed for social-cognitive skills (.77) than for social interaction skills (.34). The one consistent finding that has emerged from such

meta-analyses is that disruptive, aggressive behaviors appear to be the most resistant to change.

Such divergent results have led many researchers to ask whether training really works. In attempting to answer this question, Gresham (1997) argued that the success of any intervention program depends on at least two core elements. First, the specific type of social skill deficit must be identified and matched to a specific intervention procedure. For example, in the study noted earlier, Ladd (1981) chose rejected children for intervention based on three deficits: asking questions, making suggestions, and making supportive statements. Coaching led to improvement on these three skills, and such improvement was followed by subsequent increases in sociometric status.

Gresham also argued that most formal intervention programs decontextualize social behavior. In other words, training efforts encourage the acquisition and performance of various social skills under contrived circumstances. Children are taken out of the classroom and taught how to behave in a socially appropriate manner while away from their peers. Thus, generalization to more naturalistic settings is difficult because the behaviors learned in such isolated contexts often have little connection to what is demanded in the classroom or other social environments. Not surprisingly, studies show that when multiple agents (teachers, parents, even peers) reinforce lessons across a variety of contexts (at home, on the playground, in the lunchroom, etc.), gains in social skills are maintained (for a review, see Moote et al., 1999).

Among adults, interventions often focus on remediating skill deficiencies in depressed individuals. Lewinsohn and his colleagues (e.g., Lewinsohn, Weinstein, & Shaw, 1969) were the first to propose that skill deficits would impact social outcomes such as depression; they reasoned that the “aversive behaviors” of depressed people would ultimately lead family and friends to avoid them, thus decreasing their rates of positive reinforcement. Since Lewinsohn et al.’s early work, the causal link between various communication skills and depression has not found a great deal of empirical support. Thus, more recently, Segrin (2000) argued that poor social skills may be a distal factor in the development of depression. As he explained:

It is possible that some people with poor social skills who might live alone in an isolated area, or work by themselves in a laboratory... may be satisfied with the state of their lives, and not experience the kinds of stressors and cognitions that may precipitate depression. It is only those people who have poor social skills *and* experience events and outcomes that they perceive as stressful who are predicted to develop depressive symptoms. It is, therefore, the combination of poor social skills and negative life events that are thought to produce depressive distress. (Segrin, 2000, p. 394)

Regardless of whether communication skills are an antecedent to depression or a factor that increases an individual’s vulnerability to negative social outcomes, intervention appears to help. As was the case with social skills interventions for children, programs aimed at adults have targeted deficiencies in molecular behaviors important for communicating across a variety of contexts. For instance, paralinguistic cues (e.g., Pope, Blass, Seigman, & Raher, 1970), facial expressions (e.g., Gaebel & Wolwer, 1992), and gaze (e.g., Segrin, 1992) have all been identified as concomitants of depression and received attention within the literature on adult training. So, too, have more general skills. For example, Martin and Thomas (2000) developed a training model for shy college students that included instruction and practice in how to relax during feared social conditions. Others have worked with the tendency of depressed adults to engage in negative statements about the self and partner

during conversations (e.g., Gotlib & Robinson, 1982); to exhibit talk about well-being, especially negative well being (e.g., Segrin & Flora, 1998); to disagree, criticize, and show verbal aggressiveness (e.g., Segrin & Fitzpatrick, 1992); and to engage in an overabundance of self-disclosure that is negative, inappropriate, and ill timed (e.g., Gibbons, 1987).

Studies demonstrate that extensive training in both molecular and molar aspects of communication skills (as well as their cognitive antecedents) not only results in clear improvements of social performance, but also in decreased depression (see Segrin, & Givertz this volume). In fact, Bellack, Hersen, and Himmelhoch (1981) found that, compared with individuals who received other forms of intervention such as pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, those who participated in social skills training had the highest scores on interpersonal competence, the lowest scores on depression, and the lowest level of drop-out across the study. There is some indication that, compared with children, adults may benefit from more individualized versus group approaches to intervention (Ralph et al., 1999).

Few, if any, studies have examined the effects of training on the elderly. Instead, most work has targeted changes in intergenerational attitudes as a result of intervention. The findings are mixed. When youngsters are exposed to older individuals who are passive and lethargic, negative stereotypes increase (Seefeldt, 1987). When the generations are brought together in more structured settings (e.g., engaging in joint activities, having lunch, tutoring, etc.), negative attitudes among both the young and the old are reduced (Oljenik & LaRue, 1981; Pinquat, Wenzel, & Sorensen, 2000). Other work suggests that when the elderly participate in "feelings groups" in which core emotions such as anger, happiness, and so on are discussed, they show increases in both self-esteem and social skills (VanWylen & Dykema, 1990). In general, then, the literature suggests that when programs are carefully designed and provide opportunities for practice across a variety of settings and with a variety of reinforcing agents, intervention can remediate deficiencies in the communicative behaviors relevant to friendship formation and maintenance at different life stages.

## CONCLUSION

The nature of friendship changes dramatically over the life course, and the communicative competencies identified within this chapter wax and wane in importance according to such changes. There appears to be a certain symmetry to these developmental shifts, however. Both our earliest friendships, and those that will be our last, are defined by companionship and fun. For the very young, friends are playmates who have good toys; for the very old, friends are people with whom to share a laugh. Despite the salience of features such as fun and companionship, we know relatively little about the particular communicative abilities that make someone a good playmate or an entertaining social companion. As is reflected in this chapter, the vast majority of research on communication and friendship has focused on more serious pursuits—the emotional support friends provide one another in times of need, the intimate disclosure in which they engage, and the ways in which they manage conflicts that arise. Skills focused on the negotiation and management of various affective states have commanded researchers' attention, in part, because they are important components through which the functions of adolescent and young adult friendship are realized, and these populations represent relatively convenient subject pools. It is important to remember, however, that even among adolescents and young adults, emotional pursuits represent a salient component of friendship, but certainly not the only component. Studies examining the "lighter side" of friendship are sorely

needed, as are those exploring how humor, storytelling, and so on figure into the accomplishment of more serious tasks such as comforting and conflict management.

The picture of friendship painted in this chapter does not apply to everyone; in fact, it applies to a relatively small percentage of the world's population. A limited, but growing body of evidence suggests that culture shapes the nature of same-gender friendship, the functions it serves in people's lives, and the communication skills related to its success or failure. Interestingly, recent work also demonstrates that the outcomes of friendship depend on one's cultural heritage. For instance, in a study of American inner-city teens, Luthar (1995) observed an inverse relationship between being well liked and academic success. More specifically, adolescents who were initially rated as "friendly" and "easy to get along with" showed the greatest declines over time in academic functioning and peer-rated qualities of leadership. Along similar lines, Cauce, Felner, and Primavera (1982) found that among disadvantaged adolescent boys, high levels of informal support from friends was negatively related to academic success. This pattern of results stands in stark contrast to the positive consequences typically associated with perceptions of friendliness and likability among White, middle-class adolescents. It also underscores the importance of examining variations in friendship among members of different cultures as well as members of minority groups within cultures.

Studies such as these further suggest that the effects of culture on friendship typically outweigh the effects of gender, even though many would have us believe otherwise. The idea that men and women are so different that they should be regarded as members of distinct cultures is a perspective that has come to be widely accepted both in scholarly circles (e.g., Wood, 1994) and the popular press, but the data simply do not support such a claim. Clearly, throughout the life course men and women differ in their conceptualizations of friendship, in the activities that occupy the time they spend with friends, and in the benefits they accrue from this relationship. But it is crucial to understand that these differences are relative, not absolute. If the two genders truly represented different cultures, then not only would the topography of male and female friendship look different, but so, too, would the communication skills that underlie its success. Yet, as the literature in the current chapter indicates, this is not the case. At every stage of development, the similarities between male and female friendship clearly outweigh the differences. Men value their same-gender friends for the support they provide, men talk to their friends about emotions and problems, and men develop close and intimate bonds with their same-gender companions; they just do so a little bit less than women. To treat gender as a cultural variable is, therefore, misleading. It suggests an inflated image of the amount of variance gender typically explains, especially when compared with "true" cultural variables such as ethnicity.

In sum, this chapter has attempted to identify the interactional competencies underlying friendship success across the lifespan. Literatures relevant to this purpose are large, scattered among many disciplines, and sometimes not squarely focused on specific communicative abilities of friendship per se. Future research in this area would benefit from (a) examining how various communication skills shape friendship (as opposed to peer acceptance), (b) investigating how such skills contribute to the fun side of this relationship, and (c) recognizing that the face of friendship—as well as its antecedents and consequences—may change as a function of culture. Finally, all of us must realize that communication competencies are learned; thus, as parents, teachers, aunts, and uncles, we have a very real role in determining whether those close to us will develop the skills they need for others to consider them "friends."

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CHAPTER

# 17

## ACCOMPLISHING ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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Personal relationships are skilled accomplishments “wherein various social and communication abilities play vital roles in every phase of relationship development” (Burleson, 1995, p. 575). Scholars acknowledge that social skills play an important role in the initial stages of relational development. For example, heterosocial skills training programs focus on relationship initiation skills (Curran, Wallander, & Farrell, 1985). But beyond initiation, communication skills play a vital role in the development, maintenance, and termination of romantic relationships.

Because relationships are made up of interactions, fundamental interaction skills are necessary for accomplishing personal relationships (see part II: Fundamental Interaction Skills, this volume). Because people pursue and service a number of functions in personal relationships (Burleson, 1995), function-focused communication skills are also necessary for accomplishing personal relationships (see part III: Function-Focused Communication Skills, this volume). In addition to fundamental interaction skills and relevant function-focused communication skills, romantic relationships involve the necessary task of accomplishing relationship development. Dating, courtship, and romantic relationships are typically conceived of as going from somewhere to somewhere, and this sense of progression is inherent in most lay and scholarly conceptions of dating, courtship and romantic relationships (Surra & Huston, 1987), even if these relationships are no longer necessarily conceived of as on a path to marriage (Cere, 2001). The primary task of a romantic relationship is to accomplish relationship development, that is, to initiate the relationship, move it to intimacy or bonding, and then keep it there. In this chapter, we address the communication skills required to accomplish romantic relationship development. In addition to the fundamental task of accomplishing relationship development, romantic relationships involve unique functional tasks. Two of the functional tasks relevant to romantic relationships are managing sexuality and managing jealousy. Thus, we also discuss communication skills for accomplishing these two functional tasks.

## SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

Communication skill refers to an individual's ability to achieve communicative goals during the course of an interaction (Burleson & Denton, 1997). Unfortunately, the literature on communication skills in the development of relationships is sparse. We know little about communication skills for romantic relationship development except for initiating a dating relationship (e.g., planning a date, initiating a date; Curran et al., 1985). Most of the research on relationship development has been descriptive; it describes the communication behaviors associated with relationship development and decline (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000; Miller & Parks, 1982; Taylor & Altman, 1987). This research does not specify communication skills necessary to accomplish relationship development, however. Because this research is, for the most part, correlational, we only know that relational development is associated with systematic changes in communication behavior. We do not know whether communication behavior is instrumental in the process of relational development or decline. In addition, these studies are of communication behavior, not communication skills. Communication behavior is not synonymous with communication skills (Burleson & Denton, 1997). Thus, the implications of this research for communication skills are unclear.

### A Strategic Approach

To provide insight on the communication skills necessary to accomplish relationship development, we take a strategic approach to personal relationships (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). Human communication is purposive, goal directed, and strategic (Parks, 1994). As stated by Miell and Duck, "people becoming acquainted can be active, strategic, mentally alert, purposeful human beings who have knowledge of social rules and can use them to develop relationships" (1986, p. 142).

Communication strategies are an individual's intended and actual communication behaviors performed to accomplish particular goals (Seibold, Cantrill, & Meyers, 1994). Research on the strategies individuals use to initiate, develop, maintain, and terminate relationships indicates how people use communication behavior to accomplish relationship development. For the most part, however, research on relationship development strategies does not inform us about the outcomes of these strategies. Most of this research is descriptive, indicating the strategies and tactics people use or say they use (or say they would use) to accomplish relationship development. It does not tell us whether these strategies are effective in achieving relationship development. As stated by Seibold et al., "strategic, goal-oriented behavior requires consideration of the outcome (or outcomes) of the strategy enacted and evaluation of the extent to which the goal sought was achieved" (1994, p. 545). Research on the outcomes of relationship development strategies is relatively nonexistent. Just because an individual indicates that he or she uses a particular strategy to develop or maintain a relationship does not mean that the strategy is effective or that he or she is skilled in using the behavior to accomplish relationship development. As Berger and Kellermann (1994) noted, "persons may know the optimal strategies for achieving a particular interaction goal but be unable to muster the requisite communication skills to do so" (p. 1). In addition, research on communication strategies is based primarily on self-report data. Although self-reports may be valid indicators of strategy preferences (Tolhuizen, 1989), little is known about the relationship of self-reported communication strategies to actual behavior. The demands of real communication situations may affect individual strategy choices

in ways that are not represented when individuals respond to self-report measures (Richmond, Gorham, & Furio, 1987). Nonetheless, research on communication strategies provides insight on potential communication skills for accomplishing relationship development.

In addition to research on communication strategies, we incorporate research on communication scripts for romantic relationship development. Berger and Kellermann (Berger, 1988; Berger & Kellermann, 1983; Kellermann & Berger, 1984) suggested that the meta-goals of efficiency and social appropriateness are critical to the conduct of strategic communication. According to Berger and Kellermann, persons formulate plans to accomplish goals in the most efficient manner using strategies that are socially appropriate. Communication scripts indicate which behavior is expected and appropriate in particular situations. As Honeycutt and Cantrill stated, "scripts spell out social behaviors, such as the unspoken rules that apply when asking out a date or the expected step-by-step routines of a first date" (2001, p. 28). People have numerous scripts for romantic relationship interactions, including what to say when meeting a stranger, asking for a date, making sexual overtures, and so on (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). Communication scripts inform communication strategies. As Seibold et al. (1994) noted:

Communication strategies reflect the mental processes (for example, inference patterns, schemas, and formulations of general presentational lines) and behavior routines involved in actors' choices of situationally responsive, socioculturally appropriate, and linguistically competent messages to influence the outcomes of interactions in ways that satisfy . . . goals. (p. 544)

Communication scripts provide insight into how to skillfully accomplish relationship development. As Burleson (1995) stated, "building a model of the social skills needed for successful relationships depends on understanding the culturally shared expectations for appropriate tasks and interactions at different points in the history of the relationship" (p. 577).

## ACCOMPLISHING RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Relationships do not get started and then move to a more advanced state on their own, nor do they stay there on their own. To accomplish the task of relationship development, one must influence at least three underlying dimensions of relationships that systematically change as a relationship develops: frequency and duration of interaction, intimacy, and liking or attraction. In other words, one must engender, increase, and then maintain these relational characteristics.

### Three Dimensions of Relationships

A relationship is minimally a series of interactions. A relationship begins with the first interaction and ends with the last interaction. It has been demonstrated that frequency and duration of interaction are related to the development of relationships (Miller & Parks, 1982). As a relationship develops, the frequency and duration of interaction increases; as a relationship declines, the frequency and duration of interaction decreases.

Intimacy is a major dimension of relationships. Relationships increase in intimacy as they move from initiation to more advanced stages of relationship development.

Intimacy includes, among other things, verbal sharing of personal information about self and corresponding knowledge of personal information about other.

Liking or attraction is also a major dimension of relationships. To initiate a romantic relationship, one must generate liking; to maintain a romantic relationship, one must maintain liking. Thus, in this chapter we argue that to accomplish romantic relationship development one must generate, escalate, and then sustain high levels of interaction, intimacy, and attraction.

## Directness—Indirectness

Directness is underlying dimension of compliance gaining strategies (Cody, Canary, & Smith, 1994). Directness also appears to be an underlying dimension of relationship development strategies. From a communication skills perspective, the issue is to what degree is directness used to accomplish relationship development goals? More important, to what degree is directness effective in accomplishing relationship development goals, and does the effectiveness of directness vary across stages of relationship development? Being direct may adhere to the meta-goal of being efficient, but it may not be the most socially appropriate way to accomplish relationship development, at least at some stages. Thus, we weave a discussion of directness—indirectness of relationship development strategies throughout our chapter.

## INITIATING ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

To initiate a romantic relationship, the first task that must be accomplished is to have a successful initial interaction, one that leads to future interactions.

### Initial Interaction Skills

Accomplishing initial interaction requires all the fundamental skills of (noninitial) interaction discussed in part II of this volume. In addition, there are communication tasks and skills that are unique to initial interaction. Davis (1973) elaborated six tasks an individual must accomplish to successfully “pick up” another person: determine qualifiers, determine clearance, opener, find integrating topic, self-presentation, and plan for second encounter. Some of these tasks are specific to initial interaction; others are more general and apply to subsequent interactions in early stages of relationship development. We use Davis’ six tasks to organize our discussion of initial interaction skills; however, we expand most of his six tasks.

**Qualifiers.** According to Davis (1973), the first task an individual must accomplish in an unfacilitated first encounter is to determine whether the other person possesses the qualifiers (physical attractiveness, sensitivity, and so on) that make it worthwhile to initiate interaction. Qualifiers may be manifest (physical attractiveness) or latent (personality traits such as sensitivity). Qualifiers are the visible and inferred aspects of a person that encourage strangers to attempt to initiate and sustain an initial interaction and to seek further interactions.

Determining qualifiers can be accomplished using passive and active information acquisition skills (Berger, 1979). Passive strategies involve gathering information about a person through unobtrusive observation of the person. Active strategies include asking third parties about the person.

There is some evidence that individuals use active information acquisition skills to gather information about another person prior to initial interaction. Pryor and

Merluzzi (1985) studied scripts for getting a date. Participants were asked to list the things that occur when a man asks a woman on a date. *Find out about the other person from friends* (before initial interaction) was one of actions in the script for getting a date.

In addition to being able to determine qualifiers, individuals should be able to display qualifiers so that others will be induced to initiate a first encounter with them. This may be an especially relevant skill for women because research shows that men still do more of the initiating of dating relationships than women (cf. Clark, Shaver, & Abrams, 1999). Being able to display physical attractiveness, as well as other latent qualifiers, may be an important nonverbal communication skill to entice others to initiate initial interaction.

**Clearance.** According to Davis (1973), the second task required to successfully accomplish an unfacilitated first encounter is to determine whether the other person is cleared for an encounter and a relationship. As indicated by Burgoon and Bacue (this volume) people nonverbally signal approachability through eye contact, turning toward another person, smiling, an open body posture, winking, waving, and so on. In the presence of these cues, we generally conclude that a person is approachable; in the absence of these cues, we generally conclude that a person wants to be left alone.

The communication skills involved in determining clearance are message reception, or decoding, skills (Burleson & Denton, 1997). These skills are discussed in Burgoon and Bacue's chapter on nonverbal communication skills and, consequently, are not elaborated here. They are, however, essential to successfully determining clearance.

During the course of the first encounter, the individual interested in initiating a romantic relationship also must determine whether the other person is available for a romantic relationship (Davis, 1973). The skills necessary to accomplish this task are interactive information acquisition skills (Berger, 1979), specifically, asking questions ("Are you single?") and self-disclosure ("I'm single"), predicated on the assumption that the partner will reveal similar information about him- or herself ("so am I"). Passive information acquisition skills (observing the other) during the course of the initial interaction can also be used to determine availability (does the other person where a wedding ring?). Berger and Bell (1988) found that the second most frequently reported strategy in people's plans for requesting a date from someone they had just met at a party was to *assess the interest of the other person*. Active information acquisition skills (i.e., find out about other person from friends), before or after initial interaction, can also be used to determine whether the other is cleared for a romantic relationship.

In addition to determining clearance (i.e., approachability), a potential communication skill for an unfacilitated encounter is communicating clearance. *Noticing each other, getting caught staring at each other, and smiling* are all behaviors central to the script for getting a date (Pryor & Merluzzi, 1985). Clark et al. (1999) asked people to describe their two most recent successful romantic relationships and found that *flirting, acting interested, and nonverbal communication* (e.g., "she gave me the look") were strategies to initiate a romantic relationship. These behaviors communicate clearance (i.e., I am available for an encounter or a relationship).

**Opener.** According to Davis (1973), the third task of an initial encounter is to find an opener that engages the other person's attention. Openers (i.e., greetings) are not unique to initial interaction and are discussed in Part II of this volume, Fundamental Interaction Skills.

Research on dating scripts indicates the frequency of openers in initial encounters. Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) found that the most frequently reported action in the script for getting a date was *female says "hello," male begins the conversation*. In addition, one of the behaviors in the script for the first date was *female greets male at the door*.

There is some evidence that a successful opener in initial interaction is direct. Kleinke (1981) surveyed college students and found that both male and female respondents preferred direct (e.g., "I'd like to meet you") opening lines. Thus, being direct may be an effective way to open an initial encounter.

**Integrating Topic.** The fourth task of an initial encounter is to discover an integrating topic or a topic of common interest (Davis, 1973). There are several communication skills necessary for discovering integrating topics, including information acquisition strategies. Passive strategies (i.e., gathering information about a person through unobtrusive observation of the person), active strategies (i.e., asking third parties about the person), and interactive strategies (i.e., asking questions and self-disclosing during initial interaction) are ways to discover integrating topics.

Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) found that *attempts in conversation made to find common interests* was part of the script for getting a date. Berger and Bell (1988) found that *seek similarities* was one of the most frequently mentioned strategies reported in individuals' plans for requesting a date from someone they had just met. In addition, plans judged to be effective were more likely to incorporate the strategy *seek similarities*. Miell and Duck (1986) found that *asking questions, reciprocal self-disclosure*, and *observing each other while interacting* were strategies to gather information about a new partner.

Observational research indicates that questions and answers dominate the first few minutes of initial interaction between strangers. The questions typically asked during the first few minutes of initial interaction are focused on biographic-demographic characteristics of interactants. Berger and Kellermann (1983) found that 62% of questions asked during 5-minute initial interactions were questions about the partner.

Berger and Kellermann (1983) found that question asking is a strategy to acquire information about a partner in initial interaction. They also found that question asking was judged to be an efficient and socially appropriate strategy for seeking information in initial interaction. In another study, Berger and Kellermann (1989) found that self-disclosure was a strategy to acquire information about a partner in initial interaction.

**"Come-On Self".** The fifth task of an initial encounter is to project what Davis (1973) called a "come-on self" that will induce the other to want to continue the present encounter and seek future ones. Similarly, Knapp and Vangelisti (2000) indicated that communicators in the initiation stage are trying to display themselves as people who are "pleasant, likeable, understanding and socially adept" (p. 36). Indeed, Clark et al. (1999) asked individuals to describe their two most recent successful romantic relationships and found that *presenting the self well* (e.g., "I was charming") was described as a strategy to initiate the relationship.

**Second Encounter.** The final task a person must accomplish in an initial encounter is to schedule a second encounter, or at least an opportunity for one (Davis, 1973). To do this, the initiator must either schedule a second encounter during the initial encounter or elicit the other person's name, telephone number, or address to arrange for a second encounter at a later date. Alternatively, an individual may inquire about

the other person's routine ("Do you come here often?") to make sure he or she runs into the other person again.

There is evidence that planning for a second encounter is part of the script for initial interaction. Kellermann, Broetzmann, Lim, and Kitao (1989) found that the topic *plan future meeting* was in the next-to-last subset of topics in the conversation MOP (memory organization packet) for initial interaction. Berger and Bell (1988) found that *ask out* (individual explicitly suggests to other person that they share some future activity), a direct strategy, was the most frequently reported strategy in individuals' plans for requesting a date during initial interaction. In addition, interactive information acquisition strategies can be used to accomplish the task of planning for a second encounter (i.e., obtain necessary information to request second encounter at later date). Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) found that *male asks female for her phone number* and *male phones female later to ask her out and makes arrangements for the date* are part of the script for getting a date.

Sometimes it is also necessary to plan for the first encounter. Indeed, the script for getting a date (Pryor & Merluzzi, 1985) indicates that individuals plan for a first encounter. Specifically, an individual can *manipulate ways to "accidentally" run into him or her*, or a third person can be used to facilitate a first encounter (*introduced by a friend*). Similarly, Clark et al. (1999) found that *third parties* was a strategy to initiate a romantic relationship.

A successful goodbye in initial interaction involves more than just scheduling a second encounter. Indeed, all the functions of goodbyes in conversations (Knapp, Hart, Friedrich, & Shulman, 1973) were part of the script for the first date (Pryor & Merluzzi, 1985): communicating inaccessibility, (e.g., *saying goodnight*), summarization (e.g., *complimentary summary of evening*), and communicating supportiveness (e.g., *if interested, ask to call or hope he asks to call again, kiss, thank date for evening*).

The six tasks for accomplishing a first encounter (Davis, 1973) correspond to the three characteristics of relationship development that must be engendered to initiate a romantic relationship. Determining clearance, choosing an opener, and planning for a second encounter all function to ensure interaction. Self-presentation functions to generate liking and finding an integrating topic functions to generate interaction and serves as a precursor to more intimate communication (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000). Now we discuss communication skills for engendering interaction, intimacy, and liking beyond the initial interaction.

## Interaction

After the initial interaction one must continue to meet to develop a relationship. There are several communication skills relevant to ensuring interaction with a potential romantic partner.

**Planning Meetings.** Davis (1973) said that "acquaintances who feel they might become intimates must meet again. They must establish their continued encounters on a regular basis...these future meetings may not be assumed, they must be arranged" (p. 30). Thus, in addition to planning for a first and second encounter, individuals must often plan for subsequent encounters in early stages of relationship development when subsequent encounters are not ensured by proximity or other factors.

The same strategies for planning a second encounter apply to planning the third and fourth encounters and so on. Individuals can make a date for the next meeting

during a phase of the last encounter, typically during the final phase in which they terminate their interaction, or arrange a meeting later (e.g., via telephone or e-mail). Alternatively, when mutual plans to meet again are not made, one may still make plans to meet the other. An individual can become familiar with the other's routine, knowing when and where they can attempt to "run into" the other on a regular basis.

Miell and Duck (1986) asked participants to indicate appropriate behavior for those who have just met and for close friends, and to indicate strategies to develop a friendship. *Planning meetings* was listed as a strategy to develop a relationship. Participants indicated that they would choose when and where to meet their partner as a strategy to develop a relationship. Miell and Duck also found that meeting frequently was perceived as appropriate behavior for close friends (but not for those who just met), and for those wishing to develop a close friendship.

Similarly, Baxter and Philpott (1982) found that *inclusion* (activities which bring the other person into one's presence) was the most frequently reported ingratiation strategy for "making friends." Finally, Berger and Bell (1988) found that *enter larger social setting* (individual suggests to new roommate that they go to dinner, explore the campus, etc.) was one of the most frequently generated strategies to induce liking with a new roommate.

**Small Talk.** The ability to engage in small talk is a necessary interaction skill. Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) found that participants listed *male phones female to ask her out and makes arrangements for date by beginning conversation with "small talk"* as part of the script for getting a date. Typical actions in the first date script were *conversation with date after arrival, talk about common interests, small talk, and go to get something to eat and drink while talking*. Berger and Bell (1988) found that *small talk* was the second most frequent strategy (after *ask out*) in individuals' plans to request a date from someone they had just met. Miell and Duck (1986) found that a general (superficial) level of discussion and a limited range of appropriate discussion topics were viewed as appropriate behaviors for interacting with someone you had just met.

Knapp and Vangelisti (2000) elaborated the importance of small talk in initial stages of relationship development. According to Knapp and Vangelisti, in some situations, such as first encounters, small talk is almost the demanded form of communication. Small talk, according to Knapp and Vangelisti (2000), is the sine qua non of experimenting, a process that begins in initial interaction and continues through the early stages of relationship development. Small talk serves a number of functions in the initial stages of relationship development including the following: maintaining a sense of community or fellowship with other human beings, serving as a proving ground for both new and established relationships, providing a safe procedure for indicating who we are and how another can come to know us better, serving as an interpersonal pacifier, and uncovering integrating topics (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000). Thus, the ability to engage in superficial, conventional conversation that is characterized by breadth (a range of superficial topics), not depth, is an essential communication skill for initiating and sustaining interaction with another individual.

## Getting to Know You

"Strangers, having met, become acquaintances" (Davis, 1973, p. 30). All the fundamental skills of interaction are relevant for getting acquainted. As Kellermann (1991) stated, "conversation is one of the most basic and fundamental means that persons use to become acquainted" (p. 385). In addition, question asking and self-disclosure

have been shown to be efficient and socially appropriate communication behaviors for acquiring information about another person.

Self-disclosure is a primary means by which individuals become acquainted. In initial interaction, people begin by revealing biographic and demographic information about themselves (names, hometowns, etc.). As Derlega, Metts, Petronio, and Margulis (1993, pp. 1–2) stated, “it is hard to imagine how a relationship might get started without such self-disclosure.” Similarly, it is hard to imagine how a relationship might develop without self-disclosure:

If you like this person, you will want to know more about him or her, and you will, in turn, be willing to share more information about yourself. You will begin to talk about attitudes, feelings, and personal experiences; in brief, you will begin to disclose more personal information. If your new friend likes you, he or she also will disclose personal information. (Derlega et al., 1993, p. 2)

Altman and Taylor (1973) explicated the role of self-disclosure in relationship development. Specifically, they argued that social penetration processes proceed in a gradual and orderly fashion from superficial to intimate levels of exchange, as a function of both immediate and forecast outcomes. In a review of the research on the status of social penetration theory, Taylor and Altman (1987) found ample evidence that self-disclosure developed in a gradual and incremental manner. Altman and Taylor (1973) also hypothesized that this process is reciprocal. A meta-analysis of reciprocity of self-disclosure (Dindia, 2001) provided overwhelming evidence that self-disclosure is reciprocal in early stages of relationship development.

Studies of norm violation in initial interaction provide evidence for gradual, sequential, and reciprocal revealing of information in initial interaction. Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck, and Shulman (1976) examined sequencing of information in initial interaction. Participants sorted 150 conversational statements along a time continuum, indicating in which 15-minute interval in a 2-hour conversation between strangers a particular statement might first occur. The results were that demographic and superficial information about oneself was disclosed to new acquaintances first. Middle time slots consisted of attitudes toward public affairs, religion, and nonintimate personal and family information. Personal, sexual, and family problems were consistently placed in much later time slots. In addition, participants perceived that some very intimate statements would not occur at all in a 2-hour conversation between strangers.

Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman, and Miller (1976) examined the effects of violating the normal pattern of information sequencing in initial interaction. Participants read a transcript of the first 2 minutes of a conversation between strangers. Berger et al. randomly selected statements that were sorted into the initial (low deviance conversation), middle (moderate deviance conversation), and last time slots (high deviance conversation) by the respondents in the previous study. The conversations were either reciprocal or nonreciprocal. Participants perceived the low deviance conversation as most typical for a first conversation between strangers. They also rated the reciprocal conversation as more typical than the nonreciprocal interaction. Participants were most attracted to persons in the low deviance condition and viewed individuals in the reciprocal conversations as more attractive than persons in nonreciprocal interactions.

In a second study, Berger, Gardner, Parks et al. (1976) gave participants a sequential list of statements to read and were told to imagine that someone they had just met at

an informal party was making the statements. In the low norm violation condition, the statements were arranged in the order in which a pretest had indicated that they would normally occur. In the high norm violation conditions the statements were arranged in reverse order. The low violation condition was seen as more structurally similar to the participants' own interaction style and to that of most people. Participants were most attracted to persons in the low violation condition.

Overall, the results of these studies indicate that there is a norm of sequencing information in initial interaction, and violating the norm of sequential information in initial interaction has negative consequences for how individuals are perceived by others. As stated by Duck (1976), "initial interaction is a skilled process in which interactors acquire and release information at "correct" rates of speed at correct levels at correct times" (p. 139).

## Communicating, Generating, and Assessing Liking

In the initial stages of relationship development people seek to communicate liking, to generate liking, and to test liking. Communicating liking can be accomplished directly or indirectly. Nonverbal cues are typically indirect and have been referred to as immediacy cues (see Burgoon and Bacue, this volume for discussion of nonverbal immediacy cues). Immediacy cues include touch, forward lean, increased eye contact, and an open body orientation. We can also directly communicate our attraction verbally by saying, "I like you," although this is not done in the early stages of a relationship. Instead, we might use a more indirect approach, perhaps by saying we like something about the person (e.g., a personality trait, or what she or he said or did, their clothes, their hair, their jewelry, and so on). Clark et al. (1999) found that *flirting, nonverbal communication, and acting interested* were reported as strategies to initiate a romantic relationship.

In addition to communicating liking, we seek to generate liking. Berger (1988) pointed out that "the ability to engender liking is perhaps the most fundamental of social goals. Indeed, people must often get others to like them before they can achieve superordinate goals" (p. 220). Affinity seeking is one means by which people create relationships (Daly & Kreiser, 1994).

At least three studies have examined communication strategies for generating liking. Baxter and Philpott (1982) examined ingratiation strategies for "making friends." Although they were examining friendship rather than romantic relationships, the strategies are likely to generalize to romantic relationships. Berger and Bell (1988) studied college students' plans for how they would go about getting a new roommate to like them. All but two strategies (*establish territorial limits* and *establish rules*) are likely to generalize to romantic relationships. Finally, Bell and Daly (1984) studied communication strategies people use to get others to like and feel positive toward them across four relationship types, one of which was romantic relationships. In the following paragraphs, we highlight strategies found to generate liking across these studies.

**Inclusion of Other.** Baxter and Philpott (1982) found that *inclusion* (activities that bring the other person into one's presence) was the most frequently reported strategy (27% of all strategies listed) to make friends. *Enter larger social setting* (suggest that planner and new roommate go to dinner, explore the campus, and so on) was the third most frequently mentioned strategy to get a new roommate to like you (Berger & Bell, 1988). Effectiveness judgments of roommate ingratiation plans were positively

related to the strategy *enter larger social situation*. Bell and Daly (1984) also found that *inclusion of other* (include other in social activities) was a strategy to generate liking.

**Information Acquisition.** Not only do information acquisition strategies help us find integrating topics, they also generate liking. *Information acquisition* (solicit information about other) was the second most frequently mentioned strategy to make friends (Baxter & Philpott, 1982, 21% of all strategies reported). Bell and Daly (1984) found that *elicit other's disclosures* (ask questions and encourage other to self-disclose) was a strategy to generate liking, and it occurred more frequently than would be expected due to chance across four distinct relationship types.

**Self-Disclosure.** In addition to getting acquainted, *self-disclosure* is used to generate liking. Berger and Bell (1988) found that self-disclosure was a frequently mentioned strategy to induce liking in a new roommate. Bell and Daly (1984) found that *openness* was generated significantly more frequently than would be expected due to chance as a strategy to generate liking across four relationship types. In addition, a meta-analysis of self-disclosure and liking (Collins & Miller, 1994) provided overwhelming support that self-disclosure causes liking.

**Self-Presentation.** Projecting a “come-on self” was one of Davis’s (1973) six tasks for successfully accomplishing a first encounter. Research on affinity seeking strategies also indicates that self-presentation is a strategy for generating liking. Berger and Bell (1988) found that *present positive image* was the most frequently mentioned strategy to get a new roommate to like you. More important, effectiveness judgments of roommate ingratiation plans were positively related to presenting a positive image. Baxter and Philpott (1982) found that *self-presentation* (presentation of a unique and favorable image of oneself) was a strategy to make friends (17% of strategies listed). Finally, Bell and Daly (1984) found that *present interesting self*, *dynamism* (present self as active and enthusiastic), and *personal autonomy* (present self as independent, free thinking) were strategies to generate liking.

**Doing Favors.** Baxter and Philpott (1982) found that *favor rendering* (doing favors or giving rewards) was a strategy to make friends (14% of strategies reported). Similarly, *volunteer services* (an offer of assistance to the roommate as he or she moves into the room) was a strategy to ingratiate a new roommate (Berger & Bell, 1988). *Altruism* (provide help and assistance) occurred more frequently than would be expected by chance as a strategy to generate liking (Bell & Daly, 1984) across four distinct types of relationships.

**Communicate Similarity.** Baxter and Philpott (1982) found that similarity (*demonstration of commonality with other*) is a strategy to make friends (12% of strategies reported). *Seek similarities* was a strategy to ingratiate a new roommate (Berger & Bell, 1988) and plans that included *seek similarities* were judged as more effective. Bell and Daly (1984) found that *similarity* (emphasize tastes, interests, attitudes shared with others) was a strategy to generate liking.

**Other Enhancement.** Bell and Daly (1984) found that *self-concept confirmation* (confirm other's self-concept) was reported as a strategy to induce liking more frequently than would be expected by chance across four types of relationships. *Other*

*enhancement* (compliments and other cues which demonstrate that one thinks highly of the other) was also listed as a strategy to make friends (10% of strategies listed; Baxter & Philpott, 1982).

There appears to be a norm for moderate (not excessive) and reciprocal compliments in initial encounters. Berger, Gardner, Parks, et al. (1976) asked participants to read a transcript of an initial conversation between strangers. The results were that participants perceived the moderate compliment condition as most typical for initial interaction (rather than excessive compliments or no compliments). Participants perceived compliment givers as most attractive in the moderate compliment (as opposed to no compliments or excessive compliments) and reciprocal compliment (as opposed to nonreciprocal compliment) conditions.

**Rewards.** Bell and Daly (1984) found that *reward association* (reward partner by giving gifts or present self as being able to reward partner) was a strategy to generate liking. Baxter and Philpott (1982) found that *favor-rendering*, which included giving rewards, was a strategy to generate liking among friends.

**Small Talk.** In addition to initiating interaction, small talk serves to generate liking. Indeed, Berger and Bell (1988) found that *small talk* was the second most frequently mentioned strategy in individuals' plans to request a date and in individuals' plans to ingratiate a new roommate. A number of additional strategies were found to generate liking in these studies (see Bell & Daly, 1984; Berger & Bell, 1988) but cannot be elaborated here.

Berger and Bell (1988) also found that plan effectiveness (judges' ratings of the probability of being successful) was correlated with plan length, plan breadth, and number of contingencies represented in the plan. This indicates that having a broad repertoire of strategies to generate liking may be more effective.

Bell and Daly (1984) found that the more people are perceived to use affinity-seeking strategies (in general and with the person), the more positively others view them. Thus, it appears that affinity-seeking strategies, in general, are associated with perceived communication competence.

Not only do people seek to create liking in others, they also seek to test the degree of liking others feel for them (Daly & Kreiser, 1994). Douglas (1987) studied affinity-testing strategies in initial interaction. Individuals were asked to describe all the things that they do to find out how much somebody of the opposite sex likes them in an initial encounter. Eight categories of affinity-testing strategies were found. In descending order of frequency of being reported they were as follows: *Offering* (actions that generate conditions favorable for approach by partner, e.g., "I waited for him to come out of the restroom. If he wanted to talk to me he could"), *bazing* (actions that require partner to provide commodity or service, e.g., "I told her I needed a ride"), *withdrawing* (actions that require partner to sustain interaction, e.g., "I would be silent to see if he would keep the conversation going"), *networking* (actions that involve third parties to acquire or transmit information, e.g., "I told other people I liked him. I knew it would get back to him"), *approaching* (actions that imply increased intimacy to which the only disconfirming response is compensation, e.g., "I would touch his shoulder or move close to see how he would react"), *confronting* (actions that require the partner to provide immediate and public evidence of his or her liking, e.g., "I asked her if she liked me"), *sustaining* (actions designed to maintain the interaction, e.g., "I kept asking her questions"), and *diminishing self* (actions that lowered the value of self by self-deprecation or by identifying alternative reward

sources for partner, e.g., "I told him I wasn't very interesting, waiting for him to say "Oh, no").

Many of the strategies used to generate liking were also used to test liking. For example, offering (i.e., communicating clearance or approachability) is used to communicate interest (and make it easy for the other person to initiate interaction) and to test liking. By sustaining interaction we communicate our willingness to continue the interaction (i.e., communicate liking) and simultaneously test the other person's willingness to continue the interaction (i.e., test their liking).

In addition to studying the frequency of affinity testing strategies, Douglas (1987) studied perceptions of efficiency and social appropriateness of these strategies. Douglas found that *confronting*, *approaching*, *sustaining*, and *networking* were perceived as significantly more efficient than *diminishing self*, *bazing*, and *withdrawing*. One strategy, *sustaining*, was judged as significantly more socially appropriate than any other strategy. The strategies of *offering*, *approaching*, and *networking* were viewed as significantly more socially appropriate than the strategies of *confronting*, *withdrawing*, *bazing*, and *diminishing self*. Thus, it appears that the most efficient and socially appropriate strategies for testing affinity in initial interactions are *sustaining* interaction to see how willing the other person is to continue the interaction, *approaching* or increasing the intimacy of our actions to determine whether the other person reciprocates or compensates for our actions, and *networking* in which we ask third parties to acquire or transmit information regarding liking. It should be noted that Bell and Daly (1984) also found that *influence perceptions of closeness* (engage in behaviors that cause partner to perceive relationship as closer than it has been) was a strategy to generate liking.

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO INTENSIFY ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

After a romantic relationship has been initiated, it is often the goal to move it to a more advanced stage of development. In conjunction with moving a relationship to a more advanced stage, one must be able to assess the current state of the relationship and the partner's feelings about the relationship. Once a relationship has moved to an advanced stage, one must deal with relationship functions unique to advanced stages of relationship development. Different tasks and interactions are appropriate at different points in the history of a relationship (Burleson, 1995), and these tasks demand different types of communication skills. According to several models of relationship development, sexual intercourse is a characteristic of an advanced stage of relationship development (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000) or a turning point in the development of a romantic relationship (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). In this section, we discuss communication skills for moving a relationship to a more advanced stage of relationship development, one involving sexuality, and once we get there, communication skills for managing sexuality.

### Moving a Relationship to an Advanced Stage

There are several strategies for moving a relationship to a more advanced level. Individuals can be direct, verbally indicating that they would like to become intimates. Alternatively, people can be indirect, hinting and flirting to communicate their desire to intensify the level of the relationship. Finally, individuals can begin to construct a more intimate relationship by engaging in trial intimacy moves, such as increasing the intimacy of self-disclosure or touch, in hopes that the partner will reciprocate.

**The Direct Approach.** One way to escalate a relationship is to be direct, to talk about the state of the relationship and one's desire for the future of the relationship. Tolhuizen (1989) asked seriously dating college students to describe the things they said and did to change their present relationship from one of casual dating to one of serious and exclusive dating. Fifteen strategies were inductively derived from participants' written accounts. *Relationship negotiation* (direct discussion about relationship, about feelings in relationship, about what is desired for future of relationship) was the second most frequently mentioned strategy to intensify a relationship (29% of all strategies reported). *Direct definitional bid* (making a direct request for a more serious and exclusive relationship, 16% of strategies reported) and *accept definitional bid* (agreeing to a direct request for more serious and exclusive relationship, 10% of strategies listed) were also strategies to intensify a romantic relationship. Thus, more than 50% of strategies listed involved a direct approach to escalating the relationship.

Honeycutt, Cantrill, Kelly, and Lambkin (1998) also studied romantic relationship escalation strategies. They constructed scenarios that took individuals up to a certain point in a developing romance and asked participants to list the strategies they would use to advance the relationship to the next stage. Two of the most frequently reported strategies were *direct request* (to escalate relationship) and *explanation* (provides reasons for agreeing to the request).

Clark et al. (1999) conducted two studies of romantic relationship initiation. Many of the strategies reported were strategies to intensify a romantic relationship. In the first study, participants were told to imagine that they were romantically unattached and romantically attracted to an available person who might also be attracted to them. Participants were presented with eight romantic relationship initiation strategies and asked to evaluate them on several dimensions. *Direct initiation* (making physical contact and directly asking a potential partner to start a relationship) was rated as one of the most proficient (i.e., effective and inviting) strategies. It was deemed the most potent (i.e., risky, intense, and controlling), open (i.e., clear and revealing), flirtatious, and uninhibited strategy. There were positive correlations between an individual's self-reported past success at romantic relationship initiation and the rated agreeableness of *direct initiation*. Those who reported they had been successful in their past initiation attempts reported that they used this strategy more frequently, felt more comfortable performing these strategies, and felt they were more appropriate.

In the second study, participants were asked to recount their two most recent successful romantic relationship initiation attempts. One of the most frequently mentioned strategies (mentioned by more than 50% of both men and women) was *asking directly* (ask out on date, ask other to be boyfriend or girlfriend). Thus, these studies provide some evidence that directness is a frequent and effective strategy to intensify a romantic relationship.

**Indirectness.** As an alternative to being direct, individuals are often indirect in their attempts to escalate their romantic relationship. Tolhuizen (1989, 1992) found that *suggestive actions* (hints, flirting, other tactics characterized by subterfuge or deception) was used as a strategy to intensify a romantic relationship. Similarly, Clark et al. (1999) found that *acting indirectly* and *flirting* were strategies to initiate a romantic relationship.

Individuals can construct an intimate relationship by increasing the intimacy of their verbal and nonverbal behavior (or other dimensions of the relationship associated with relationship development) as an escalation strategy. Expectancy violations theory (EVT) predicts that within romantic relationships, when a rewarding partner

increases intimacy, reciprocity should occur. EVT predicts that even very high levels of increased intimacy can produce positive affect and reciprocity. Considerable research has examined adaptation to changes in nonverbal intimacy by romantic partners. Several studies have shown that increases in nonverbal intimacy are generally associated with attraction and positive emotional responses and reciprocity of nonverbal intimacy. Indeed, Guerrero, Jones and Burgoon (2000) found reciprocity of verbal and nonverbal intimacy for extreme increases in nonverbal and verbal intimacy in romantic dyads. Thus, we argue that individuals can increase the level of the relationship in at least three ways: by increasing the frequency and duration of interactions, by increasing expressions of liking and affection, and by increasing the intimacy of communication.

**Increase Frequency and Duration of Contact.** One strategy to escalate a relationship is to increase communication. Tolhuizen (1989, 1992) found that *increase contact* (attempts to increase frequency and duration of communication and contact) was the most frequently mentioned strategy to escalate a current romantic relationship in two studies. Clark et al. (1999) asked participants to recount their two most recent successful romantic relationship initiation attempts and found that *talking in person, spending time together, and talking on phone* were some of the most frequently mentioned strategies (all mentioned by more than 50% of both men and women). Similarly, Miell and Duck (1986) found that *see partner frequently* was perceived as appropriate behavior for close friends and as a strategy to become close friends.

**Expressions of Affection and Tokens of Affection.** As individuals become intimate, they verbally and nonverbally communicate their affection to each other (Davis, 1973). One way to construct a more intimate relationship is to communicate affection. Indeed, Tolhuizen (1989) found that *verbal expressions of affection, nonverbal expressions of affection, and tokens of affection* were all strategies to intensify a romantic relationship (together the three categories accounted for 42% of all strategies listed). In a second study, Tolhuizen (1992) found that *verbal expressions of affection* was one of the most frequently reported strategies used in the last two weeks to intensify a current romantic relationship. Honeycutt et al. (1998) found that one of the most frequent strategies to enhance intimacy was *ingratiation*. *Ingratiation* was broadly defined to include giving gifts or mementos to the partner, complimenting the partner, using other-oriented statements to express an interest in the partner's values and goals, verbal expressions of love, and showing physical affection through touching, hugging, and kissing. Finally, Clark et al. (1999) found that *touching* was one of the most frequently mentioned strategies (mentioned by more than 50% of both men and women) in participants' accounts of their two most recent successful romantic relationship initiation attempts.

**Increase Rewards.** Tolhuizen (1989) found that participants listed *increase rewards* (compliments, favors) as a strategy used to escalate a present relationship from one of casual dating to one of serious and exclusive dating. It was one of the most frequently mentioned escalation strategies used in the last 2 weeks in a current dating relationship (Tolhuizen, 1992).

**Self-Disclosure and Personalized Communication.** Clark et al. (1999) found that *becoming emotionally involved* (revealing personal information) was rated as one of the most agreeable (i.e., frequent, appropriate, and comfortable) and proficient

(i.e., effective and inviting) strategies (of eight strategies evaluated) to initiate a hypothetical romantic relationship. It was also perceived to be the least fake or phony strategy. Tolhuizen (1989) found that *personalized communication* (self-disclosure, seek or give support, personal idioms) was a strategy to intensify a current romantic relationship from one of casual dating to serious and exclusive dating. It was one of the most frequently mentioned strategies used in the last 2 weeks to intensify a present dating relationship (Tolhuizen, 1992). Finally, Miell and Duck (1986) found that a wide range of discussion topics and an intimate level of discussion (breadth and depth of self-disclosure) were seen as appropriate behaviors for close friends and as strategies to intensify the development of a friendship.

**Third-Party Assistance.** Just as third parties are used to initiate a relationship, they are also employed to intensify a relationship. Tolhuizen (1989) found that *social support and assistance* (asking for advice or assistance from social network members) was the second most frequently mentioned strategy to intensify a romantic relationship (29% of strategies listed). Clark et al. (1999) found that using *third parties* (getting friends or family members to assist) was mentioned by more than 50% of both men and women as a strategy to initiate their two most recent, successful romantic relationships. In a study of hypothetical romantic relationship initiation, *third party* strategies were judged to be one of the least agreeable (frequent, appropriate, and comfortable) strategies, however. Thus, the frequency, and more important the effectiveness, of asking third parties to assist in escalating a romantic relationship is unclear.

A number of additional strategies were found to intensify romantic relationships including *social enmeshment* (interact with, get to know partner's social network, promote interaction between partner and individual's social network; we show how social enmeshment is also used as a strategy to maintain relationships in the next section), *personal appearance*, *sexual intimacy*, and *behavioral adaptation* (Tolhuizen, 1989, 1992), *manipulating the situation* (making the setting romantic, maintaining close physical contact), *joking*, *demonstrating resources*, *acting passively*, *acting interested*, *presenting the self well*, *nonverbal communication*, *using drugs and alcohol*, *game playing*, and *dressing up* (Clark et al., 1999).

## Assessing the State of the Relationship

To successfully escalate a relationship, one must accurately assess the current state of the relationship and the partner's feelings to the relationship. Indeed, Baxter and Wilmot (1985) found that the "state of the relationship" was the most frequently mentioned "taboo topic" among opposite-sex relationships at various stages of development, especially if the relationship was in transition between friendship and romantic relationship. Baxter and Wilmot hypothesized that in the absence of direct talk about the relationship, partners must develop alternative information acquisition strategies to reduce uncertainty about the relationship.

Baxter and Wilmot (1984) studied secret tests in three types of relationships. Participants were asked what they said and did to assess where their relationship stands and how their partner feels about the relationship in their current platonic, romantic potential (i.e., in transition from friendship to romance), or romantic relationship. Seven categories of secret tests were found through cluster analysis. In descending order, based on proportion of respondents reporting at least one test in each category, they were as follows: *Endurance tests* include three subcategories, *testing limits* (rule deviation to determine how much partner will withstand), *self-put-down*

(self-deprecation to elicit a positive statement from the partner), and *forced choice* (force the partner to make a costly choice on behalf of the relationship). *Triangle tests* include two subcategories, *fidelity checks* and *jealousy tests* (verbal descriptions of a potential competitor to the partner or the physical presence of a potential competitor). *Indirect suggestion* includes three subcategories, *joking* (about a more serious relationship), *escalating touch* (to see if partner reciprocates), and *hinting* (about a more serious relationship). *Separation tests* include three subcategories, *physical separation* (separation from the partner to determine whether the partner's feelings withstand the absence), *initiation induction* (structuring the situation so that the burden of meeting rests on the partner), and *forced choice* (this strategy fell into two clusters). *Directness tests* involves *direct questioning* (direct relationship talk initiated by one of the partners) and *self-disclosure* (engaging in intimate self-disclosure with the hope that the partner will reciprocate). *Asking third parties* (interrogation of social network members about the partner's perceptions of the relationship) and *public presentation* (public presentation of the relationship type by one party to see how the partner will react) were also reported as secret tests.

Only 21% of respondents reported *directness tests* (direct questioning and self-disclosure) as a strategy to assess where the relationship stands and how the partner feels about it. Thus, secret tests (indirect strategies) are predominantly used to test the state of the relationship. In addition, it should be noted that many of the strategies used to escalate a relationship are also used to assess the state of the relationship. Indirectness (joking, hinting, flirting) is used both as a strategy to escalate a relationship and as an strategy to test the state of the relationship. An individual can joke or hint about a more serious relationship or flirt and see how the partner responds as a means to test how the partner feels about the relationship and to escalate the relationship. Similarly, increasing verbal and nonverbal intimacy behaviors (e.g., touch, self-disclosure) and then observing the partner's reaction is used as a strategy to escalate a relationship and to assess the state of the relationship. It should also be noted that several of the strategies used to test the state of the relationship were also used to test liking in initial interaction (Douglas, 1987).

Baxter and Wilmot (1984) found that relationships in transition between friendship and romance (i.e., in the process of escalating relationship) reported significantly more secret tests, specifically *separation tests* and *indirect suggestion tests*, than either platonic or romantic relationships. Unfortunately, Baxter and Wilmot did not test the effectiveness of various secret tests.

Research on affinity-testing strategies in initial interaction and secret tests in more developed relationships has important implications for communication skills, suggesting that message sending skills are not the only communication skills necessary for accomplishing relationship development. Because of the high degree of indirect messages sent in accomplishing relationship development, individuals must also be skilled in message reception skills, particularly in receiving and accurately interpreting relationship messages.

## Managing Sexuality

Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman, and Thompson (1989) used the term *sexually bonded primary relationships* to refer to the subset of close relationships that is sexually based, including dating, courtship, romantic relationships, as well as marriage. This subset of close relationships is differentiated from friends, siblings, and parent-child relationships, which are not sexually based. Although it is true that not all romantic

couples engage in sexual activity, involvement in sexual activity is a defining characteristic of romantic relationships. Thus, we include a review of research on sexual communication in romantic relationships and the implications of this research for communication skills in romantic relationships.

Sadly, Americans have a more difficult time discussing sex than they do engaging in sex (Marble, 1997). When examining the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, it appears that communication about sexual health can be described as, at best, ineffective—at worst, nonexistent. Communicating about sexual health is of paramount importance to developing safe sex practices, as well as maintaining sexually fulfilling relationships. Good communication is fundamental to sexual competence (Cupach & Metts, 1991), but we know little about how communication is used to manage sexuality in close relationships. The literature on sexual communication is increasing, but it is still a relatively underdeveloped area of research. Broadly speaking, the three major foci of sexual communication research have been (a) sexual initiation and/or refusal, (b) sexual self-disclosure (i.e., likes and dislikes, in relation to satisfaction), and (c) communication about sexual health, including talk about safe sex and HIV risk.

**Sexual Initiation and Refusal.** Greer and Buss (1994) performed a series of studies to identify the range of tactics men and women use to promote sexual encounters. They were interested in not only determining what these tactics are, but also in the perceived effectiveness and the frequency of these tactics. In the first study, Greer and Buss (1994) uncovered 122 acts, which were then sorted into 34 distinct tactics, for promoting sexual encounters. A sampling of the tactics they uncovered include: *flirting, increasing proximity, increasing sexual contact, increasing nonsexual contact, going to a private area, creating a romantic atmosphere, and enhancing physical attractiveness*. Greer and Buss (1994) then asked university students to rate the effectiveness of the tactics when performed by both men and women. They found that the strategy that was perceived as most effective for women was quite different than that for men. A woman who directly asked a man to have sex with her was perceived (by men) as the most persuasive. Nearly all acts engaged in by women and rated by men as most effective involved signaling sexual accessibility. On the other hand, a man who told a woman he loved her was perceived (by women) as the most persuasive, followed by the tactic of telling her he was very committed to her. In other words, women who want to have sex merely need to ask (be direct), whereas men who want to have sex need to express love and commitment (be indirect).

Greer and Buss (1994) asked students about the frequency with which they used these tactics, as well as how often they thought they were the target of these tactics. They found that women are more likely than men to enhance their sexual attractiveness—for example, dressing seductively—as the chief means of encouraging a sexual exchange and that men are more likely than women to show a willingness to invest time, energy, and resources—for example, by expressing love and commitment—as a way to encourage a sexual encounter.

Greer and Buss (1994) also found that men think they are the initiators and the targets of these types of tactics about an equal portion of the time (i.e., they use sexually promoting tactics about as often as women use these tactics). In contrast, women report that they are the targets of these tactics much more frequently than the initiators; however, men reported that women “corner them to get them alone, hint constantly about sexual things, lead them away from others, show a lot of skin, stick out their chests, and sit in a sexy provocative pose to promote a sexual encounter”

more than women reported performing such actions (Greer & Buss, 1994, p. 201). Greer and Buss pointed out the possibility that although women may be performing these behaviors, men may be misinterpreting the intent behind them—in other words, men perceive them as tactics to initiate sex, but women do not necessarily intend them that way.

In contrast to sexual initiation strategies, Afifi and Lee (2000) examined use of sexual resistance strategies, specifically focusing on request directness and request persistence. The researchers supplied undergraduate students with a hypothetical (unwanted) sexual request situation—either indirect or direct—and asked them to rate how likely they were to use various resistance strategies to refuse the request. Next, the participants were told, “Now, assume that your partner persisted after your initial resistance that night, and used the same tactic s/he used the first time,” at which point the respondents again rated their likelihood of using various resistance strategies. Afifi and Lee (2000) found that individuals are more likely to use face-saving than face-threatening messages in their initial resistance, but that they would nonetheless be relatively direct. Furthermore, they found that in general, request directness appears not to affect the selection of initial resistance messages, that is, people use the same tactics to resist a sexual request regardless of the request. When examining the role of request persistence, however, Afifi and Lee noted that their results reflect the influence of time. Whereas men were unaffected by request directness, even over time, women who were presented with direct requests showed a significantly larger increase in the likelihood of using face-threatening messages in response to a repeated request. Although this study does a great deal to uncover ways in which people choose to resist unwanted sexual requests, it does not take the step of exploring which resistance strategies are effective. Future research should expand this line of inquiry by measuring the effectiveness of resistance strategies.

***Sexual Self-Disclosure.*** Good communication has been linked to developing and maintaining rewarding sexual relationships (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Cupach & Metts, 1991). Although sexual self-disclosure (i.e., sharing likes and dislikes) has often been cited as an important factor in close relationships, little research has been done in this area. Because couples establish patterns for their behavior (sexual or otherwise) during the dating phase of their relationships (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Metts & Spitzberg, 1996), premarital sexual self-disclosure should be a significant topic of interest.

Byers and Demmons (1999) recruited 99 university students who were involved in dating relationships and measured the extent of their self-disclosure on both non-sexual and sexual topics. Sexual self-disclosure was measured using 12 items: six items about self-disclosure with regard to one's likes of various sexual activities, and six items about self-disclosure of dislikes with regard to these same activities. Byers and Demmons (1999) found that the amount of sexual self-disclosure was positively associated with length of relationship, being in an exclusive relationship, frequency of affectionate behaviors, nonsexual self-disclosure, partner self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction. Because only nonsexual self-disclosure and partner self-disclosure uniquely predicted sexual self-disclosure, however, they noted that sexual self-disclosure occurs in the context of an overall disclosing relationship. That is, partners who are involved in relationships characterized by high levels of nonsexual self-disclosure are more likely to share sexual self-disclosures.

Using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the authors found that sexual self-disclosure is related to satisfaction in two ways. First, increased sexual self-disclosure

leads to increased sexual satisfaction by making sexual interactions more positive. Second, increased sexual self-disclosure enhances sexual satisfaction through increased levels of relational satisfaction. Having said that, Byers and Demmons (1999) found that so-called full sexual self-disclosure was the exception rather than the rule. Although many of the participants in their study reported sharing "some detail" in their disclosure about a variety of sexual likes and dislikes, few respondents indicated that they had "fully [discussed this with] my partner; they know exactly how I feel about this."

**Communication About Sexual Health.** In the realm of sexual health, the lack of full sexual self-disclosure is supported by the work of Buysse and Ickes (1999). They observed 120 dating couples, some who were paired with their partner for a conversation task; some who were paired with a stranger. Half of the pairs were asked to discuss safe sex practices, and the other half were asked to discuss joint leisure time activities. Buysse and Ickes (1999) found that the dating couples had a more difficult time discussing safe sex practices than did their nonacquainted counterparts. Furthermore, dating couples had a more difficult time discussing safe sex practices than they did discussing joint leisure activities. In other words, it seems that "full sexual self-disclosure" can be a tricky proposition for dating couples.

The lack of full sexual self-disclosure can be problematic enough when considering the impact on a healthy relationship, but when taking into account the various physical health issues associated with sex, the implications are even more severe. Although sexual communication has been linked to lower HIV risk behavior (Quina, Harlow, Morokoff, Burkholder, & Deiter, 2000; Wingood & DiClemente, 1998), merely "talking about HIV" is not enough to produce preventative behaviors (Cline, Johnson, & Freeman, 1992). Quina et al. (2000) surveyed 816 women—not a university sample—who had at least one "risk factor" for HIV in the past 5 years. These risk factors were as follows: two or more sexual partners, an injection drug-using sexual partner, or a sexual partner who had had other sexual partners. Although many women reported using somewhat high levels of verbal assertiveness (e.g., asking their partners about sexual behavior, etc.), the women who were "partnered with at least one risky partner were engaging in the most risky behavior" (p. 543). Because the women who are at greatest risk are the least likely to communicate with their partner about these risks, Quina et al. (2000) recommend intervention with this audience in the form of teaching verbal assertiveness. If these women can be taught what to ask, and how to ask it, they may be able to remove themselves from future risky sexual encounters. In other words, direct communication is of paramount importance.

Similarly, in a university setting, researchers have found that talking about safe sex is relatively rare. From condom use (Edgar, Freimuth, Hammond, McDonald, & Fink, 1992) to AIDS prevention (Cline & Johnson, 1992; Cline et al., 1992), college students do not seem to be sufficiently educated or to take adequate precautions. When examining the uncertainty reduction strategies used with a potential partner before the first sexual encounter, Edgar et al. (1992) found that only slightly more than half (56%) of their participants used direct communication. Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they "asked directly," and 17% reported that the partner "volunteered information." The remaining respondents used varying degrees of indirect methods, from making a joke about the topic, to bringing up an example of a friend's sexual behavior, to believing that they "could just tell" something about the person. After examining elements of interpersonal influence, Edgar et al. (1992)

concluded that mere willingness to bring up condom use is more important than the particular strategy employed (see also Catania et al., 1989; Ross, 1988) and that training in communication skills about condom use can enhance this mindset. Specifically, they noted that educating individuals about the “best” way to persuade one’s sexual partner to use a condom is not as necessary as encouraging their willingness to discuss the issue in the first place.

With respect to AIDS prevention, Cline et al. (1992) examined partners’ talk about AIDS. They collected questionnaires from 588 sexually experienced undergraduate students and found that one third of them had never discussed AIDS with a sexual partner. Of the remaining two thirds who said they had discussed AIDS with a partner, only one third (21% of the full sample) discussed safe sex (the rest merely discussed AIDS “in general”). Perhaps most alarmingly, of this subgroup, only one third actually discussed condom use. Thus, only 6% of the sexually experienced sample indicated that they had had AIDS-related discussions with a partner that focused on effective means of prevention. The most common reasons given for not discussing AIDS with a potential sexual partner were threats to the sexual encounter and to self-image. Cline et al. (1992) argued that future research “must focus on identifying communication patterns that set the stage for condom use” (p. 55). Simply “talking about AIDS” is not sufficient; more direct communication about safe sex is necessary.

Research on sexual initiation and refusal, sexual self-disclosure, and communication about sexual health indicates that sexual communication involves multiple, complex issues. At present, we are only scratching the proverbial surface of “sexual communication skills.” As Cupach and Metts (1991) explained,

Sexual interaction is not merely comprised of a single goal (i.e., the desire to have sex) translated into a simple initiation move, followed by either compliance or noncompliance. Rather, sexual negotiation is marked by multiple goals, held (but not necessarily shared) by both relational partners. These goals are pursued by multiple (often subtle) behaviors enacted in an interactive context and influenced by prior sexual episodes in the relationship as well as the broader relational culture. A more processual view of sexual negotiation episodes will advance beyond the study of single and simple strategies directed only at having or avoiding intercourse. (p. 106)

It is extremely important that more work on sexual communication skills is conducted—for the simple reason that our health may depend on it (Cline & Johnson, 1992; Cline et al., 1992; Edgar et al., 1992; Quina et al., 2000).

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS

At the beginning of this chapter we stated that the primary task in accomplishing a romantic relationship is to move the relationship from the initial interaction stage to intimacy or bonding and then keep it there. Relationships do not maintain themselves. In this section, we discuss potential communication skills for “keeping it there.”

Many of the communication behaviors to escalate a relationship also function to maintain it. As Duck (1988) noted, “some means for developing relationships are also means for maintaining them” (p. 100). If escalating a relationship entails spending time together, doing things together, intimate self-disclosure, verbal and nonverbal expressions of liking and affection, and so on, then maintaining a relationship requires continuation of these behaviors. Indeed, research indicates that many of the strategies used to initiate and escalate a relationship are also used to

maintain a relationship (Dindia, 1994). Bell, Daly, and Gonzales (1987) developed a typology of 28 affinity-maintenance strategies and found that 24 of the 28 strategies used to maintain liking were used to generate liking in the first place. Thus, in this section we discuss how partners maintain high levels of interaction, intimacy, and liking.

In addition to maintaining the qualities of the relationship that were built up during the development of the relationship, close romantic relationships encompass a number of relationship functions. Some of these functions are discussed in part III of this volume, Function-Focused Communication Skills, including conflict management and emotional support. At the end of this section, we discuss one function that is unique to romantic relationships: managing jealousy.

## Maintaining Interaction

Interactions are the foundation of relationships. To initiate a relationship, we engage in initial interaction. To escalate a relationship, we increase the frequency and duration of interaction. To maintain a relationship, we must continue to interact with each other on a regular basis. Indeed, when we stop communicating (altogether, not briefly), we no longer have a relationship.

Spending time together and doing things together are strategies to maintain relationships. Dindia and Baxter (1987) asked spouses to list the things they said and did to maintain their marriage. *Time together* and *shared activities* were two of the most frequently reported relationship maintenance strategies. Bell et al. (1987) developed a list of affinity-maintenance strategies by asking married women to describe the things they said and did in their marriages to maintain liking and solidarity. Two of the strategies reported were *inclusion of other* (spouse invites partner to participate with him or her in social activities) and *self-inclusion* (spouse joins in the activities of the partner). More important, wives' perceptions of their husband's use of *self-inclusion* predicted wives' marital satisfaction. Thus, inclusion of self and other are strategies to generate (Bell & Daly, 1984) and maintain liking (Bell et al., 1987).

Although spending time together and doing things together usually entail talking, talk in general and talking about our day are also important strategies to maintain relationships. Dindia and Baxter (1987) found that *talk* (e.g., talking to each other) was one of the most frequently reported relationship maintenance strategies. This category specifically did not make reference to the quality of communication (e.g., openness or honesty).

In addition to talk in general, conversations that allow the partners to "catch up" on what happened during the day are also used to maintain the relationship. Vangelisti and Banski (1993) noted that "by discussing the experiences they had while they were separated during the day, relational partners may be engaging in an activity that defines their togetherness" (p. 150). Vangelisti and Banski found that reported time spent in catching-up conversations was positively related to relational satisfaction.

Lack of time together is a threat to a relationship, and relationships have to be maintained despite the fact that individuals cannot always be with their partners. Sigman (1991) noted that a fundamental anomaly about social and personal relationships is that relationships are continuous despite discontinuous periods of physical and interactional co-presence. Sigman argued that couples manage the discontinuous aspects of relationships by using relational continuity constructional units (RCCUs), behaviors relational partners engage in before, during, and after an absence that function to construct the continuity of the relationship despite the absence.

RCCUs are divided by Sigman (1991) into three types: (a) prospective units, (b) introspective units, and (c) retrospective units. Prospective units are behaviors that relationship partners perform before physical separation. Examples of behaviors in this category include farewells and agenda establishments (projections of future interactions). Introspective units occur during relational non-co-presence and constitute the relationship's continuity during periods of absence. A major type of an introspective unit is mediated contact between relationship partners. Greeting cards, notes, phone calls, and e-mail messages allow partners to remain connected when face-to-face interaction isn't possible. Retrospective units occur after the period of relational non-co-presence. Greetings and conversations that allow the partners to "catch-up" on what happened during the period of absence are examples of retrospective units.

Gilbertson, Dindia, and Allen (1998) conducted a test of Sigman's (1991) theory. They studied the relationship between time spent apart, RCCUs, and relational satisfaction for married and cohabitating couples. The results of the study indicated that time apart was negatively related to relational satisfaction. This result indirectly supports the claim that interactional co-presence is essential to relational maintenance. More important to Sigman's theory, there were a number of significant positive correlations between prospective, introspective, and retrospective RCCUs and relational satisfaction. In a multiple regression equation, with the effects of relational co-presence held constant, women's and men's reports of their prospective RCCUs predicted female relational satisfaction and women's reports of their prospective RCCUs predicted male relational satisfaction.

## Maintaining Liking

A second characteristic of relationships that must be maintained is liking. Liking is maintained in a number of ways; one of the most powerful is apparently through expressions of liking and affection.

Dindia and Baxter (1987) found that *expressions of affection* was one of the most frequently mentioned marital maintenance strategies. Bell et al. (1987) examined wives' perceptions of affinity-maintenance strategies in marriage. Wives reported that one of the most frequently used strategies by both themselves and their husbands was *verbal affection*. In addition, Bell et al. found that wives believed that one of the things their husband wanted most was physical affection. Finally, Bell et al. found that physical affection was a significant predictor of wives' marital satisfaction.

Stafford and Canary (1991) derived five relational maintenance strategies through factor analysis: *positivity*, *openness*, *assurances*, *network*, and *sharing tasks*. Several studies found that *assurances* (stressing commitment, showing love, demonstrating faithfulness) is a frequent strategy to maintain relationships (see Stafford, 2003, for a review). Stafford and Canary (1991) found that married, engaged, and seriously dating couples perceived more partner *assurances* than did those who were just dating, indicating that *assurances* become a more frequent maintenance strategy as a romantic relationship develops.

There is also evidence that *assurances* is an effective relational maintenance strategy. *Assurances* have been found to be a predictor of satisfaction, commitment, and liking (see Stafford, 2003, for a review). Gurerrero, Eloy, and Wabnik (1993) investigated the connection between maintenance strategies at Time 1 and relationship status 8 weeks later. Dating couples whose relationship had remained stable or whose relationship had escalated since Time 1 reported more *assurances* at Time 1 than couples whose relationship had ended or deescalated 8 weeks later. Spiegelhoff and

Dindia (2001) studied individuals' perceptions of their own and their partner's relational maintenance behaviors. They found that perception of partner assurances was the primary predictor of relational satisfaction for both men and women. Thus, there is some evidence of the frequency, importance, and effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal expressions of affection in maintaining a relationship.

Being positive and cheerful appears to be a strategy for maintaining relationships. Dindia and Baxter (1987) found that *prosocial strategies* (being nice and cheerful, refraining from criticism, giving in) was one of the most frequently mentioned strategies to maintain a marital relationship. Canary and Stafford (1994) also found that *positivity* (being nice and cheerful) predicts liking. Finally, Spiegelhoff and Dindia (2001) found that men's perceptions of their female partner's positivity predicted men's relational satisfaction.

## Maintaining Intimacy

Several of the strategies to maintain liking also function to maintain intimacy, in particular, verbal and nonverbal expressions of affection. In addition to expressions of affection, self-disclosure functions to maintain intimacy. Bell and Daly (1984) found that *openness* (self-disclosure) was a strategy to generate liking and Bell et al. (1987) found that *openness* was a strategy to maintain affinity. It was neither frequent, important, nor a predictor of wives' marital satisfaction, however. *Influence perceptions of closeness* (behaviors thought to lead partner to perceive relationship as close, including pet names and talking about "we" rather than "you" and "I") was a strategy to generate (Bell & Daly, 1984) and maintain liking (Bell et al., 1987); however, it, too, was neither frequent, important, nor a predictor of wives' marital satisfaction. Thus, the role of self-disclosure and personalized communication in maintaining relationships is unclear.

## The Role of Directness in Maintaining Relationships

Kaplan (1975/1976) elaborated two global and polar-opposite types of maintenance behaviors. *Maintenance-by-expression* occurs when partners directly verbalize their feelings, their observations of the relationship, and the regulation of interaction between them. Maintenance-by-expression has been referred to by others as meta-communication, relationship talk, openness, and self-disclosure. *Maintenance-by-suppression* occurs when any direct discussion of mutual feelings, views of the relationship, or efforts to carry on in an orderly fashion is suppressed. Maintenance-by-suppression includes expressing emotions indirectly through nonverbal and verbal communication (joking and laughter). Kaplan (1975/76) argued that expressive maintenance is better able to sustain relationships of high involvement over time than maintenance-by-suppression. According to Kaplan, "expressive maintenance provides a way of preserving a strong emotional bond and, in general, promotes closeness and satisfaction in a relationship" (p. 301).

Research has examined maintenance-by-expression (or directness) as a relational maintenance strategy. Braiker and Kelley (1979) studied relational maintenance behavior, which they operationally defined using items measuring communication with one's partner about the relationship. They asked married couples to complete questionnaires in which they estimated the degree or extent to which they experienced a particular attitude, feeling, or behavior during each stage of the relationship's

history (casual dating, serious dating, engaged, and married). The results of the study were that maintenance behavior (communication about the relationship) increased linearly from casual dating to marriage.

Factor and cluster analyses were conducted on all the scales. The results were that relational maintenance items (items measuring communication about the relationship) loaded on a general love dimension during the first two stages of the relationship but by the fourth stage (marriage) they were more heavily loaded on a conflict-negativity dimension. The authors concluded that maintenance behaviors (communication about the relationship) change meaning over time, with maintenance behavior serving to increase interdependence and love in earlier stages of development and to resolve conflict in later ones.

Additional research has been conducted on the use of directness and indirectness in relational maintenance. Ayres (1983) studied directness as a strategy to maintain a relationship at its current stage (thus preventing the relationship from deescalating to a lower level or escalating to a higher level). Men and women were given a hypothetical relationship scenario (acquaintance, friend, teacher, or coworker) and asked the likelihood of using *avoidance* (ignoring things another might do to change a relationship and avoiding doing things that might alter the relationship trajectory—i.e., touching the other person when you haven't before), *balance* (keeping the number of favors and emotional support levels constant), and *directness* (directly telling the other person that you would prefer the relationship to remain unchanged) to maintain the hypothetical relationship at its current level. When an individual desired to maintain a relationship, regardless of whether the individual perceived the partner as wanting to escalate, maintain, or deescalate the relationship, *directness* was the least reported strategy, followed by *avoidance*, then *balance*. Thus, the results indicate that when our desire is to maintain our relationship, regardless of our perceptions of our partner's goals, we are least likely to be direct about our desire to maintain the relationship.

Several other studies have examined directness using related terms. Dindia and Baxter (1987) found that *meta-communication* (talk about the relationship) was a strategy to maintain and repair marriages; however, it was listed more frequently as a means to repair than to maintain a relationship (this corresponds with Braiker and Kelley's (1979) conclusion that communication about the relationship functions to resolve conflict in marriage). Bell et al. (1987) found that wives' report of their husbands' *honesty* predicted wives' marital satisfaction.

Stafford and Canary (1991) studied *openness* as a relational maintenance strategy. Their measure of *openness* consists of items measuring self-disclosure and open discussion about the relationship. They found that *openness* was weakly and inversely related to relational satisfaction. Several studies found that *openness* was the least frequently reported of five relational maintenance strategy (see Stafford, 2003, for a review). Dainton, Stafford, and Canary (1994) also found that the partial correlation between *openness* and relational satisfaction was negative. Again, openness (in particular, communication about the relationship) may be used to resolve conflict and repair relationships, which may explain why it is negatively related to relational satisfaction.

Overall, there is mixed support for the frequency and effectiveness of directness as a relational maintenance strategy. The communication skills involved in expressing negative emotions and talking about the relationship may be difficult to master, which may be another cause of mixed results. As stated by Kaplan (1975/1976), "it is not

enough simply to be open with another individual, one must do it constructively." Thus, *openness*, in and of itself, may not be a communication skill for maintaining a relationship.

## The Social Network

The social network was used as a strategy to initiate relationships (being introduced by a friend, using third parties to acquire or transmit information) and as a strategy to intensify a relationship (asking for advice or assistance in escalating relationship from social network members). The social network is also employed to maintain relationships.

Stafford and Canary (1991) found that *social network* (spending time with common friends and affiliations) is a strategy to maintain a relationship. Dindia and Baxter (1987) found *spend time with network* was a frequent strategy to maintain a marriage. Bell et al. (1987) found that *third-party relations* was a strategy to maintain marriages; however, it was neither frequent, important, nor a predictor of wives' marital satisfaction.

The social network also appears to maintain relationships in another way—through direct expression of one's feelings towards one partner to third parties in the absence of the partner. Oliker (1989) has shown that married women's friendships promote marital stability. They do this, in part, by diffusing anger or other volatile emotions and managing these emotions so as to sustain married women's commitment to their marriage.

## Repairing Relationships

Dindia and Canary (1993) elaborated several uses of the term *relational maintenance*, one of which was to keep a relationship in repair, including elements of preventative and corrective maintenance. Rather than treating relationship repair as a separate stage of relationship development, we include a brief discussion of repair in our discussion of maintenance.

There is little research on relationship repair (which is different from relationship reconciliation). Most of the research has concentrated on initiation, maintenance, and termination; however, Dindia and Baxter (1987) studied relational maintenance and repair. They found that not all strategies reported to maintain relationships were also reported to repair them. Specifically, *meta-communication* was reported more frequently when the goal was repairing the relationship than when the goal was maintaining the relationship. *Introducing variety, novelty, and spontaneity* into the relationship was reported more frequently when the goal was maintaining the relationship than when the goal was repairing the relationship. In addition, more strategies were reported for maintenance than repair, indicating that individuals' repertoires of strategies for maintaining their relationship is larger than their repertoire of strategies for repairing their relationship.

## Romantic Jealousy Expression

Effectively managing jealousy is critical to romantic relationship maintenance. Jealousy is an interpersonal phenomenon; it is based in a perceived threat to one's relationship, and communication plays a distinct role in the jealousy experience. Although jealousy is sometimes evident in friendships (Aune & Comstock, 1991) and

in family relationships (Aune & Comstock, 1999), it is expressed more commonly in romantic relationships and therefore uniquely affects the maintenance of romantic relationships.

Romantic jealousy “has the power to impact the climate and continuity of relationships” (Guerrero, Eloy, Jorgensen, & Andersen, 1993, p. 128). Guerrero and colleagues (e.g., Andersen, Eloy, Guerrero, & Spitzberg, 1995; Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Andersen, 1998; Guerrero, Andersen, Jorgensen, Spitzberg, & Eloy, 1995; Guerrero et al., 1993) have been particularly instrumental in exploring jealousy expression. She and her coauthors (Guerrero et al., 1995) coined the phrase *communicative responses to jealousy*, defined as “behavioral reaction[s] to jealousy that [carry] communicative value and [have] the potential to fulfill individual and/or relational goals” (p. 272). They conducted a series of studies that uncovered two overarching types of communicative responses to jealousy: interactive and general responses.

**Interactive Responses to Jealousy.** Guerrero et al. (1995) used the term *interactive* for responses that manifest themselves in either engaging in or avoiding face-to-face interaction. Six types of interactive responses to jealousy emerged from Guerrero et al.’s factor analysis. *Negative affect expression* is defined as nonverbal expressions of jealousy-related behavior that the partner can see, such as appearing hurt, or crying in front of the partner. *Integrative communication* is direct but nonaggressive communication about jealousy with the partner (i.e., self-disclosure in an effort to “work things out”). *Distributive communication*, in contrast, is direct, aggressive communication about jealousy with the partner (e.g., accusations, sarcasm). *Active distancing* is an indirect but aggressive means of communicating jealousy—possibly done by withdrawing affection or giving one’s partner the silent treatment. *Avoidance/denial* is an indirect but nonaggressive communication that focuses on avoiding the jealousy-invoking issue, situation, or partner (e.g., denying jealous feelings, decreasing contact with the partner). Finally, *violent communication/threats* is threatening or actually engaging in physical violence against the partner.

Although they did not emerge in Guerrero et al.’s (1995) original factor analysis, three additional interactive responses were found in their qualitative data. Based on those findings, a wide review of literature, and further research (Guerrero, 1998), the following interactive responses were later added to the typology (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998). *Signs of possession* is defined as publicly displaying the relationship to others so they know the partner is “taken,” such as kissing the partner in front of potential rivals. *Derogating competitors* is making negative comments about potential rivals to the partner and to others. *Relationship threats* involves threatening to terminate or de-escalate the primary relationship or to be unfaithful to the partner.

**General Responses to Jealousy.** Guerrero et al. (1995) also uncovered five types of “general” responses to jealousy. These responses do not fall under the interactive category because, although they “often involve engaging in actions or behavioral responses that have communicative value,” they do not necessarily involve face-to-face interaction (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998, p. 170). *Surveillance/restriction* is defined as behavioral strategies designed to gather information about or interfere with the rival relationship, such as spying or checking up on the partner or looking through the partner’s things for “evidence.” *Compensatory restoration* is behavior aimed at improving the primary relationship or making oneself more desirable. This can manifest itself in countless ways, including sending flowers to the partner, trying to appear more physically attractive, or being especially nice. *Manipulation attempts*

are moves to induce negative feelings in the partner or shift responsibility for communicating about the problem to the partner (e.g., flirting with others to make the partner jealous, bringing the rival's name up in conversation to check for a reaction). *Rival contacts* is direct communication with the rival about the jealousy situation, rival relationship, or partner, such as telling the rival to stop seeing the partner. Finally, *violent behavior* is defined as directing violence toward objects, either in private or in the presence of others, as in slamming doors or punching walls.

**Communicative Responses to Jealousy and Goals.** Individuals use various types of jealousy expression when faced with a perceived relational threat. One reason why people use different communicative responses to jealousy (CRJs) is the different goals they are trying to attain (Yoshimura, Guerrero, & Trost, 1999). When a relational partner perceives a threat to the well-being of the primary relationship, more than just the goal of maintaining the relationship might fuel his or her reaction. Bryson (1991) argued that two independent motivational goals influence jealousy expression: maintaining self-esteem and maintaining the primary relationship. To explore Bryson's "dual motivation model," Guerrero and Afifi (1998) asked participants involved in romantic relationships to think of the times when they had experienced jealousy in their relationship and consider their goals when expressing jealousy. Specifically, they responded to the item "When I am jealous I am usually concerned about . . ." followed by various items written to assess relationship maintenance goals versus self-esteem goals. Responses were coded based on an early version of the CRJ scale comprised of the original nine CRJs.

Guerrero and Afifi (1998) found that individuals with a high motivation to maintain the primary relationship were more likely to use *integrative communication*, *compensatory restoration*, and *negative affect expression* than were those with a low motivation. They also found that individuals with a high motivation to maintain self-esteem were more likely to use *integrative communication*, *manipulation attempts*, and *avoidance/denial* than were those with a low motivation. They note that using *manipulation attempts* and *avoidance/denial* may serve to protect self-esteem by shifting responsibility for action onto the partner. Interestingly, although perhaps not unexpectedly, individuals in the low self-esteem maintenance and low relationship maintenance group reported that they used the least amount of *integrative communication*.

In a later study, Guerrero and Afifi (1999) noted that jealousy expression is best predicted by a combination of goals. In their investigation, they found that two thirds of the CRJs were best predicted by two or more goals. Furthermore, of the nine CRJs they examined, only two were predicted by the goal of relationship maintenance: *compensatory restoration* (for which it was the sole predictor) and *negative affect expression*. This is a complex research area, and it is in need of further inquiry. But although understanding the relationship between goals and jealousy expression is an important step, it does not reveal the entire picture. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *goals* and *strategies* are not synonymous with *skills*, and more work remains to be done to link the behaviors performed to accomplish these goals to outcomes.

**Communicative Responses to Jealousy and Relational Outcomes.** Jealousy expression has been linked to relationship outcomes in meaningful ways. In fact, CRJs have been found to account for more variance in relational satisfaction than the experience of jealousy (Andersen et al., 1995), indicating that jealousy expression has a

more significant impact on relationship satisfaction than jealous feelings (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998). Put another way, it is not how jealous you feel, but how you deal with those feelings (e.g., discuss them with your partner, start a fight, or spy on your partner) that is more closely associated with relational satisfaction.

Building from the notion that open, positive communication is linked to satisfaction, Andersen et al. (1995) explored the connections between the reported use of various CRJs and relational satisfaction. They found that satisfaction was negatively associated with *distributive communication*, *active distancing*, *negative affect expression*, *violent communication/threats*, and *avoidance/denial*. Their hypothesis that satisfaction would be positively linked with integrative communication was, however, not supported. Timmerman (1999) found partial support for these findings, uncovering significant negative correlations between satisfaction and *negative affect expression*, *distributive communication*, and *relationship threats*, and no correlation between satisfaction and *integrative communication*. In a later study, Timmerman (2001) found that respondents' satisfaction was negatively linked to a wider range of CRJs—specifically, *distributive communication*, *active distancing*, *avoidance/denial*, *violent communication/threats*, *relationship threats*, *manipulation attempts*, and *violent behavior*. Timmerman (2001) also found a positive correlation between satisfaction and *integrative communication*.

Interestingly, Andersen et al. (1995) found that *negative affect expression* was a positive move in some cases but a negative move in others. A suppression effect suggests that when used with *distributive communication* and/or *active distancing*, *negative affect expression* is not an effective strategy (i.e., it is negatively linked to satisfaction). When used by itself, however, *negative affect expression* may create an atmosphere that encourages relationally enhancing activities, such as self-disclosure and talk about the relationship. An additional suppression effect seems to indicate that although *integrative communication* is a positive move, its benefits are negated by the use of accompanying negative CRJs. In other words, just using *integrative communication* is not enough; one must refrain from using negative CRJs as well.

As Andersen et al. (1995) pointed out, uncovering behaviors that reduce the likelihood of relationship dissatisfaction is the crux of learning more about how to effectively manage jealousy. Furthermore, it might be useful to think of CRJs in terms of direct (or active) and indirect (or passive) and in terms of “positive” (do not threaten the relationship, or are actually productive) and “negative” (are threatening or damaging to the relationship). Each of these categorizations is meaningful with respect to interpersonal communication, and when interpreting many of the results mentioned earlier, such categories appear to be important.

## TERMINATING RELATIONSHIPS

We have noted that when the goal is to initiate, intensify, or maintain a romantic relationship, three underlying tasks must be carried out: ensuring interaction, intimacy, and liking. When the goal is to terminate a relationship, then these tasks are essentially “reversed” (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973). As Baxter (1985) noted, one's level of familiarity does not change during termination, but closeness (as reflected in intimacy of self-disclosure) decreases. Over time, however, a loss of familiarity will occur. Relationships on their way to termination are often marked by a low level of contact, intimacy, and liking (Miller & Parks, 1982).

## Relationship Termination Strategies

Several studies have been conducted examining relationship termination strategies. In addition to studying strategies to “make friends,” Baxter and Philpott (1982) examined strategies to end friendships. Baxter and Philpott examined six tactics to terminate a relationship: *other negation* (cues that demonstrate that the other is not liked), *difference* (demonstrating that one does not have things in common with the other), *self-presentation* (presentation of one’s negative attributes), *cost-rendering* (ceasing favors and increasing costs to the other), *disinterest* (ceasing to acquire additional information about the other), and *exclusion* (avoiding having the other in one’s presence). Results indicated that individuals primarily use *exclusion* and *other negation* to terminate a relationship, strategies that directly relate to decreased contact and decreased liking, respectively.

Baxter (1982) examined strategies to de-escalate or terminate relationships using four hypothetical relationship scenarios: friendship relationship/total disengagement goal, friendship relationship/partial disengagement goal (i.e., de-escalate relationship to “casual friends”), very close friendship relationship/total disengagement goal, and very close friendship relationship/partial disengagement goal. Baxter (1982) found four types of relational de-escalation/termination strategies: *withdrawal/avoidance* (acts sharing the common feature of nonconfrontation about the disengagement), *manipulatory strategies* (intentional manipulation of others for purposes of achieving disengagement), *concern for positive tone* (concern for the affective tone with which the other party reacts to the disengagement), and *openness* (open confrontation about the disengagement). Relationship goal (de-escalate/terminate relationship) did not predict strategy use. Thus, it appears that individuals use the same strategies to deescalate and terminate a relationship. Baxter found that relationship closeness affected strategy choice. Closer relationships were less likely to use withdrawal/avoidance and manipulatory strategies.

In examining retrospective reports of termination strategies, Baxter (1984) found eight termination strategies: *withdrawal* (avoidance behaviors in which intimacy or frequency (or both) of contact with a partner is reduced), *pseudo-de-escalation* (a declaration to the other party that the disengager desires a transformed relationship of reduced closeness when, in fact, the desire is to end the relationship), *cost escalation* (behavior which increases the partner’s relational costs), *fait accompli* (an explicit declaration to the other party that the relationship is over, with no opportunity for discussion or compromise), *state of the relationship talk* (an explicit statement of dissatisfaction and desire to exit in the context of a bilateral discussion of the relationship’s problems), *fading away* (an implicit understanding that the relationship has ended), *attributional conflict* (a conflict, not over whether to exit, but on why the exit is necessary), and *negotiated farewell* (explicit communication between the parties that formally ends the relationship and is free of hostility and argument).

Baxter (1985) noted that two underlying dimensions, directness and other-orientation, underlie these strategies. Direct strategies explicitly state one’s desire to exit the relationship, whereas indirect strategies try to accomplish the breakup without an explicit statement of the goal. Other-orientation refers to the degree to which the disengager attempts to avoid hurting the other party in the breakup. Indirect, unilateral strategies to exit a relationship included *withdrawal*, *pseudo-de-escalation*, and *cost escalation*. Indirect, bilateral strategies include *fading away* and *pseudo-de-escalation*. Direct, unilateral strategies include *fait accompli* and *state of*

*the relationship talk.* Direct, bilateral strategies include *attributional conflict* and *negotiated farewell*.

Among unilateral resolutions to terminate relationship, 76% of initial strategies employed to terminate relationship were indirect, primarily *withdrawal*, followed by *pseudo-de-escalation*, then *cost escalation*. Twenty-four percent of unilateral resolutions to exit were initiated with direct strategies, primarily *fait accompli*, followed by *state-of-the-relationship talk*. Baxter studied partners' reaction to the initial termination attempt and found that indirect unilateral disengagement strategies had a 22% likelihood of initial acceptance by the partner. In contrast, the partner accepted 66% of direct unilateral disengagement strategies. Thus, directness was more effective in terminating relationships. In particular, *fait accompli* had the highest rate of partner acceptance, whereas *pseudo-de-escalation* had the lowest level of partner acceptance. Baxter (1984) found that when a second attempt was made to terminate a relationship, it was most likely to be indirect (75%), regardless of whether the first attempt was direct or indirect. Alternatively, when the desire to terminate a relationship was bilateral, directness (i.e., *attribution conflict* and *negotiated farewell*) and indirectness (i.e., *fading away*) strategies were employed equally.

Cody (1982) asked students to recall a heterosexual relationship in which they had taken the initiative in terminating. Termination strategies formed five groupings: *positive tone* (i.e., end relationship on positive note), *negative identity management* (e.g., "I think you should start dating other people"), *justification* (i.e., legitimate reasons for breakup), *behavioral de-escalation* (i.e., withdrawal), and *de-escalation* (e.g., suggest a trial separation). Cody studied predictors of termination strategies, one of which was perceived intimacy. The results of the study were that more intimate relationships were more likely to involve *justification*, *de-escalation* and *positive tone* (i.e., direct strategies); less intimate relationships were more likely to involve *behavioral de-escalation* (i.e., indirect strategy).

## CONCLUSIONS

In the wake of a lack of research on communication skills for accomplishing relationship development, we have taken a strategic approach to identifying potential communication skills for accomplishing relationship development. We have identified a number of communication strategies that individuals use, or at least say they use or would use, to initiate, develop, maintain, and terminate romantic relationships. In general, there is little, if any, evidence for the effectiveness of these strategies in accomplishing relationship development.

This research does, however, provide a starting point—a set of potential communication skills for accomplishing relational development. Research is needed to test the effectiveness of these behaviors in accomplishing relationship goals; research is then needed to specify the concrete communication behaviors that constitute these communication skills. For example, there are a number of ways to increase touch. Although it appears that, in general, increasing touch is an effective strategy to escalate and test the level of the relationship, one can think of various ways that an individual might increase touch that could be perceived as socially inappropriate or that would be ineffective in achieving one's goal. Nonetheless, research on communication scripts and strategies provides insight on potential communication skills for accomplishing romantic relationship development.

## The Generality of Communication Skills Across Relationship Goals

We have made the argument that communication skills for accomplishing relational development are similar across stages, that is, behaviors used to initiate a relationship are used to escalate, maintain, and to terminate the relationship. One study of affinity-seeking strategies used across various stages of relationship development indicates that there is some evidence that this is the case.

Tolhuizen (1989) studied strategies to generate liking across relationship stages. Participants read a description of one of four levels of relationship development: new acquaintances, fully developed stable friendship, deteriorating friendship in which the desire is to save and continue the relationship, and deteriorating friendship in which the desire is to terminate the relationship. Participants indicated the likelihood that they would use Bell and Daly's (1984) 25 affinity-seeking strategies.

The results indicated that more than half (14) of the strategies were similar across all stages of relationship development (*altruism, assume control, assume equality, concede control, conversational rule-keeping, dynamism, elicit other's disclosures, inclusion of other, nonverbal immediacy, optimism, personal autonomy, physical attractiveness, self-confirmation, and trustworthiness*). Eleven of the strategies showed significant differences across relationship stages, however. Without going into detail, participants reported greater use of a number of affinity-seeking strategies to maintain a relationship than to initiate, repair, or terminate a relationship. These results suggest either greater effort to maintain a developed relationship than to initiate or terminate a relationship or a greater repertoire of strategies to maintain a relationship than to initiate, repair, or terminate a relationship.

When the goal was initiating the relationship, participants reported being more likely to use *similarity* than when the goal was to repair or terminate the relationship and more likely to use *present interesting self* than when the goal was to terminate the relationship (Tolhuizen, 1989). Thus, these strategies may be unique to early stages of relationship development. Among other findings, *openness* was more likely to repair the relationship than to initiate or terminate a relationship. This is similar to a study by Dindia and Baxter (1987), who found that meta-communication was used more to repair than to maintain a relationship. When the goal was termination, participants were more likely to use *supportiveness* than when the goal was initiation. Tolhuizen speculated that this result might confirm Knapp and Vangelisti's (2000) contention that supportiveness may be evident in the farewell rhetoric of decaying relationships. Indeed, research by Baxter (1984) indicates that other-oriented strategies are specifically designed to avoid hurting the other party in the breakup.

## Directness

Directness appears to be an underlying dimension of relationship development strategies across all stages of relationships. Both direct and indirect strategies are used to accomplish relationship goals. Indeed, Baxter (1985) argued that relationship process cognitions allow relationship partners to rely heavily on indirect cues to accomplish relationship development goals rather than using direct communication. As stated by Baxter, direct relationship communication provides the most efficient strategy for communicating one's relationship goals and for acquiring information about the partner's relationship goals; however, it is because people have relationship process cognitions that indirectness also can be employed efficiently to accomplish relationship goals (Baxter, 1985). Such indirectness serves the function of reducing the face

threat present in direct communication. Because there is a great deal of indirectness used to accomplish relationship development goals, it is clear that message-sending *and* message-receiving skills are important for accomplishing relationship development.

## Generalizability of Communication Skills

Although these skills are discussed as communication skills for accomplishing romantic relationships, they are probably applicable to all voluntary relationships. The exception may be the function-focused communication skills of managing sexuality and managing jealousy, which may be unique to romantic relationships. Alternatively, many of the fundamental interaction skills discussed in part II as well as many of the function-focused communication skills discussed in part III of this volume (such as conflict management and emotional support) are obviously important communication skills for initiating, developing, and maintaining romantic relationships.

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CHAPTER

# 18

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN COUPLES: A REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF EMERGING PERSPECTIVES

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This chapter presents a review and critique of empirical research on communication skills in marriage or married-like relationships. Such a chapter is warranted on several counts. First, marriage remains a popular social institution with about 80% of the population professing an intention to marry at some point in their lives (McDonald, 1995). Although most couple relationships start out happy, satisfaction erodes for a substantial proportion of marriages. At any given time, 20% of all married couples report marital dissatisfaction (Reynolds, Rizzo, Gallagher, & Speedy, 1979), and in Western countries, between 40% and 55% of marriages end in divorce (De Guilbert-Lantoine & Monnier, 1992; McDonald, 1995). Second, marital communication is a more valued resource for married individuals than communication with others; among married people, the spouse is the person most often turned to for support (Beach, Martin, Blum, & Roman, 1993; Cutrona, 1996; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1994). Third, escalation of conflict into violence is common in married couples; physical aggression occurs in about 30% of married couples in the United States (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) and newlywed couples in the United Kingdom (Kelly & Fincham, 1999), leads to significant physical injury in about 10% of couples (Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus et al., 1980), and is the most common interpersonal context in which homicide occurs (National Committee on Violence, 1990). Fourth, marital conflict is associated with child problems, particularly when children are exposed to unresolved conflict and frequent, intense physical aggression, and remains unresolved (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Fantuzzo, et al., 1991; Grych & Fincham, 1990, 1992). Finally, conflictual couple communication is associated with stress-related disease indicators, such as poor immune response (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987) and sustained

elevations in stress-related hormones (Malarkey, Kiecolt-Glaser, Pearl, & Glaser, 1994).

The overall aim of this chapter is to identify ways in which we might advance our conceptualization of couple communication skills and to explore their implications for couple interventions. To this end, the chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, we define what we mean by couple communication skills and evaluate current behavioral assessment technologies. In the second section, we provide an overview of research on couple communication. In the third section, we explore promising new constructs in couple communication skills and their relation to marital satisfaction. The fourth section examines intra- and extrapersonal factors that influence couple communication skills. In the final section, we discuss implications for prevention, enhancement, and therapy.

## **CONCEPTUALIZING AND OPERATIONALIZING COUPLE COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

We begin this section by distinguishing between communication behavior and communication skills in couple relationships. Communication behavior may be thought of as verbal and nonverbal behavior occurring when a couple is interacting. Communication skills refer to the ability to realize communicative goals while behaving in a socially appropriate manner during the course of interaction (Burleson & Denton, 1997). Thus, communication behavior need not involve the deployment of skills; however, we might reasonably assume that communication skills involve communication behavior. This is an important distinction because it has implications for how couple researchers might quantify communication skills in couples. Theorists have argued that problem-solving discussions, the most common forum for evaluating communication in couples, may be a good operationalization of communicative behavior but may not be a good measure of communication skills (Burleson & Denton, 1997). Burleson and Denton persuasively argued that communicative behavior may say as much about the intent or motivation of participants as about communication skills.

A second consideration is the dependent variable we adopt to evaluate whether communication skills are "good" or "bad," functional or dysfunctional. From a behavioral perspective, communication skills are hypothesized to affect overall evaluations of couple relationship satisfaction. Relationship distress is assumed to arise, at least in part, from deficits in communication skills (see review by Noller, 1993). Before reviewing literature on communication skills, we first examine the limitations of this benchmark construct.

The most widely used quantitative measures of relationship satisfaction are the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) and the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959). A feature of such measures is that they contain a mixture of differentially weighted items, ranging from reports of specific behaviors that occur in marriage to evaluative inferences regarding the marriage as a whole. An issue of direct relevance to an evaluation of the impact of communication skills on marital satisfaction is that the DAS and the MAT contain items tapping communication behavior and skills. For example, the MAT contains the question "When disagreements arise, they usually result in husband giving in/wife giving in/agreement by mutual give and take." Such a question probably taps some aspect of problem solving skills. Consequently, caution is needed in evaluating research on the association of communication skills and global measures of relationship satisfaction, because

conceptual overlap may lead to spurious statistical associations (Fincham, Beach, & Kemp-Fincham, 1997). Nevertheless, global measures such as the DAS and the MAT have utility in discriminating between distressed and nondistressed couples.

To measure communication behavior and skills, behaviorally oriented researchers have most commonly used direct observation. This typically consists of videotaping couples discussing problem issues for short periods (usually around 10 minutes) in a research setting (Weiss & Heyman, 1997). Trained coders then quantify the occurrence of behaviors assumed to constitute functional and dysfunctional communication.

Do videotaped problem solving discussions in artificial settings yield samples of typical communication behavior? Several studies show that couple communication varies according to contextual factors. Diary studies illustrate that stressful marital interactions occur more frequently in couples' homes on days of high general life stress and at times and places associated with multiple competing demands (Halford, Gravestock, Lowe, & Scheldt, 1992). Furthermore, the topics of marital disagreements often coincide with the activities in which partners are engaged at the time (Halford et al., 1992). Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Wethington (1989) found that arguments at work were related to marital conflict that evening. Finally, Cohan and Bradbury (1997) found that problem-solving behavior was not independent of life events that couples commonly reported, and so the impact of problem solving and stressful events on marital adjustment should not be studied in isolation. Couples undoubtedly bring some life stressors into the clinic setting, but we may be losing important information by studying communication skills outside the natural ecology of couple interaction (Fincham & Beach, 1999a).

Although some information on the couple-context interaction is lost, there is good evidence that structured clinic observations are representative of couple's typical interaction. For example, couples themselves report that interactions are reminiscent of their typical interactions (e.g., Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1989). Marital communication in the laboratory appears similar to marital interaction in the home (Kelly & Halford, 1995; Krokoff, Gottman, & Hass, 1989). Also, maritally satisfied and unsatisfied couples can be reliably distinguished on the basis of their behavior in structured laboratory interactions, suggesting that many aspects of interaction are not suppressed by laboratory conditions.

A second point of caution is that coding systems inevitably restrict the researcher's field of vision with respect to the complexities of couple interaction. When couples communicate, they show all manner of variability in verbal content, strategies to resolve problems, speed of interchange, posture, facial movements, and displays of emotion, to name just a few dimensions. Coding systems may be sensitive to some communication behaviors and skills but may not be sensitive to others.

Coding systems vary enormously in type of coding unit and unit complexity (Floyd, 1989). For example, the type of coding unit might involve time sampling (in which the unit is a fixed amount of time) or event sampling (in which the unit duration is variable and determined by some naturally occurring boundary, such as a statement or "thought" unit). Within coding units, the types of behaviors that are monitored vary in complexity. Some behaviors are precisely defined *a priori* and involve relatively little judgement (e.g., a smile), whereas others involve a high degree of judgment or abstraction by the observer (e.g., enmeshment).

The Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS-IV; Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995) is a well-validated example of a microanalytic system, in which coding units are small and monitored behaviors discrete. In the MICS-IV, every new behavior is coded,

including changes in speaker content, with both verbal and nonverbal behavior being used in the coder's decision making. The types of behaviors allocated to each partner include discrete behaviors, such as a disagreement or excuse, as well as behavioral constructs for which there is no single marker. An example of the latter is withdrawal, in which a gestalt of behaviors (e.g., no response to partner, turn off cues such as rolling eyes, closed-off body language, no eye contact) are used to judge if withdrawal is occurring.

Some popular microanalytic coding systems are relatively crude in their measurement of nonverbal behavior, and coding of verbal behavior tends to contain greater richness (more categories) than nonverbal behavior. For example, in the Marital Interaction Coding System, nonverbal behavior ratings are positive, neutral, and negative. These ratings are assigned on the basis of voice tone, facial expressions, and body posture. Crude ratings of this sort may miss important variability in "negative" behavior, such as whether a partner shows depressed or angry affect. Coding systems that permit a more fine-grained analysis of affect are available. For example, the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF; Gottman, McCoy, Coan, & Collier, 1996) can be used to code five negative affects (anger, disgust/contempt, sadness, fear, or whining) and four positive affects (affection/caring, humor, interest/curiosity, or joy/enthusiasm). Using the SPAFF, Gottman (1994) found that contemptuousness and vindictiveness have a more corrosive effect on relationship satisfaction than other forms of anger expression. These findings suggest that some forms of interactive behavior traditionally viewed as negative may have positive effects and that there is predictive utility in capturing qualitative distinctions in negative affect expression. At the same time, variability in the magnitude of such reversal effects indicates the need for research on interactive behavior in marriage to be better grounded theoretically (Fincham & Beach, 1999b), a point to which we return later.

At the opposite extreme, macrocoding systems have been developed and tested, including the Interactional Dimension Coding System (IDCS; Julien, Markman, Lindahl, Johnson, & van Widenfelt, 1987), and the Marital Interaction Coding System—Global (MICS-G; Weiss & Tolman, 1990). Macrocoding systems have large coding units (typically around 3 minutes), and coders make an overall Likert rating based on the frequency, intensity, and duration of a summary code. To take one of these as an example, the MICS-G has six summary categories: conflict, problem solving, validation, invalidation, facilitation, and withdrawal. The summary codes used in many macrocoding systems reflect those behaviors that have been found to covary with marital satisfaction using microcoding systems.

Several empirical and conceptual limitations regarding coding systems for couple communication have been raised. Not surprisingly, interobserver reliability for macrocodes is lower than for microcoding systems (Floyd, 1989). The high level of abstraction makes it unclear how coders make their ratings (Floyd, 1989; Weiss, 1989). At the conceptual level, marital theorists have argued that coding methods (both micro- and macrocoding systems) stray in several ways from a behavioral formulation of couple communication. Notably, Jacobson and Christensen (1996) argued that behavioral observation is often based on a value judgement of what constitutes "good" and "bad" communication.

In summary, behavioral observation is an ideal forum to evaluate how communication behavior covaries with relationship satisfaction. The extent to which behavioral observation accurately taps communication skills remains to be evaluated, because distressed couples may not be motivated to use any communication skills they do have, or indeed, they may use communication skills to hurt or further distress

the partner. Commonly used coding systems place inherent limitations on the extent to which we can evaluate communication skills because the richness of data is determined by a priori categories, which are notably few in the case of nonverbal behavior. We now explore what observational research tells us about the communication behavior and skills of distressed and nondistressed couples.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS ON COUPLE COMMUNICATION

As a framework for exploring research findings, we adopt Burleson's (1992) typology of communication. In this typology, four processes are proposed: message production skills, message reception skills, interaction skills, and social perception skills. The advantage of this framework over other simpler dichotomies (e.g., verbal/nonverbal) is that the role of cognition is acknowledged, and it provides a good heuristic framework for describing where communication problems occur.

### Message Production

Message production skills relate to the generation, articulation, and monitoring of message content. We argue that cognitive processes are an integral part of message production. To behave in a manner that facilitates problem solving, intrapersonal skills such as reframing a problem, entertaining options for approaching a problem, managing negative affect, and editing destructive impulses are useful, if not necessary (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 1994). Prosocial responses to a partner's negative behavior do not come automatically, and often the responses partners actually make are far more constructive than the responses they initially considered (Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994).

There is some evidence that distressed couples have low confidence in their ability to effectively and mutually resolve problems. Adapting Bandura's (1977) notion of efficacy to the relationship context, Notarius and Vanzetti (1983) proposed the construct *relational efficacy*, which is defined as an individual's confidence about the ability of a couple to successfully resolve a range of relationship issues (Doherty, 1981; Notarius & Vanzetti, 1983). Relational efficacy may determine a couple's persistence in conflict resolution, the styles employed in conflict resolution, and their willingness to engage in discussion of marital problems (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Fincham, Bradbury, & Grych, 1990). Notarius and Vanzetti (1983) showed that confidence in resolving a variety of common areas of marital disagreement (e.g., such as showing affection, money, household chores, sex) were significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction and attributions of blame for unresolved discussions (Notarius & Vanzetti, 1983; Vanzetti, Notarius, & NeeSmith, 1992). Specifically, couples with high relational efficacy showed external and unstable causal attributions during marital conflict, whereas couples with low relational efficacy made internal stable and global attributions during marital conflict (Vanzetti et al., 1992).

Baucom and Epstein (1990) postulated that spouses form expectancies on the basis of previous interactive experience about how their partner will behave in a variety of situations. Two published studies have assessed the impact of expectancies on subsequent interactive behavior. Vanzetti et al. (1992) examined the frequencies of positive and negative partner behaviors predicted for each spouse using preinteraction checklists. Immediately before interaction, spouses completed a 12-item bipolar adjective checklist predicting how their partner would act during the discussion (e.g. "dominant," "supportive," "calm"). Couples completed two interactional tasks: one

on an issue that both partners viewed as a major ongoing problem (high-conflict task) and one on a relationship strength (low-conflict task). For both interactions, distressed couples expected fewer positive and more negative behaviors from their spouse than nondistressed couples. The consistency of results across high- and low-conflict tasks suggests that expectancies are not limited to difficult issues. Even interactions that are to focus on positive events are expected to result in higher negativity than positivity. Drawing on Weiss's (1980) sentiment override hypothesis, these researchers argued that individuals have a dominant sentiment regarding their marriage, which determines how a person cognitively processes relationship events and interactions. Related work has been conducted byForgas and colleagues in their investigation of the Affect Infusion Model (AIM; Forgas, 1995). In this context it has been found that affective state exerts a greater impact on novel judgements than on well-established or well-rehearsed judgements.

Fincham, Garnier, Gano-Phillips, and Osborne (1995) argued that cognitive constructs such as expectancies are not merely a measure of an overriding sentiment of marriage, but contribute unique variance to marital satisfaction over and above dominant sentiments of marriage. Before a discussion task, Fincham et al. (1995) asked spouses to rate the likelihood that a range of possible partner behaviors would occur. Partner behaviors included those that were positive (e.g., "My spouse will be supportive of me and my views of the problem") and negative (e.g., "My spouse will not listen fully to what I am saying"). Spouses also indicated the extent to which they were currently experiencing a range of positive and negative affect descriptors (e.g., happy, anxious, and angry). For both men and women, marital satisfaction was significantly correlated with positive and negative expectancies and with preinteraction affect. Moreover, the association between affect and marital satisfaction became nonsignificant when expected partner behavior was partialled out of the relationship. These findings suggest that outcome expectancies are not merely epiphenomenal, but mediate the association between marital satisfaction and affect.

Efficacy expectations also appear to mediate the longitudinal relation between attributions and marital satisfaction. Specifically, Fincham, Harold, and Gano-Phillips (2000) found that attributions predicted efficacy expectations 6 months later and that efficacy expectations, in turn, predicted marital satisfaction 1 year subsequent to their assessment. Importantly, the relationship found between causal attributions and marital satisfaction over the 18-month period of the study was fully mediated by efficacy expectations.

In terms of observed message production, it is perhaps not surprising that when distressed couples discuss relationship problems, they show more interruptions (Schaap, 1984), criticism and complaining (Fichter & Wright, 1983; Revensdorf, Hahlweg, Schindler, & Vogel, 1984), and negative solutions (e.g., "Let's just forget the whole thing"; Weiss & Tolman, 1990) than their nondistressed counterparts. When nondistressed couples do complain, complaints are focused on the partner's behavior, rather than on his or her personality (Weiss & Heyman, 1990). Also, relative to happy couples, distressed couples show less constructive problem-focused behavior. For example, distressed couples show fewer self-disclosures and positive suggestions (Birchler, Clopton, & Adams, 1984; Margolin, Burman, & John, 1989) and less pinpointing and verbalizing of problems in a noncritical way (Birchler et al., 1984; Margolin & Wampold, 1981). Distressed couples show less agreement (Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Revensdorf et al., 1984), acceptance (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996), empathy (Birchler et al., 1984), eye contact, and smiling. Gottman (1994) found that happy couples use meta-communication to correct unhelpful interactive behaviors.

For example, a spouse may respond to "Please, you're not letting me finish" with "Sorry... please finish what you were saying."

A central tenet of behavioral couples theory is that communication behaviors and skills not only predict current relationship satisfaction, but predict relationship satisfaction over time. There is strong evidence that negative communication behavior of the sort described above prospectively predicts long-term changes in marital satisfaction. In their meta-analysis of longitudinal studies of marriage, Karney and Bradbury (1995) calculated aggregate effect sizes for behavioral predictors of marital satisfaction and stability. Aggregate effect sizes are an estimation of the magnitude and direction of the effect of a variable based on the results of multiple studies, independent of sample size or statistical power of any single study (Schmidt, 1992). Using Pearson product-moment coefficients, Karney and Bradbury found that couples' negative behavior at Time 1 strongly predicted marital quality at Time 2 ( $r_s$  between  $-.30$  and  $-.42$  for husbands and wives, respectively). Behavioral positivity also predicted both marital satisfaction and stability. In particular, an aggregate effect size of  $r = .42$  for wives and  $r = .37$  for husbands was found in the prediction of marital satisfaction, and  $r = .33$  for wives and  $r = .46$  for husbands in the prediction of marital stability.

When one studies the interactions of happy couples, it is often not verbal content that stands out. Instead, what is remarkable is the pleasurable emotions couples appear to be experiencing—the smiles, laughs, affection, and warmth that happy couples show. Similarly, it is the agitation, tears, distress, anger, and coldness in distressed couples that are often immediately evident. Happy and distressed couples differ in their nonverbal behavior during interactions (e.g., Gottman, 1979; Levenson & Gottman, 1983; for a review, see Bradbury & Fincham, 1987). Birchler, Weiss, and Vincent (1975) found that distressed couples behaved with less humor, assent, smiling, and laughter than happy couples. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that relative to nondistressed couples, distressed couples show high levels of fear, anger, disgust, and sadness. Also characteristic of distressed couples is withdrawal (e.g., maintaining silence, looking away, leaving the room), and body postures that are stiff, closed, and turned away from the partner (see Weiss & Heyman, 1990, 1997, for reviews; Weiss & Tolman, 1990).

Nonverbal communication is more strongly related to relationship satisfaction than verbal communication (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Krokoff, 1987; Smith, Vivian, & O'Leary, 1990). When couples are instructed to act as happy couples, independent observers can still reliably discern happy from unhappy couples on the basis of nonverbal behavior (Vincent, Friedman, Nugent, & Messerly, 1979). As previously suggested, these findings are at odds with the crude dimensions commonly used to code couple communication patterns, and we look forward to more research using coding systems that provide a richer description of affective behavior in couples. That distressed couples are less able to "turn off" negative behavior suggests that negative nonverbal behavior may be much more difficult to shift in therapy than verbal behavior.

To describe functional and dysfunctional communication as separate variables is to omit the possibility that each one may moderate the other. Couples with the same level of negativity may differ vastly in marital satisfaction if there are differences in positive experiences (Fincham et al., 1997). This makes intuitive sense and is supported by several studies. There is good evidence that ratios of positive to negative behavior vary across happy and unhappy couples. For example, Birchler et al. (1975) found that the ratio of positive to negative behavior was about 30 for nondistressed couples

and around 4 for distressed couples. Howard and Dawes (1976) found that the rate of sexual intercourse relative to arguments predicated marital satisfaction but that the rate of either alone did not predict satisfaction. Research on the importance of ratios of positive to negative behavior has at least two important implications for communication in couples. First, such findings suggest that there is not an absolute level of positivity or negativity that makes for functional marital communication. Second, the frequency of positive behavior needs to greatly outweigh negative behavior to ensure a happy relationship.

In summary, observational research is consistent with the possibility that distressed couples have poor message production skills. Notably, distressed couples have difficulties with pinpointing and describing problems, generating positive solutions, and managing negative affect.

## **Message Reception**

Message reception relates to attending to and the comprehension, interpretation, and storage of the messages of others (Burleson & Denton, 1997). The most extensively investigated cognitions studied in marriage are the attributions spouses make for marital events. A large number of studies have shown that distressed spouses, relative to nondistressed couples, make maladaptive causal attributions that accentuate the impact of negative marital events and minimize the impact of positive events (see Fincham, *in press*, for a review). For example, a distressed spouse may attribute his or her partner's failure to complete a chore to a stable and global factor located in the partner (e.g., laziness), whereas a nondistressed partner may attribute such behavior to an unstable, specific and external factor (e.g., an unusual work demand). Also, "attribution style" or variability in attributions has been linked to marital quality. Less variable responses have been associated with marital distress (Baucom, Sayers, & Duhe, 1989), although attempts to replicate this finding have only been partially successful (Horneffer & Fincham, 1995). Finally, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) found that attributions, but not unrealistic beliefs, predicted marital satisfaction 12 months later. This result has been replicated and is independent of spousal depression (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993) and marital violence (Fincham, Bradbury, Arias, Byrne, & Karney, 1997).

## **Interaction Skills**

Interaction skills relate to smooth and mutual transferal of information (Burleson & Denton, 1997). Often described as the "signature" communication process in distressed couples, distressed couples show a greater likelihood of negative behavior by one partner (e.g., criticism) being followed by a negative response (e.g., criticism, denial of responsibility, or interruption) by the spouse (Gottman, 1994; Margolin & Wampold, 1981). Gottman (1994) interpreted this phenomenon as a problem of being "locked in" to a destructive pattern of engagement, from which maritally distressed couples, unlike happy couples, are unable to exit.

Negative reciprocity has been shown to have a negative impact on marital satisfaction over time. Julien, Markman, and Lindahl (1989) examined the premarital interactions of 59 couples, rating their interactions for positive and negative escalation and correlating these ratings with relationship satisfaction 18, 36, and 48 months later. Higher levels of negative escalation at Time 1 covaried with lower levels of

satisfaction concurrently ( $r = -.42$ ) and at later time points ( $r = -.23, -.30$ , and  $-.30$  respectively), although the correlations are notably modest.

In addition to negative reciprocity, positive reciprocity (an increased likelihood of positive responses when a partner behaves positively) has been reported to be associated with decreases in marital satisfaction (Filsinger & Thoma, 1988). Post hoc analyses of those who stayed married and those who separated 60 months later revealed that higher levels of positive reciprocity at the initial assessment were more characteristic of the relationships that had ended by 60 months than those who stayed together. Filsinger and Thoma noted that this latter finding was difficult to interpret because  $z$  scores corresponding to this sequence were not above chance levels, and others have criticized this study on the basis that change scores, rather than multiple-regression procedures, were used (Woody & Costanzo, 1990). The finding that positive reciprocity predicts marital instability may seem counterintuitive; however, consistent with the interpretations of Weiss and Heyman (1997) and Gottman (1994), these results suggest that distressed couples are locked into sequences of behavior. In distressed couples, positive responses appear functionally dependent on positive behaviors occurring, rather than occurring at chance rates (i.e., not dependent on partners' behavior).

A second key interactional process commonly observed in distressed couples is that one spouse pressures the other with demands, complaints, and criticisms, whereas the partner withdraws with defensiveness and passive inaction. This interaction pattern is commonly referred to as the demand-withdraw pattern (Christensen, 1987, 1988). Building on a series of early studies on self-reported demand-withdraw patterns (Christensen, 1987, 1988; Christensen & Shenk, 1991), Christensen and Heavey (1990) videotaped interactions of families discussing a topic relating to parenting behavior. It was found that frequency of demands by the female partner and withdrawal by the male partner were negatively related to marital satisfaction.

That female-demand and male-withdrawal behaviors are associated with low marital satisfaction is consistent with several other studies of gender differences in interactive behavior. In particular, women display more negative affect and behavior than do men (Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Notarius & Johnson, 1982; Schaap, 1982), and male partners make more statements suggestive of withdrawal, such as not responding and making irrelevant comments (Schaap, 1982; Schaap, Buunk, & Kerkstra, 1988). In distressed couples, women request more changes in their partner than vice versa and also report wanting higher degrees of change than men (Margolin, Talovic, & Weinstein, 1983).

Roberts and Krookoff (1990) investigated demand-withdraw processes using time-series analysis to assess the temporal relationship of withdrawal and hostility during conflict. They found that among distressed couples, husbands' withdrawal was predictive of their wives becoming hostile, but no such relationship was found among happy couples. A pattern of male withdrawal followed by female expression of hostility accounted for 20% of the variance in marital satisfaction above that accounted for by overall affective tone.

Marital theorists have speculated that men find conflict intrinsically more distressing than women, and this is why men are likely to withdraw from conflictual discussions (Gottman, 1994). This view has been criticized on the grounds that who demands and who withdraws may vary according to which partner desires change (Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993). In addition, women appear to be more reactive to conflict with a romantic partner than men across a number of physiological indices

(Kiecolt-Glazer et al., 1996). Female partners also have greater investment in changing the marital relationship than male partners and so will be more likely to demand than their partners.

To clarify this issue, Heavey, Christensen, and Malamuth (1995) explored how demand-withdraw patterns vary according to which partner's problem issue was discussed. When discussing the husband's issue, there were no systematic differences in the roles taken by each spouse. When discussing the wife's issue, however, women were much more likely to be demanding and men more likely to be withdrawing than the reverse. Similarly, Klinetob and Smith (1996) found that demand-withdraw patterns switch polarity when the topics chosen for discussion clearly focus on an issue of change for each partner. Both studies indicate that the tendency to withdraw is greater for both men and women when it is "the partner's issue" rather than one's own that is under discussion. Consistent with Burleson and Denton's (1997) argument, these findings suggest that demand-withdraw behavior is heavily influenced by motivation for change and may be less a manifestation of communication skills deficits.

Beyond the realm of observed behavior, there are patterns of affective and physiological responses that impact on future relationship satisfaction and stability. Levenson and Gottman's (1983) followed a cohort of young married couples over 3 years (Levenson & Gottman, 1985), taking measures of online affect and physiological arousal during marital interactions. Four physiological measures were taken for each subject, and a measure of interspousal reciprocity was calculated (termed *physiological linkage*). The term physiological linkage was defined as the probability that changes in physiological responses in one spouse would be followed by similar changes in the partner (while taking into account autocorrelation). A central finding was that for problem discussions, there was a significant negative correlation between an average measure of physiological linkage (using all four physiological measures) and marital satisfaction. The stronger the correlation of physiological arousal between partners when discussing a problem, the greater their marital distress. Notably, this average measure of physiological linkage explained 60% of the variance in current marital satisfaction. Also, negative affect reciprocity explained 16% of variance in relationship satisfaction change scores over that explained using physiological indicators of arousal. Building on these findings, Gottman and colleagues used this as further evidence that distressed couples are enmeshed in a negative cycle. Presumably, partners detect changes in the affective and physiological experience of the partner via their partner's behavior (either verbal or nonverbal), and respond similarly. More recent efforts to examine physiological linkage have either found the opposite effect or failed to replicate the original effect, however. Thomsen and Gilbert (1998), for example, found greater synchrony in physiological systems among maritally satisfied couples than maritally dissatisfied couples. Likewise, a subsequent study in the same lab failed to replicate the effect (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

## Spousal Perception

Social perception relates to what one attends to or the impressions one forms of another. It is well established that distressed spouses perceive their partner's behavior and relationship events differently from each other. Couples in distressed relationships show low agreement in their reports of relationship events (Christensen & Nies, 1980; Elwood & Jacobson, 1982), and even with extensive training agreement rates remain well below conventional standards for reliable observation (Elwood & Jacobson, 1988). Marital theorists propose that low interspousal agreement may be

more a function of various cognitive filters and biases that modify memories of marital events and less a function of actual interactional behavior (Floyd & Markman, 1983). Also, distressed spouses have more negative perceptions of their spouse's behavior than do objective observers (Christensen, Sullaway, & King, 1983).

Positive biases may contribute to the implementation of functional interaction skills and high relationship satisfaction. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) investigated the extent to which idealized spousal qualities (e.g., kindness, affection, openness, patience, understanding, responsiveness, tolerance, and acceptance) were characteristic of happy dating and married couples. Beliefs about the partner were compared with the partner's beliefs about himself or herself. Happily married individuals were found to view their partner in a more positive light than their partner viewed themselves, and individuals were happier in their relationships when they idealized their partner and their partner idealized them. Studies have consistently shown that estimates of perceived reciprocity based on one spouse's report are greater than those of actual reciprocity based on both partners' separate reports (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993). These sorts of biases may be functional in that they maintain high marital quality by increasing the likelihood of consistent behaviors that confirm partner perceptions (Kelly & Fincham, 1998).

## Integration

Most observational research has focused on how distressed and nondistressed couples discuss problem issues. In terms of message production, distressed couples show expectations of negative outcomes and low relational efficacy. These intrapersonal characteristics may indicate deficits in the skills of reframing problems positively and editing impulses to behave in ways consistent with negative expectancies and low self-efficacy. Second, distressed couples behave in ways that are consistent with poor skills in problem description, active listening, and generating constructive solutions. Third, they show high frequencies of behaviors that impede effective problem solving, such as cross-complaining and criticisms and nonverbal expressions of anger, distress, and depression. Fourth, distressed couples may be deficient in exiting cycles of negative affect and managing physiological arousal during problem solving. Finally, distressed spouses selectively attend to negative behavior and have a dysfunctional attributional style, a finding that holds after accounting for plausible third variables.

Do these findings tell us much about the nature of communication skills in distressed couples? We would be better able to answer this question if we could evaluate the motivation of participants to resolve the problem being discussed. As previously reviewed, it is possible that distressed couples may have "good" communication skills but may be unmotivated to use them, or indeed, they may use good communication skills in ways to upset or hurt the partner.

Burleson and Denton (1997) explored the association of communication skills and couple relationship satisfaction using a variation on the standard interactional task. They assessed communication effectiveness, perceptual accuracy, and predictive accuracy using the communication box methodology (e.g., Denton & Widmer, 1994). This method involves partners' taking turns talking, with one partner beginning first and then rating how he or she intended the partner to feel about what had just been said (actual intent) and how he or she predicted the partner would feel about what had just been said (predicted intent). The other partner then rates how he or she felt about what the first partner had just said (actual impact) and then rate how he or she guessed

the first partner wanted him or her to feel about what had been said (perceived intent). Predictive accuracy was calculated using the difference between predicted impact and actual impact scores. Decoding ability was calculated using differences between perceived intent and the spouses' actual intent score. Communication effectiveness was calculated using the difference between actual intent and the spouse's actual impact score. Thus, low scores were indicative of effective communication.

Burleson and Denton (1997) found a significant association between the three communication skills and relationship satisfaction for nondistressed couples. For distressed couples, however, there were some positive and some negative associations of communication skills and satisfaction. Notably, skills in predictive intent in distressed husbands were negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest that effective communication skills may sometimes amplify rather than diminish distress for maritally discordant partners.

## NEW CONSTRUCTS IN COUPLE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Although it is evident that most research on couple communication has focused on how couples handle divisive issues, effect sizes for the association between problem-solving behavior and marital satisfaction are modest (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). We now turn to some new challenges in describing the communication patterns that show promise in accounting for added variability in global evaluations of couple relationship satisfaction.

### Spousal Support

It is notable that what is known about the communication skills of couples is mostly based on research into problem-solving behavior. Indeed, four categories of marital communication have been defined on the basis of their problem-solving function (Sayers, Baucom, Sher, Weiss, & Heyman, 1991). The *problem focused* and *avoidance* categories reflect spouses' attempts to address or not to address the problem at hand, whereas the *facilitative* and *nonconstructive* categories represent spouse behaviors that are conducive (cooperative) or harmful (competitive) to any discussion or problem-solving attempt. This limits our definition of what constitutes functional communication. There are many other aspects of communication that may be equally important. For example, the degree to which spouses support each other or cope with distress is not adequately reflected in such categorizations.

In the last decade, research attention has turned to the ways in which couples deal with problems and distress experienced by one partner. The partner's skill in providing support is a fruitful expansion of our conception of couple communication because the partner is the most common person turned to in times of stress (Beach et al., 1993; Cutrona, 1996), and the provision of support has a beneficial impact on physical and mental health outcomes (Coyne & Downey, 1991). Cross-sectional research using self-report measures indicates that spousal support is correlated with marital satisfaction (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Cutrona & Suhr, 1994). Interestingly, perceptions of spousal support within marriage are more strongly related to the general well-being of wives than husbands (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Julien & Markman, 1991). Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) argued that the topography of behaviors perceived as supportive probably varies according to gender (see also Culp & Beach, 1998). Women may value emotionally intimate forms of support (e.g., talking, receiving affection) more than men.

Systems for coding spousal support have recently emerged. In the Social Support Interaction Coding System (SSICS; Pasch, Bradbury, & Sullivan, 1997), the coding units are speaking turn for the helper and helpee. Helper support behavior is coded as positive instrumental (e.g., specific suggestions, helpful advice, specific questions), positive emotional (e.g., reassurances, consoling, conveys love), or negative (criticizes, expresses negative affect). The behavioral responses of the helpee are also coded as positive (e.g., expresses feelings related to the problem) or negative (e.g., demands help, blames or accuses the partner). The SSICS is useful in determining how support behaviors vary according to gender and how important they are in predicting changes in marital satisfaction.

Pasch and Bradbury (1998) showed that spousal support behavior (coded using the SSICS) predicts changes in marital satisfaction among newlyweds over a 2-year period. For example, helper support behavior (i.e., providing emotional and instrumental support during discussion of personal, non-maritally related stressors) and negative affect during problem solving both predicted marital satisfaction independently. Also, wives' support solicitation and provision behaviors predicted marital outcomes 2 years later, independent of negative behaviors during marital problem-solving discussions. Spousal support provision and solicitation are unique aspects of couple communication and may constitute skills that determine relationship satisfaction over time.

## Acceptance

A common feature of distressed couples' interactions is a focus on changing the partner's behavior. Jacobson (1992) defined acceptance in the therapeutic setting as a letting go of the struggle to change the partner—and in some cases even embracing those aspects of a partner that have been precipitants of conflict (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996). Anecdotally, therapists report frequently encountering "problem behaviors" that were previously accepted or even seen as positive. For example, an attentive partner may initially have been seen as romantic and committed, but later as possessive or smothering.

Although the skills a couple acquires to relieve relationship distress may be quite different from those characteristic of happy couples generally (Kelly & Fincham, 1999), therapy outcome literature is consistent with the notion that acceptance is a communication skill associated with relationship satisfaction. Integrative Couples Therapy, which incorporates interventions to increase acceptance, appears to be associated with lower separation and divorce rates than traditional Behavioral Couples Therapy (Lawrence, Eldridge, Christensen, & Jacobson, 1999; Phelps & Jacobson, 1998).

Further information about the role of acceptance in enhancing relationship satisfaction is obtained from the treatment outcome literature on Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). EFT is designed to modify distressed couples' constricted interaction patterns and emotional responses and to foster a secure emotional bond (Johnson, 1996). The effectiveness of EFT is established (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999). A key therapeutic task of EFT is to promote acceptance of partner's emotional experience of the relationship and responses by encouraging "soft" disclosures (i.e., expressions of vulnerability and requests for comfort and connection). Although there are undoubtedly many other therapeutic changes during the course of EFT that could account for improved relationship satisfaction, there is some evidence that acquiring acceptance skills is an

agent of improvement in relationship satisfaction. Johnson et al. (1999) found that couples who showed large increases in DAS scores showed more "soft" disclosures in session than couples who showed little change on the DAS.

Current coding systems are inadequate for capturing acceptance, at least in terms of Jacobson's (1992) definition. In some microcoding systems, there are some approximations. For example, in the Brief Interaction Coding System (Osgarby & Halford, 1995), there is an acceptance microcode, but acceptance is operationalized in this coding system as behaviors that show that the partner is trying to relate to his or her partner in an empathic, understanding, and validating way. This definition is at odds with Jacobson's focus on responses to negative aspects of the partner.

Jacobson and Christensen (1996) provided some behaviorally based indicators of acceptance. For example, acceptance may be operationalized as the use of language in which partners talk about their own experiences rather than describing what the partner did, thinks, or feels, and the use of "soft" disclosures rather than "hard" disclosures (which often involve anger and conveyance of power and control). A third skill associated with acceptance is being able to conduct an intellectual analysis of the problem, where the problem is described as an "it," rather than as a "you do" or "I am."

## **Self-Regulation**

A common feature of distressed couples' interactions is a rigid and inflexible response process (see Research Findings on Couple Communication). In other words, cycles of conflict are predictable, and these cycles are difficult for distressed couples to exit. Karoly (1993) defined self-regulation as those processes, internal and or transactional, that enable an individual to guide his or her own goal-directed activities over time and across changing circumstances. Regulation implies modulation of thought, affect, behavior, or attention via deliberate or automated use of specific mechanisms and supportive meta-skills. Halford, Sanders, and Behrens (1994) emphasized that self-regulation implies a dynamic reciprocal interchange between internal and external determinants of behavior. Self-regulation therefore describes a meta-skill, a process of modulating thoughts, feelings, and behavior in response to a problem.

At a theoretical level, the construct of self-regulation fits well with an idiographic approach to understanding couple interactions. The definition emphasizes a flexible and dynamic response style, rather than a prescribed template of what constitutes functional and dysfunctional communication (as is the case with commonly used coding systems; see Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Couple Communication Skills). Therefore, what is functional in one setting may not be functional in another. For example, problem solving might work in some stress-related contexts but not in others, for which an affectionate and active listening approach might work. The concept of response modulation and flexibility is not new in psychology (e.g., the neo-Freudian, Karen Horney, 1942, argued that individual maladjustment was characterized by inflexible use of interpersonal responses), and it is surprising that this communication meta-skill has not been researched empirically in marriage.

## **Power**

In the marriage literature, clinicians and theorists (Minuchin, 1974; Whisman & Jacobson, 1990) have long discussed the role of power; however this construct has often been poorly defined, with the possible exception of behavioral marital research. Dysfunctional imbalances of power within a marital relationship are most often operationalized as nonegalitarian decision making (e.g., Gray-Little & Burks, 1983;

Szinovacz, 1981), conversational dominance (e.g., Gray-Little, 1982; Whisman & Jacobson, 1990), and low conversational support (Kollock, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1985; Whisman & Jacobson, 1990). There is good evidence that power imbalances are associated with relationship dissatisfaction. Relationship distress is associated with distorted, asymmetrical, or denied power structures, whereas relationship satisfaction is associated with symmetrical and clear power structures (Markman & Notarius, 1987; Minuchin, 1974; Whisman & Jacobson, 1990).

Dysfunctional power imbalances are a good example of where well-honed communication skills may or may not be implemented with selfish or malevolent intent. For example, clear and articulate expressive skills could be used to impose solutions that benefit the self at the expense of the partner. Also, although a partner may have very advanced communication skills, he or she may choose to behave negatively to hurt the partner. Finally, withholding potential solutions to problems may be of strategic advantage to a spouse. Consistent with these possibilities, Heavey et al. (1995) and Jacobson (1989) suggested that conversational withdrawal is a response used by some maritally distressed men to maintain a relationship power structure that they have low investment in changing. Also, Burleson and Denton (1997) found that maritally distressed men had good skills in predicting how their messages would affect their partners, and these authors suggested that such skills may be used to cause pain or distress. Clearly, more explicit tests of the relationship between communication skills, intent, and impact are needed. Both egalitarian and asymmetrical power structures may be maintained by the strategic use, nonuse, or misuse of well-honed communication skills.

## Connecting

When happy couples reminisce about positive events, a sense of connectedness is often evident. For example, when recalling a skiing trip, partners may share memories about the exhilaration of conquering a tough slope, then move on to laugh about their falls, their time in the pub afterward, and the interesting people they met. There is a sense of mirrored positive affect and elaboration on the content each person contributes. At the other extreme, it is sad to watch the communication of unhappy couples when they recall positive events. There is a poverty of information, a disjunction or asynchrony of positive affect, and little in the way of expansion in relaying associated experiences.

Some research confirms such clinical observations. When couples talk about positive events in their relationship, there are differences between distressed and nondistressed couples. Osgarby and Halford (2000) found that highly satisfied couples showed higher rates of positive behavior and affect arousal than distressed couples during positive reminiscence interactions. Highly satisfied couples also showed higher levels of conversational meshing than unhappy couples. That is, they showed a series of positive communication behaviors while building a conjoint story surrounding a relationship memory.

## Integration

The review so far has highlighted a range of behavioral constructs that show promise in furthering our understanding of what types of communication patterns and skills may predict marital quality. These constructs include spousal support, self-regulation, power, acceptance, and connecting. Operationalizations of some of these measures are well developed. For example, measures of perceived partner support

and behavioral coding systems for support are well validated (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Pasch & Bradbury, 1997). Operationalizations of other constructs, such as self-regulation, acceptance, and connecting are in the early stages of development. Obtaining valid and reliable measures of these new constructs will be a challenge because they are largely contextually determined. That is, incidences of self-regulation, acceptance, and connecting by a spouse are, at least in part, determined by the partner's behavior. As a simple example, acceptance by one partner may be dependent on the partner's explication of his or her own negative characteristics. From a behavioral perspective, implementing a dyadic unit of analysis redresses Jacobson's (1992) criticisms of conventional coding methods. He argued that coding behavior at the individual unit of analysis using a priori determined categories is inconsistent with a functional view of communication behavior.

## ACCOUNTING FOR VARIABILITY IN COUPLE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

In this section, we provide an overview of key factors that influence communication skills in couples. To provide a structure for our analysis, we use Karney and Bradbury's (1995) vulnerability–stress–adaptation (VSA) model of marriage. The VSA model draws together developmental theories of marital satisfaction and stability, including those that emphasize early relationship history and stable individual characteristics (e.g., attachment theory; Bowlby, 1969), and the impact of stressful events external to the couple (e.g., crisis theory; Hill, 1949; McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). Enduring vulnerabilities and stressful events are hypothesized to predict adaptive processes or the way in which couples contend with relationship distress and disagreement.

### Enduring Vulnerabilities

A recent study that illustrates the role of stable individual factors in governing relationship quality is a four-wave longitudinal study spanning 12 years in which marital satisfaction across serial marriages was examined (Johnson & Booth, 1998). These authors found that for those who remarried over this time, satisfaction with the first marriage predicted marital satisfaction in subsequent marriages, suggesting that individual factors were "carried over" from one relationship to the next. Although this study did not examine what these individual factors were, the results pointed to the need to extend our conception to enduring individual factors as determinants of couple communication.

Although many studies have explored the association of enduring vulnerabilities (e.g., education, conflict in the family of origin) and marital satisfaction, relatively little research has explored the association of enduring vulnerabilities and communication in couples. For discrete predictors, available research points to a significant association. For example, spouses' reports of their family of origin experience is associated with the number of specific complaints about their own marriage (Overall, Henry, & Woodward, 1974). Halford, Sanders, and Behrens (2000) found a significant association between male exposure to violence in the family of origin and nonverbal negative affect and behavioral negativity in engaged couples' conflict management. These studies are consistent with the notion that individuals bring experiences into their marital relationship that can affect the way couples communicate.

Personality research also has contributed to our understanding of the determinants of couple communication and relationship satisfaction. Of the "Big Five" personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, impulsivity, agreeableness, and conscientiousness;

McCrae, Costa, & Busch, 1986), neuroticism is the personality trait most strongly associated with marital stability (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Watson & Clark, 1984). Neuroticism has been variously defined as primarily physiological overreactivity to stressful environmental stimuli (Eysenck, 1967), and the propensity to experience negative affect (Watson & Clark, 1984). The longitudinal association of neuroticism and marital satisfaction is significant (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Watson & Clark, 1984), but the overall effect sizes are small ( $r = -.19$  for women and  $r = -.13$  for men; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Only one study has been published on the association of neuroticism and communication. Karney and Bradbury (1997) found that neuroticism and marital interaction were not correlated within or between couples, which is inconsistent with the hypothesis that neuroticism and marital interaction mediate each other in their effects on marital satisfaction.

## Stressful Events

That stressful events occur at some point over a marital career is a truism. Because marital communication has been largely researched without taking contextual factors such as stressful events into account, it may be the case that changes in marital satisfaction are more a function of stress than communication problems (Cohan & Bradbury, 1997). A growing body of research links stressful events with marital satisfaction. Among married men, stressful life events in the previous month have a greater negative impact in those that are distressed compared with those who are happily married (Whiffen & Gotlib, 1989). Broman, Riba, and Trahan (1996) found that people who had experienced traumatic events such as the death of a child, a life-threatening illness, and physical attack (unspecified perpetrator) reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Because these later studies are retrospective and cross-sectional, the causal directions linking stressful events and marital satisfaction are unclear. Also, because these studies did not measure communication, it is unclear what role communication might have in reducing the impact of stressful events on marriage.

Cohan and Bradbury (1997) proposed that communication may influence the relationship between stressful events and marital satisfaction in three ways. First, they propose that communication may buffer, or moderate, the effect of stressful events on marital satisfaction. Second, they proposed that communication may lead to enhanced marital satisfaction when stressful events occur (termed the *personal growth model of stress*). Third, they proposed that communication may mediate the association of stressful events and marital satisfaction. That is, stressful events predict communication, and communication predicts marital satisfaction. Two studies inform us of how stressful events, communication, and marital satisfaction are related. In a longitudinal study, Cohan and Bradbury (1997) administered checklists of stressful events, behavioral measures of verbal and nonverbal behavior during problem solving, and measures of marital satisfaction at two time-points 18 months apart. They found evidence that problem solving moderates the effect of life events. They also found evidence of a personal growth effect; when wives expressed higher proportions of anger, reports of stressful events predicted increased marital satisfaction, suggesting that wives' anger was beneficial for personal and marital adjustment in the context of stressful life events. Perhaps anger expression (without contempt or whining) by the female partner constitutes a functional communication behavior that signals high distress and engages the male partner in support or problem solving behaviors.

## Integration

Consistent with the VSA model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), disparate studies have linked stable historical factors, stressful events, and relationship satisfaction. Notably, however, research on the association of enduring vulnerabilities and communication is burgeoning, with available research consistent with the hypothesis that these factors play a significant, although modest, role in determining the quality of couple communication. Preliminary support for higher order hypotheses (involving mediating and moderating effects) is beginning to appear. For example, problem solving moderates the effect of life events on marital satisfaction (Cohan & Bradbury, 1997). This confirms the need to explore couple communication from within a historical and contextual framework.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION AND ALLEVIATION OF MARITAL DISTRESS

Strategies for changing communication patterns have long been an integral part of the most widely researched form of couple therapy, behavioral couple therapy. In behavioral couple therapy, a primary aim has been to increase marital satisfaction by improving communication skills, such as active listening skills, expressive skills, and editing (i.e., avoiding provocative ways of expressing what one thinks or feels; Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, & Markman, 1976; Guerney, 1977). We begin this section by reviewing the efficacy of behaviorally oriented, communication-focused interventions and draw some tentative conclusions about the role of communication skills improvement on relationship satisfaction. Care is needed here because null findings might mean that changing communication doesn't help or that there are much better ways of delivering such interventions. When effects are evident, it is difficult to conclude that changes in communication skills are the mechanism of change. Many other factors (such as self-selection effects into experimental groups, intervention expectancies) may also account for intervention effects.

Communication skills training has typically been based on the active listening model (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998), the listener-speaker exchange (e.g. Notarius & Markman, 1993), and problem-solving training (e.g., Baucom & Epstein, 1990). In turn, these approaches have evolved from client-centered therapy (Guerney, 1977). For example, Jacobson and Gurman (1995) targeted marital communication by training couples in the use of "I" statement, turn taking, reflecting and clarifying the partner's requests, and expressing problems noncritically. Baucom and Epstein (1990) defined effective problem-solving training as specifying the problem clearly in behavioral terms, generating alternative solutions, agreeing on a solution, and implementing the solution.

Are we training couples in communication methods that are typical of happy couples? For example, when discussing a problem, do happy couples say things such as, the following: "I feel really hurt when you don't ask me about my day." "I wasn't aware of that . . . do you want to sit down and talk about it?" "Tell me what's been going on for you." "So you have been feeling quite alone and unsupported. Have I received that message OK?" Such an interaction may be optimal yet unusual, even for couples who are highly satisfied with their relationship. Absolute frequencies of some of these behaviors are small in both distressed and nondistressed couples (Kelly, Halford, & Young, in press); even though in some cases there were significant differences). Using

interval time sampling and an adaptation of the Interaction Coding System (Osgarby & Halford, 1995), only 12% of intervals during problem solving by happy couples included self-disclosures (compared with 10% in distressed couples), and 8% of intervals contained positive suggestions (compared with 3% in distressed couples). Also, Johnson and Talitman (1997) found that self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction were unrelated in a sample of couples wishing to improve their relationship, and levels of self-disclosure were unrelated to therapist ratings of improvement.

Just because most happy couples may not use these sorts of communication skills doesn't mean that such communication skills training may not be helpful. During driving lessons, the first author was taught how to indicate the intention to change lanes for several seconds and to check both mirrors twice before proceeding carefully and slowly to the adjacent lane. Although he considers himself a competent and worthy driver (perhaps an irrational belief), these behaviors are no longer prominent in his driving behavior. Likewise, although real couples don't fit well into our normative communication models particularly, such interventions may ensure the maximization of positive reinforcement and the minimized likelihood of punishment. This may be critical in the early days of couple therapy, when entrenched conflict and minimal positivity may be likely.

Most research on the efficacy of couple interventions has been confined to two intervention options: extended therapy for distressed couples and brief prevention programs. Traditionally, behavioral couples therapy (BCT) has focused on behavior exchange (contracting to increase positive events), communication skills training, negative affect management, and problem-solving training (e.g., Hahlweg & Markman, 1988; Jacobson & Addis, 1993). Shadish, Ragsdale, Glaser, and Montgomery (1995) assessed the overall effect size for behavioral couple therapy across 27 trials. They found that BCT was associated with an overall effect size of  $d = 0.71$  (which falls in the medium to large effect size range according to Cohen's conventions; Cohen, 1992). This implies that the average couple who received therapy was better off at the end of treatment than 76% of control couples. Moreover, the effect size for BCT was higher than the effect size for other forms of couple intervention. Shadish et al. (1995) found that the effect size for nonbehavioral treatments was  $d = .51$ , which is a medium effect size (Cohen, 1992). In Shadish et al.'s meta-analysis, however, only one study had a follow-up of more than 1 year.

The long-term effectiveness of BCT is modest. Jacobson and Addis (1993) reported that one third of couples who show improvements in BCT by the end of treatment have relapsed 1 to 2 years after therapy. In all, we can expect that around 50% of distressed couples will show significant change that generalizes across time. Although modest, we may be heartened by this result, given that in a handful of sessions behavioral couples therapists work to change communication problems acquired over a lifetime of learning. What may be more sobering is the finding that consumer satisfaction reports of marital therapy are the lowest across many types of psychotherapies (Gottman et al., 1998; Seligman, 1995). Perhaps distressed couples do not perceive their fundamental problems in terms of skills deficits, but rather view communication problems as symptomatic.

In an attempt to add to the efficacy of traditional BCT, there have been several theoretically driven modifications. Arising from research on the role cognition and emotion have in mediating behavioral responses, cognitive-behavioral couples therapy (CBCT) has been evaluated (e.g., Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Hahlweg & Markman, 1988; Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 1993). In addition to standard behavioral interventions, Baucom and Epstein focused on challenging the rationality, logic, and utility

of dysfunctional beliefs about marriage, the relationship and the partner, standards about marital conduct, selective attention processes, attributional processes, and expectancies about future marital events (Epstein, Baucom, & Daiuto, 1997). Although CBCT interventions are efficacious compared with no treatment, they don't have significantly higher efficacy than traditional BCT (Baucom & Lester, 1990; Halford et al., 1993). Cognitive and emotional factors may mediate the development of communication problems, but perhaps different processes occur in the rectification of these problems. For example, perhaps challenging these beliefs through Socratic dialogue is less effective than behavioral experiments, where sustained changes in behavior eventually erode dysfunctional cognitive and emotional content and process. Alternatively, traditional BCT interventions may already optimally address cognitive factors in creating the context necessary for therapy implementation. For example, couples need to adopt a view of their problems that emphasizes skill deficits.

It is also possible that in many cases, communication skills—that is, the ability to communicate effectively—are frequently present in distressed couples, but they are unmotivated to use these skills. Noller (1984) found that spouses in distressed relationships are unable to use the skills with their partners that they use with strangers. In this case, communication skills training may not be efficacious until underlying resistance to skills enhancement is addressed in therapy. As previously reviewed (see New Constructs in Couple Communication Skills), EFT (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985) is explicitly designed to uncover themes that are hypothesized to drive conflict before improving the manner in which these themes are expressed. The efficacy of EFT is established (Denton, Burleson, Clark, Rodriguez, & Hobbs, 2000), and there is evidence that communication skills training is most effective when delivered following a program of EFT (James, 1991).

Several studies of the effects of communication skills training on newlywed couples are now available (Dyer & Halford, 1998). Typically, communication skills interventions for newlywed couples are presented in different formats than in therapy. They normally involve between four and eight face-to-face group sessions of 2 to 3 hours' duration. The focus of these groups is typically communication and conflict management skills training, enhanced positivity of day-to-day exchanges, and the development of realistic and positive relationship cognitions.

Relative to no intervention or minimal interventions, newlywed couples show minimal or modest improvements in marital satisfaction in the short term (e.g., Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988; Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992). This may be because relationship satisfaction is high in these populations or because of ceiling effects in key dependent measures. For example, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) was designed to evaluate marital distress, rather than to discriminate different levels of happiness (Dyer & Halford, 1998). In the longer term, however, one prevention program enhances relationship satisfaction 2 and 5 years after its implementation (Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993). These effects were not replicated with a sample of high-risk couples (van Widenfelt, Hosman, Schaap, & van der Staak, 1996), however, and in Markman's PREP program, significant effects may be attributable to self-selection effects, given that only one third of couples offered the program chose to participate.

To hope that communication skills training has discernable long-term effects may be unrealistic. Do couples really remember and apply the lessons learned in communication skills training years later, when marriages are most likely to become distressed? There is an assumption that couples can generalize these skills not only across time, but also to contexts in which a host of intrapersonal and extrapersonal

factors may have evolved (or devolved). The available research on the impact of stressful events on marriage suggests that problem-solving and support skills interact with stressful events. If we are to adopt a developmental approach to marital quality, adaptation to stressful events (such as career change, financial pressures, having children) may be important. Such stressors may not be have been experienced by newlywed individuals. In the case of newlywed couples, communication skills training may be timely, but a special focus on adapting to specific stressors may be most effective when temporally associated with a stressor. For example, the transition to parenthood is a period associated with declines in marital satisfaction (Belsky, 1985; Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Belsky, Ward, & Rovine, 1986), so a program designed to increase relationship resilience may have maximal impact around the time of birth.

The behavioral research reviewed in the first section of this chapter alerts us to some important subtleties that may influence the direction of communication skills training. First, communication skills training may merely sharpen tools of conflict in couples where hurt, unresolved anger and malevolent intent are present. Second, divorcing communication skills from the context in which communication problems are occurring does not fit with the literature. To do this risks training couples to use skills outside of high-risk contexts, where communication skills may be most needed. Third, some skills that have been traditionally thought of as "good," such as problem solving and the use of humor, may have a detrimental effect on marital satisfaction under some circumstances. Similarly, some communication behaviors commonly considered as negative, such as particular types of anger expression, may be adaptive in some situations. What may be more important is to train couples in how to exercise flexibility in regulating their own behavioral responses. This requires a functional approach to couple interaction, rather than the application of a prescriptive set of skills. Finally, interventions designed specifically to foster support between partners are not a feature of behavioral couples interventions, despite evidence that support skills are empirically distinct from problem-solving skills, and support skills predict changes in marital satisfaction just as strongly as problem-solving skills (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

## OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have provided an overview of findings on the association of communication and marital satisfaction, highlighted new and promising behaviorally oriented constructs, explored basic and higher order hypotheses regarding the development of communication problems, and evaluated the role of communication skills training in the couple context. Several conclusions were drawn. Although there are certain behaviors and behavioral sequences that increase the likelihood of relationship problems, there is no simple formula for functional communication in couples. The link between communication and satisfaction is likely to vary according to contextual stressors, motivation to use communication skills, developmental transitions, gender, and the temporal period over which satisfaction is being predicted.

Relapse to marital distress is a big problem for couples undergoing communication skills and problem-solving training. A focus on extinguishing negatives seems necessary but insufficient for a large proportion of couples in therapy. Also, the limited effectiveness of communication skills training may be due to a failure to adequately address existential fears underlying relationship conflict. The technology to differentiate between communication skills and low motivation to implement skills is available (e.g., Burleson & Denton, 1997) but has been underutilized compared with the

standard observational paradigm which confounds these two variables. Nevertheless, observational research findings point to the value of addressing communication problems within the context of specific stressors, placing a greater emphasis on increasing the ratio of positive to negative behaviors rather than extinguishing negatives and on increasing support skills in couples. There is a clear need to develop reliable measures of acceptance, power, connecting, and self-regulation. We seem to have put the cart before the horse by designing interventions designed to promote or address these concepts without first establishing reliable and valid means of assessing them.

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CHAPTER

# 19

## PARENTING SKILLS AND SOCIAL-COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN CHILDHOOD

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The ways that children implement social and communication skills in peer-group interaction provide the foundation for successful later life adjustment (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Research findings suggest that a host of variables are involved (Hart, Olsen, Robinson, & Mandleco, 1997). These include family processes involving marital and sibling relationships, parenting (e.g., Dunn, 2002; Hart, Nelson, et al., 2000; Stafford & Bayer, 1993), biologically based genetic and temperament factors (e.g., Pike, 2002; Plomin & Rutter, 1998; Sanson, Hemphill, & Smart, 2002), and extrafamilial influences, including the peer group, schools, media, and culture (e.g., Hart, Yang, Nelson, Jin, & Nelson, 1998; Howes & James, 2002; Ladd, Buhs, & Troop, 2002; McDougall, Hymel, Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001).

The focus of this chapter is on parenting linkages to social and communicative skill outcomes in children during early and middle childhood. Our aims are three-fold. First, we conceptualize the nature of social and communicative skills that lend themselves to peer-group success across early and middle childhood. The practical significance of these skills for psychosocial adjustment and the consequences of low skill development are discussed. Second, parenting skills that can enhance or diminish the formation of child competencies are considered, as are the complex interplay between nature and nurture that results in individual differences among children. We take issue with recent arguments suggesting that parents matter little in children's development (Harris, 1998, 2000, 2002). Third, we overview intervention studies that are designed to enhance parenting skills and child competencies and that may result in subsequent changes in child social and communicative outcomes.

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## CHILD SOCIAL-COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Skilled social behavior is more likely to result in positive psychosocial outcomes (e.g., less loneliness, more acceptance by peers) and more meaningful relationships between individuals (see Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996; Rubin, Coplan, Nelson, & Lagace-Seguin, 1999; Sampter, this volume). Behavioral and communicative manifestations of *sociable behavior* include conforming and friendly, amicable behavior; emotional impulse control; leadership; assertiveness; prosocial orientations (i.e., helping, sharing, comforting); and person-centered communication (Burleson & Kunkel, 1996; Hart et al., 1997). Children's social competence has not always been defined in ways that explicitly specify the importance of communication abilities (Rose-Krasnor, 1997), however, consider often-cited definitions such as the following:

- the ability to accomplish interpersonal tasks . . . the ability to manipulate other's responses (Weinstein, 1969, p. 755)
- the attainment of relevant social goals in specified social contexts, using appropriate means and resulting in positive developmental outcomes (Ford, 1982, p. 323)
- the formulation and adoption of personal goals that are appropriate and adaptive to specific social situations and implementing effective behavioral strategies for achieving goals (Taylor & Asher, 1984, p. 57)

Definitions of social competence like these imply communicative competence (Dodge, 1985; Gresham, 1986; Odom & McConnell, 1992). The essence of social competence in relationships is communication skill, whether it be verbal or nonverbal in nature (e.g., Burgoon, 1994; Duck, 1989; Iverson & Goldin-Meadow, 1998).

### Social and Communicative Competence

Germane to many definitions of social competence is the implication that personal and relational goals can be achieved through interpersonal problem-solving strategies that involve communication skills. For example, Rubin and colleagues defined social competence as "the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations" (Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992, p. 285). This "encompasses skills and abilities relating to all aspects of interpersonal problem solving, from the self-regulation of emotions aroused in social interaction, to the negotiation of solutions in interpersonal conflicts" (Mills & Rubin, 1993, p. 98). Negotiation requires functional communication competence, which is "the ability to use communicative resources strategically to accomplish personal and social goals—to persuade, inform, console, appease, compromise, or the like" (Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995 p. 36).

Taken together, these definitions provide a foundation for behavioral and communicative indicators of social competence that are well supported by research. For example, socially skilled children are better able to discern the emotional states of others and are more capable of regulating their own emotions (e.g., Denham, von Salisch, Olthof, Kochanoff, & Caverly, 2002). They also tend to expect that sociable behavior will lead to instrumental gains and enhanced relations with peers in interpersonal conflict situations (Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1992; Hart, Ladd, & Burleson, 1990), and they communicate in socially contingent and relevant ways during social

interaction (e.g., Black & Logan, 1995; Guralnick, Conner, Hammond, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1996; Kemple, Speranza, & Hazen, 1992; Steinkamp, 1989).

The importance of communication skills in social interaction is well exemplified in recent research on school-age children with specific language impairments (SLI). Some children with SLI have been found to have difficulty entering ongoing conversations, collaborating, negotiating, and making joint decisions (Brinton & Fujiki, 2002). They are also prone to being anxious and wary in peer-group situations (Fujiki, Brinton, Morgan, & Hart, 1999). Although children with SLI are often accepted by peers, deficits in language abilities appear particularly detrimental to friendship formation and maintenance functions that are inherent in close relationships (Fujiki, Brinton, Hart, & Fitzgerald, 1999).

Unlike general acceptance by a group of peers, friendship requires reciprocity and feelings of perceived equality between children that are manifested in close, mutual, and voluntary dyadic bilateral relationships (cf. Hartup & Abecassis, 2002; Rubin, Coplan, et al., 1999). Friendships are built "upon a foundation of interpersonal skills" (Asher et al., 1996, p. 387), many of which are expressed through language. Accordingly, Fujiki, Brinton, Hart et al. (1999) speculated that many children with SLI may lack abilities in coordinating linguistic-formulation demands associated with expressing concern and affection, self-disclosing ideas and feelings, and resolving conflict. Deficiencies in this regard imply less "ability to use communicative resources strategically to accomplish personal and social goals" (Burleson, Delia, & Applegate 1995) "while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations" (Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992, p. 285).

## Social and Communicative Skill Deficiencies

Social competence has also been framed as a "judgment call" based on how an audience views an actor's behavioral repertoire (McFall, 1982). Deficiencies in social and communicative competence can be thought of in terms of *externalizing* and *internalizing* behaviors that are not positively perceived by others (Rubin, Stewart, & Chen, 1995). These, along with *sociability*, will serve as key constructs around which the remainder of our review is organized. Individual behavioral and communicative deficits reflected in internalizing and externalizing behavior have implications for how well children form close relationships with others, as well as for their abilities to appeal to group norms that serve as criteria for peer acceptance or rejection (Rubin et al., 1998).

**Externalizing Behavior.** Externalizing is a global category of child maladjustment that captures aggressive, angry, impulsive and disruptive, oppositional, and non-conforming behaviors (e.g., Campbell, 1995; Eisenberg et al., 1999; Hinshaw, 1997). Children who display externalizing behavior are more likely to communicate their desires verbally in a less skillful, noncontingent manner (e.g., Black & Logan, 1995; Kemple et al., 1992) and are prone to envision antisocial behaviors as a means for achieving desirable goals to the exclusion of relationship considerations during interpersonal conflicts (e.g., Chung & Asher, 1996; Crick & Werner, 1998; Dodge & Price, 1994; Hart et al., 1990; Murphy & Eisenberg, 1996).

Much of the research on externalizing disorders has focused on aggressive and disruptive behavior in the context of other antisocial behavior patterns that include noncompliance with adults, delinquency, substance abuse, and vandalism (Coie & Dodge, 1998). Because such behavior is typically viewed negatively by noncolluding

agemates, aggressive or disruptive enactment directed toward others in friendship or peer-group contexts generally leads to attenuated relationships and rejection by peers (e.g., Aboud & Mendelson, 1996; Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992; Hart, McGee, & Hernandez, 1993). There are exceptions to the pattern, however. When this type of negative behavior is conjoined with high levels of athleticism or physical attractiveness or with lower levels of shyness and higher academic competence, antisocial boys are often popular with peers (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000).

Recent research on externalizing behavior has focused on subtypes of aggression with the realization that different forms of aggression often co-occur in early and middle childhood (e.g., Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Hart, Nelson, et al., 2000). For example, *physical aggression* is conceptualized as hostile acts that harm others for intimidation purposes or instrumental gains by pushing, hitting, intimidating, or verbally threatening with physical harm (e.g., Crick, Werner, et al., 1999). *Social aggression* consists of verbal disparagements (e.g., teasing, mocking, making fun of, making sarcastic comments, name calling) and nonverbal hostilities such as disdainful facial expressions or body movements such as rolling one's eyes or tossing one's hair to convey contempt (Galen & Underwood, 1997). *Relational aggression* is another form of hostility that includes a class of exclusionary behaviors that harm others through intentional damage (or threat of damage) to relationships or social standing (e.g., Crick, Werner, et al., 1999; Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998). Children who display this pattern of aggression typically rely on verbal attacks (e.g., threatening not to invite another child to a birthday party unless the child does what is wanted, gossiping, rumor spreading) and nonverbal forms of aggression (e.g., walking away when angry or enacting the "silent treatment").

**Internalizing Problems.** Internalizing problems are often characterized by negative internal states that include sadness, depression, loneliness, embarrassment, anxiety, and fearfulness (e.g., Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Ialongo et al., 1996). There is some evidence to suggest that social anxiety, for example, is associated with children being less adept at enacting competent reciprocal negotiations in interpersonal conflicts with peers (Adalbjarnardottir, 1995), even though they may possess the underlying social-cognitive knowledge for how to do so (e.g., Rubin et al., 1998).

When extreme, these internal states play out in certain types of withdrawn peer-group behavior that are negatively viewed by others. For example, recent research suggests that childhood *reticence*, operationalized as the frequent production of on-looking and unoccupied behavior, reflects social fear and anxiety in both familiar and unfamiliar social contexts (e.g., Coplan, Rubin, Fox, Calkins, & Stewart, 1994; Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, 2002). This form of "being alone" appears to stem from conflict between social approach and avoidance motivations (Asendorpf, 1990). Such behavior has been associated with peer rejection during early childhood in numerous cultural contexts (Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1993; Hart, Yang, et al., 2000; Rubin & Clarke, 1983); however, other forms of withdrawal denoted as *solitary passive* "playing alone" (e.g., quiet exploration of objects or construct activity) are viewed by younger children as normative (Ladd & Burgess, 1999). As children grow older, however, solitary passive behavior blends with reticence to become a unitary construct of withdrawal that becomes highly salient to peers (Asendorpf, 1993). Children displaying withdrawal in mid-to-late childhood feel more lonely, seldom initiate exchanges with peers, and are more likely to be rejected (Rubin et al., 2002). Possibly, children with internalizing problems display patterns of social reticence or unassertive social

and communicative strategies, and this profile of behavioral solitude may lead others to perceive them as being less socially skilled (e.g., Giles & Street, 1994; Rubin et al., 1995).

## NATURE, NURTURE, AND SOCIAL-COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

How do childhood social skills reflected in sociable behavior develop? In what ways do social skill deficiencies characterized by externalizing and internalizing risk factors emerge? The answers to these questions typically involve interactions between biological predispositions and environmental factors that include parental socialization practices (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Rubin, Coplan, et al., 1999; Pike, 2002). Research conducted by molecular and behavioral geneticists, temperament researchers, and physiologists provide some clues into how complex transactional processes between nature and nurture may play out in the development of social skills and risk factors (Hill & Maughan, 2002). Before exploring ways that parenting skills might contribute to children's behavior, we discuss the complexity of nature–nurture interactions. With this in mind, parenting skills can be considered with regard to the relative influence they might have in the context of other factors.

Genetic predispositions for risk or ability factors are by no means deterministic (Plomin & Rutter, 1998). There are likely multiple genes associated with risk (e.g., internalizing, externalizing) or ability (e.g., sociability), accompanied by multiple environmental risk or ability enhancers. These are quantitatively distributed in ways that contribute to the probability of a risk factor or an ability factor manifesting itself in actual child behavior. In other words, certain combinations of genes likely contribute to probabilistic risks or abilities when accompanied by the right combination of probabilistic environmental risk or ability enhancers. Although single genetic or environmental risk or ability factors may be necessary for individual development, it should be emphasized that none is sufficient by itself to facilitate sociability or internalizing and externalizing behavioral tendencies (Wachs, 2000).

Because individuals can be distributed across a continuum of multiple genetic and environmental probabilities for risk or abilities, social–communicative skills can vary considerably among individuals. Hypothetically, for example, children with higher genetic predispositions toward aggressive or impulsive externalizing behavior would likely be at more risk for displaying this behavior in peer-group settings if they are reared in environments that provide access to the viewing of violent media and the modeling of hostile parent–child and peer-group interactions (cf. Wachs, 1999). As an illustration, there is some evidence that a child's tendency to watch television may be partially determined by genetic factors (Plomin, Corley, DeFries, & Fulker, 1990) and that high trait-aggressive individuals are more likely to watch violent media than low trait-aggressive individuals (Bushman, 1995). Alternatively, children with lower genetic risk may be less likely to act violently when exposed to parental or media violence because they are less susceptible to hostile environmental influence (cf. Belsky, Hsieh, & Crnic, 1998).

## Molecular Genetics Research

Few genetic markers have been discovered that contribute to probabilistic risk (not deterministic risk) and differential susceptibility to environmental influence. For example, DRD4 has been linked to novelty-seeking behavior that may be played out in some forms of externalizing disorder, but it only accounts for about 4% of the variance

in behavior, suggesting that many other factors come into play as well (Plomin & Rutter, 1998). No firm genetic markers have been found specifically for aggression (Siminoff, 2002) or for most other behavioral characteristics. This may change with recent advances in gene mapping (Plomin, 2000).

Even as more genetic markers are discovered, critics argue that this knowledge may still not tell us exactly how or why some individuals may choose to override certain biological tendencies and others do not (e.g., Shaffer, 2000). Moreover, gene systems that underlie the expression of specific behavioral dimensions may turn on or turn off at different points of development (Plomin, DeFries, McClearn, & Rutter, 1997), making it even more challenging to assess the stability of biological predispositions across time. Additional evidence indicates that environmental influences can determine which regulator genes operate to modify biological aspects of human development (e.g., temperament-related neural-hormonal systems, central nervous system). All this makes it difficult to ascertain whether it is self-will, developmental change (nature), or environmental influence (nurture) that has primacy in modifying biological underpinnings for behavioral expression (Wachs, 1999).

## **Behavioral-Genetics Research**

Although the identification of behavioral-genetic markers in molecular genetics research is in its infancy, hereditary influences have been estimated indirectly in behavior genetic research for several decades (Pike, 2002). This approach relies primarily on twin and adoption studies (Plomin et al., 1997). Researchers try to gauge genetic influence from comparisons between genetically related relatives versus adoptive relatives (e.g., nonadoptive siblings versus adoptive siblings) and between genetically related individuals reared apart (e.g., twins adopted separately). Studies using variations of these designs suggest that there may be significant genetic influence for externalizing problems (e.g., Deater-Deckard, 2000; Eley, Lichtenstein, & Stevenson, 1999; Leve, Winebarger, Fagot, Reid, & Goldsmith, 1998), sociability (e.g., Plomin, 1994; Tellegen et al., 1988), and inhibited or withdrawn behavior (Robinson, Kagan, Reznick, & Corley, 1992).

## **Physiological Perspectives**

A host of physiological factors have also been considered in the development of sociable, internalizing, and externalizing behavior (see Coie & Dodge, 1998; Fox, Henderson, Rubin, Calkins, & Schmidt, 2001; Rubin et al., 2002). For example, when measuring electrical brain activity, resting right frontal EEG activity is associated with children's social fear, anxiety, and withdrawal, whereas left frontal EEG activity has been linked to sociability. Likewise, vagal tone, which marks the ability to regulate one's level of arousal, has been shown to distinguish inhibited from noninhibited infants and toddlers. Elevated baseline cortisol readings also differentiate more socially wary and fearful children from less inhibited children. Finally, externalizing behavior has also been linked to a number of hormonal, neurochemical, autonomic, and neurophysiological factors.

## **Temperament Research**

Temperament studies focus on individual differences in behavioral style that can be observed beginning in early childhood. There is some scientific support for the

generally accepted view that temperament is biologically based (e.g., Rothbart & Bates, 1998). Although multitudes of temperament categories have been studied, Sanson et al. (2002) noted an emerging consensus that three broad classifications best represent these behavioral styles. These include reactivity–negative emotionality (e.g., irritability, anger, inflexibility, or distress to novelty and fear reactions), self-regulation (e.g., emotional control, nondistractibility, persistence), and approach–inhibition (e.g., inclination to approach novel situations and people or to be wary and withdrawn).

Broadly speaking, concurrent and longitudinal findings indicate that higher levels of inhibition and fearfulness are associated with more withdrawal from peers (e.g., Rubin et al., 2002). Conversely, less inhibition has been linked to more sociability with peers (e.g., Skarpness & Carson, 1986; Stocker & Dunn, 1990). High negative emotionality (as in irritability, inflexibility) and low self-regulation is associated with more externalizing behavior (see Sanson et al., 2002), whereas low negative emotionality and higher levels of self-regulation and approach are linked to more sociability with peers (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1993). More recent findings suggest that negative emotionality, in the presence of optimum regulation, leads to better social functioning, whereas high emotionality accompanied by low regulation is a risk for externalizing behavior problems and later social competence (Belsky, Friedman, & Hsieh, 2001; Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000). Similarly, temperamentally outgoing children who lack emotional regulation have been found to be more aggressive and disruptive with peers (Rubin, Coplan, Fox, & Calkins, 1995).

## The Nature Part of Nurture

In light of biological predispositions that appear to affect behavior (in a probabilistic not deterministic sense), recent studies suggest that their impact is likely manifested in an indirect manner by influencing the experiences children evoke from others or create for themselves (e.g., Deater-Deckard, 2000). Plomin, Reiss, Hetherington, and Howe, (1994) suggested that “children are not passive receptacles for environmental influences—they select, modify, and even create their environments” (p. 32), resulting in actual and perceived differences in how others respond toward them. Thus, genetic predispositions can elicit different responses from environmental sources (e.g., parents, siblings, peers) in ways that result in different child outcomes (Pike, 2002; Vandell, 2000).

**Child Influences.** As noted by Scarr and McCartney (1983), because parents provide their children with genes, the rearing environments to which children are exposed correlate to some degree with their own genotypes. For example, a child with sociable tendencies may *passively* fit in with, and even amplify, more sociable behavioral patterns in family interaction exhibited by one or both parents with whom he or she shares most common genetic characteristics. For siblings, varying social abilities displayed by children in the same family may stem from greater genetic similarity with one parent over another. Accordingly, siblings in the same family may evoke unique responses from one or both parents. Research suggests that although there are shared parenting influences in two-parent families (Russell & Russell, 1994), different siblings in the same family, by their very natures, can evoke different parenting behaviors from mothers and fathers (e.g., Holden & Miller, 1999; Kandel & Wu, 1995; Sanson & Rothbart, 1995; Volling & Elins, 1998), particularly as children grow older (O'Connor, Deater-Deckard, Fulker, Rutter, & Plomin, 1998). Even children

understand that parents adjust their styles to different needs and personality characteristics of their siblings (Kowal & Kramer, 1997).

Children may also *actively* seek out experiences that provide a good "fit" with their temperamental predispositions (Thomas & Chess, 1977). This, in turn, tends to result in differential parental response. Relative to a more sociable sibling, for example, a more inhibited child may prefer to spend more time in solitary activities (such as coin or stamp collecting) or in anxious, hovering behaviors during peer-group interaction. Research indicates that parents typically respond to a more sociable child by facilitating more interactions with peers (e.g., Profilet & Ladd, 1994). Alternatively, parents of inhibited children tend to engage in highly directive (e.g., telling a child how to act, readily intervening to solve interpersonal dilemmas) or overprotective behavior (e.g., shielding a child from social failure). Such parenting has been shown to maintain or exacerbate, rather than resolve their child's difficulties (Rubin et al., 2002; Rubin, Burgess, & Hastings, 2002). For externalizing behavior, research suggests that children with more spirited dispositions (e.g., aggressive, highly emotional, or thrill-seeking tendencies) may raise concerns and evoke more formal intervention by parents in terms of rules, redirection, and monitoring than children who are more sociable and conforming (e.g., Hart, Yang, et al., 1998; Ladd & Golter, 1988; Mize, Pettit, & Brown, 1995). This appears to be the case in particular when child behavior falls outside cultural norms and family expectations (Bell & Chapman, 1986; Wachs, 1999).

**Shared and Nonshared Effects.** Environmental sources such as differential parental treatment that touch siblings in unique ways are referred to as *nonshared effects*. Nonshared effects can also result from children responding to similar environmental influences in different ways (Deater-Deckard, 2000). Children may respond to similar parenting styles according to how experiences are filtered through their individual perceptions (Dunn, 2002; Grusec, 2002). For example, a more externalizing-prone child may perceive parental coercion as confrontational and might often react by mouthing off and acting out in more openly defiant and angry ways. Alternatively, a temperamentally anxious-fearful sibling may view parental coercion (e.g., yelling and commanding) as threatening. He or she may respond by dutifully submitting to parental demands yet harbor feelings of anger and resentment that are later manifest in feelings of loneliness or depression. Other children in the same family may perceive warm and indulgent parents as being less authoritative and have little regard for parental input. Relative to a more responsible sibling in the same family, who seems to require little oversight and direction, some children may take advantage of a parent's good nature by trying to get away with everything that they can. In essence, nonshared experiences that children in the same family have—in concert with individual genetic influences—often determine many different personality characteristics between siblings (e.g., Plomin et al., 1997; McGue, Sharma, & Benson, 1996; Pike et al., 1996).

Environmental sources that operate to make siblings alike are referred to as *shared effects*. There is scientific evidence that shared effects stemming from parental modeling and encouragement of the same moral, religious, and political interests and values are as important, or even more important, than genes in creating similarities among siblings (e.g., Eaves, Eysenck, & Martin, 1989; Hoffman, 1991, 1994a; Plomin, 1990). Even children who are treated differently can result in similar outcomes; for example, imposing more rules and limits for a difficult child may serve to foster more conformity so that he or she begins to behave in ways that are similar to those of his or her more conforming sibling.

In summary, even though children may share constellations of genes and somewhat similar environments with their parents and siblings, their very natures can create different environmental niches that can contribute to declining resemblance over time (Wachs, 1999). Even identical twins who share the same genetic attributes do not turn out to be entirely similar due to different sets of experiences from which they build their environmental niches (e.g., Bouchard, Lykken, McGue, Segal, & Tellegen, 1990; Farber, 1981). This suggests that parenting skills required to optimize social–communicative development may vary significantly from child to child.

## The Nurture Part of Nature

Although it appears that children can exert considerable influence on their socialization environment (e.g., Bell & Chapman, 1986), evidence is emerging to suggest that parenting behaviors can also enhance or diminish children's biological predispositions (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Feldman, Greenbaum, & Yirmiya, 1999). Recent findings support a conditional view of parenting that hinges on children's differential susceptibility to child-rearing influence (Belsky et al., 1998; Vandell, 2000). That is, parental influence in certain domains may be greater for some children than for others, according to their individual dispositions (Kochanska, 1993; Kochanska, Coy, & Murray, 2001). For example, Kochanska (1997a) found that child compliance was associated with gentle, reasoning-oriented parental guidance for more temperamentally fearful-anxious children; however, compliance was linked to attachment security and responsiveness (e.g., shared cooperation, acceptance, sensitivity), and not to parental guidance, for non-fearful anxious children. This growing body of literature also suggests that parental sensitivity and nurturing involvement accompanied by firm limit setting and cohesive family relationships can diminish difficult and negative temperamental and externalizing behavior inside and outside of the home (e.g., Arcus & Kagen, 1995; Engfer, 1986; Feldman et al., 1999; Fish, 1997; Hinshaw, Zupan, Simmel, Nigg, & Melnick, 1997; Kandel & Wu, 1995; Van den Boom, 1994; Woodward, Taylor, & Dowdney, 1998). This has implications for intervention studies that are overviewed later.

There is further evidence to suggest that negative temperamental predispositions can either be enhanced or diminished in difficult children or be evoked in easier-to-raise children in the face of less parental responsiveness and involvement (e.g., Belsky, Fish, & Isabella, 1991; Olson, Bates, Sandy, & Lanthier, 2000; Wachs et al., 1993). Over two decades ago, Thomas and Chess (1977) proposed a "goodness-of-fit" model to describe how temperament and environmental pressures interact to affect children's development. Whereas good fit exists when child temperament and parenting styles are in harmony, poor fit results from dissonance between child responding and family environment (e.g., Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Interestingly, this hypothesis has only begun to be tested formally (e.g., Bates, Pettit, Dodge, & Ridge, 1998; Kochanska, 1997a). Early findings suggest that a poor fit represented by punitive-parenting interactions with difficult temperament results in the production of internalizing (Denham, Auerbach-Major, Kochanoff, & Queenan, 2002; Morris et al., 2002) and externalizing problem behaviors (Campbell, 1997; Paterson & Sanson, 1999). Alternatively, nonpunitive restrictive parental control (e.g., prohibitions, warnings) is associated with lower levels of later externalizing in children who are difficult to manage earlier on (Bates et al., 1998).

In summary, numerous child-constitutional factors impact how sociable, internalizing, and externalizing behavior play out in children's social interactions. These

factors can contribute to ways that parents respond to their children as well as be enhanced or mitigated by the child-rearing approaches that parents use (Bates et al., 1998; Patterson et al., 1992; Vuchinich, Bank, & Patterson, 1992). We now consider specific parenting skills that seem to contribute to children's social-communicative competence in positive and negative ways.

## PARENTING SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL-COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

In terms of the relative influences of nature and nurture in the development of social and communicative competence, there is no single view of what aspects belong to nature and what belongs to nurture. In light of existing evidence regarding the influence of parenting skill and children's biological dispositions, three distinct perspectives have emerged:

1. Parents are not essential to children's development (e.g., Harris, 1998, 2000; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999);
2. An "average expectable" environment provided by parents is all that is needed (e.g., Rowe, 2002; Scarr, 1992);
3. "Optimal" rather than "good enough" parenting is essential for children's optimal development (e.g., Baumrind, 1993, 1997; Gottman & DeClaire, 1997).

Evidence presented in our discussion thus far indicates the likelihood of considerable variation in children's behavior that may be due in part to factors in their biological development; however, this accounts for only part of the equation when it comes to social-communicative competence in children. In the research reviewed earlier, many scholars argue that parents do play a vital role in the development of childhood social skills and that "optimal" rather than just "good enough" parenting is important. As Baumrind (1993, 1997) and Wachs (2000) further pointed out, child outcomes associated with contrasting patterns of parenting vary considerably within, and not merely outside, normal ranges of development. Rather than dwelling extensively on the relative contributions of nature and nurture to each aspect of children's development, our view is that certain patterns of parenting are more and less healthy and adaptable to a child's nature, whatever it may be. We propose that parents reading a child's temperament and adjusting their behavior accordingly to maximize socialization influence is more likely to occur with some parenting styles than with others. We pick up on this theme after describing parenting styles.

### Parenting Styles

Researchers have conceptually delineated parenting skills that are linked to children's social-communicative competence into styles and practices (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). *Styles* are defined as "aggregates or constellations of behaviors that describe parent-child interactions over a wide range of situations and that are presumed to create a pervasive interactional climate" (Mize & Pettit, 1997, p. 312). This climate likely moderates how receptive children are to certain parenting practices such as reasoning or limit setting when enacted in specific child-rearing contexts (cf. Baumrind, 1996; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Kochanska, 1997b; Smetana, 1994). Our focus in this section is on parenting styles and the features that comprise them.

**Typologies and Features.** Parenting styles have been conceptualized in a number of ways, two of which have been used in studying socialization (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Holden & Miller, 1999; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The first approach is typological and focuses on the general patterns, organization, and climate of parenting. Using this approach, the parenting environment includes three categories, *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, and *permissive* (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Also, researchers have used a dimensional approach in exploring socialization influence (Holden & Miller, 1999). This approach is useful in desegregating distinctive modes of socialization so as to determine their linkages to child development outcomes. These include, but are not limited to, contrasting stylistic dimensions of power-assertive versus inductive, position-centered versus person-centered, parent-centered versus child-centered, punishment-oriented versus reason-oriented, and harsh-restrictive versus positive-nonrestrictive (e.g., Bronstein et al., 1996; Hart et al., 1990; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Regardless of whether researchers use typological or dimensional approaches, three features of parenting that include many of the positive dimensions noted in the previous paragraph have been consistently used in describing competent parenting (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). These include (a) the degree of parental support shown to a child (e.g., acceptance, affection, involvement, nurturance), (b) the degree of behavioral control placed on a child (e.g., limit setting, supervision, reasoning about and following through with consequences), and (c) the degree to which parents facilitate the development of psychological and emotional autonomy in children (e.g., choice giving, allowing child input into rule making, permitting the expression of ideas, avoiding intrusive behavior). More simply, these multidimensional features of parenting have been referred to as *connection*, *regulation*, and *autonomy granting* (Barber & Olsen, 1997) and have recently been empirically packaged under the rubric of "authoritative parenting" for adolescent children (Gray & Steinberg, 1999). These features are applicable to parents of young children in both the U.S. and mainland China, as demonstrated in recent research using multisample confirmatory factor analytic techniques (Wu et al., in press). Negative dimensions that include hostility (e.g., verbal and physical coercion), nonrestrictiveness, and other parent-centered approaches have been empirically derived as negative features delineating authoritarian and permissive parenting that we discuss later (Wu et al., in press).

Including parenting features within general typologies has allowed researchers to explore global patterns, such as linkages between authoritativeness and child or adolescent behavior (e.g., Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997; Hart, Nelson, et al., 2000; Resnick et al., 1997; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). When unpackaged from the larger typologies, the functions that stylistic features of parenting serve can also be investigated (e.g., Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Hart, Nelson, et al., 2000). Functions of stylistic features pertain to the immediate effects of consequences of parental behavior (e.g., getting a child to reflect on how his or her behavior impacts others or affects the child's long-term goals). Outcomes refer to long-term consequences for the child in relation to a particular feature. For example, more connectedness (patient, playful, sensitive parenting, particularly for fathers) has been associated with less childhood aggressive behavior, whereas less psychological autonomy granting has been linked to more childhood aggressive, internalizing and externalizing behavioral outcomes in the peer group (Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeilly-Choque, 1998; Olsen et al., 2002). Reasoning-oriented regulation has been linked to greater sociable child behavior, empathy, adaptive social cognitions, and peer acceptance (e.g., Burleson et al., 1995; Hart, DeWolf, &

Burts, 1992; 1993; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996), but not always to less childhood aggressive behavior (e.g., Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992; Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 1997).

**Adaptability of Authoritative Parenting.** One of the advantages of an authoritative style is that it is adaptable to individual child characteristics. It is not prescriptive. In essence, children appear to benefit from the flexible use of individualized features of child rearing that are conducted within the general framework of this stylistic pattern. As noted earlier, Kochanska (1997a) indicated that more anxious–fearful children benefit more from gentle, reasoning-oriented regulation, whereas non–fearful anxious children benefit more from the connectedness feature (shared cooperation, acceptance, sensitivity). Alternatively, more impulsive or resistive children become more manageable with greater rather than with lesser exposure to regulatory limit setting (e.g., prohibitions, warnings). This plays out in fewer externalizing outcomes both within and out of home settings over time (Bates et al., 1998). Nonpunitive regulation appears to be particularly salient for difficult children when accompanied by warm and supportive parenting that is reflected in the connection feature of the authoritative style (Hinshaw et al., 1997). These studies illustrate how the flexible use of authoritative-style features can provide the best fit for children with varying temperamental dispositions.

In essence, some children may require heavier doses of some authoritative features (e.g., regulation) than others, based on their temperamental dispositions; however, only a few studies have examined the moderating effects of parenting features on the associations between child temperamental predispositions and later adjustment (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein 2000). Moreover, little is known about how and why some parents are better able than others to adjust their parenting styles according to child temperament in ways that maximize socialization influence. Obviously, balancing connection, regulation, and autonomy-granting across different sibling characteristics, developmental time frames, varying types of child transgressions, and disciplinary versus nondisciplinary contexts requires considerable skill, particularly in the face of competing demands (e.g., economic stress, fatigue, marital adjustments, time constraints). Reflecting this complexity, a recent meta-analysis indicates that even though parenting styles reflect enduring characteristics that persist over time, parents do modify aspects of child-rearing behavior in response to different children or to the immediate context as needed (Holden & Miller, 1999). Little is known about how adaptable these adjustments are in meeting particular children's needs in ways that facilitate social–communicative competence, however.

## **Authoritative Features and Children's Adjustment**

Although research investigating how parents adjust authoritative features to child nature are limited, there are scores of studies that link connection, regulation, and autonomy features of authoritative parenting to positive child outcomes (Ladd & Pettit, 2002). In this section, we review literature that explicates how these features are associated with child social–communicative competence.

**Connection Features.** Warm and responsive parenting is often used to convey connection features of authoritative styles; however, researchers also describe connection in terms of acceptance, attentiveness, nurturance, patience, and sensitivity to and sympathy for children's feelings and needs (e.g., Wakschlag & Hans, 1999).

Warm and responsive parenting tends to promote lasting bonds with parents and “felt security” in children (Barnett, Kidwell, & Leung, 1998; Lamb, Hwang, Ketterlinus, & Fracasso, 1999). Secure attachments with parents function to facilitate the development of “working models” that provide expectations of positive reciprocal interpersonal outcomes from interactions with others (e.g., Elcker, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1992; Cicchetti, Lynch, Shonk, & Manly, 1992), better emotion regulation (Contreras, Kerns, Weimer, Gentzler, & Tomich, 2000), and self-confidence for interacting with unfamiliar peers (e.g., Rubin et al., 2002). Warmth and responsiveness not only promotes secure attachments, but have been linked concurrently and longitudinally to more sociable outcomes and to fewer internalizing and externalizing problems with peers (e.g., Bronstein et al., 1996; Dumas, LaFreniere, & Serketich, 1995; Russell & Russell, 1996; Shaw, Keenan, & Vondra, 1994). Attachment linkages, however, seem to be more important for children’s close friendships rather than for enhanced relations with other peers (Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardif, 2001). Warm, responsive, and accepting child rearing has also been found to prevent hostility, resentment, and anger in children (e.g., Hoffman, 1983; Lepper, 1981; Maccoby, 1983). Alternatively, hostile and rejecting parenting can be played out in hostile externalizing behavior with siblings, as well as with peers (e.g., MacKinnon-Lewis, Starnes, Volling, & Johnson, 1997).

Connection also involves parents being companionable and playful with their children (Ladd & Pettit, 2002). Research has documented that young children are less likely to be aggressive and more likely to be sociable and empathetic with peers if they have parents (particularly fathers) who display these qualities (e.g., Carson & Parke, 1996; Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000; Gottman & De Claire, 1997; Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998; Lindsey & Mize, 2000; Pettit, Brown, Mize, & Lindsey, 1998). Alternatively, children with poorer peer conversational skills and subsequent peer-group behavior problems have less companionable fathers who express negative affect and dominate interaction and conversation in observed father-child dyadic interactions (Fagan & Iglesias, 2000; Isley, O’Neil, Clafelter, & Parke, 1999; Isley, O’Neil, & Parke, 1996).

Maternal connection to children is also important (e.g. Zhou et al., 2002). Research indicates that mothers who engage in mutually enjoyable activities with their children and assert less power over them are more likely to maintain a mutually responsive interaction style with their children throughout childhood (e.g., Kochanska, 1997b). These types of mutually enjoyable interactions, in which parents and children comply with each other’s play suggestions, have been associated with advances in initiating play ideas, in attending to a play partners’ desires and needs, and in responding to a partners’ initiations in peer-group interaction (Lindsey & Mize, 2000; Mize et al., 1995; Pettit & Lollis, 1997). They appear to be a catalyst for establishing comfortable and emotionally fulfilling and connected relationships with others. It is possible that inherently sociable and conforming preschoolers in these studies were better able to evoke mutually responsive patterns of play with parents and peers; however, it seems more likely that parents attempting to connect with their children by being responsive rather than always directive teaches them something about the importance of reciprocity in forming lasting bonds with others.

**Regulation Features.** In contrast with connection, in which parent-child relationships are conceptualized as being more horizontal and symmetrical (almost peerlike), regulation is considered to be vertical and asymmetrical with the focus on parents instructing, correcting, teaching, or disciplining their children (Russell,

Mize, & Bissaker, 2002). Disciplinary situations, for example, require parents to move out of reciprocal role patterns (e.g., play and situations that allow for compromise) and exert authority in a more vertical fashion by placing clear and consistent limits on child behavior. The function of authoritative regulation is typically to persuade children to adopt parental views on certain issues and to regulate their behavior accordingly. This is typically done by setting limits, reasoning about rules and the consequences of misbehavior, reinforcing positive behavior, and following through with a judicious use of punishment as needed (Baumrind, 1996; Grusec, 2002; Patterson & Fisher, 2002). How parents exert authority is important in less power-sharing contexts and can influence whether children feel respected as individuals and how well they internalize rules and become self-governing (Grolnick, 2003). Social-communicative outcomes also vary according to how parents enact regulative features in ways described in the following paragraphs (see also Hart, Newell, & Sine, 2000).

Unlike coercive parents who administer harsh, arbitrary punishments (Amber, 1997; Brody et al., 2001), studies indicate that authoritative parents are clear about rules and expectations and proactively explain reasons for setting them along with consequences for not meeting them (e.g., Baumrind, 1996; Pettit et al., 1997; 2001; Patterson & Fisher, 2002). Parents who find ways to prevent child misbehavior rather than waiting for it to occur are more likely to have more compliant children and less frequent parent-child power struggles. (Chamberlain & Patterson, 1995). In so doing, a premium is placed on communication as parents use disciplinary encounters more as teaching moments (rather than punishing moments) to help their children understand how to regulate their own behavior in positive ways without having to be controlled by arbitrary external rewards and punishments (Baumrind, 1996; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Illustrative is research by Kuczynski and Kochanska (1995) in which toddlers of parents who emphasized "dos" rather than "don'ts" in communicative exchanges were found to exhibit lower levels of externalizing behavior at age 5.

There are many times when limits that have been explained in advance by parents are violated. Authoritative parents are more likely to be firm and consistent when following through in nonpunitive ways with logical consequences that are tied to the misdeeds (e.g., calmly enforcing timeout when a child is angry and hurting others and then discussing alternative ways of dealing with anger; calmly showing up at a child's teen party when curfew is violated). Opportunities are then given for children to practice "trying it again," armed with new information about the *whys* and *how*s of enacting good behavior. As noted by Baumrind (1996), "Authoritative parents remain receptive to the child's views but take responsibility for firmly guiding the child's actions, emphasizing reasoning, communication, and rational discussion interactions that are friendly as well as tutorial and disciplinary" (p. 412).

This highlights the importance of reasoning and persuasion in regulatory encounters with children (e.g., "If you hit Johnny, he probably won't want to play with you anymore"). Although not required for every situation, consistent efforts to provide simple rationales that are often repeated eventually sink in and can function to win voluntary obedience even in 2- to three-year-old children (Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1993). Numerous studies have documented positive ways that reasoning or induction with children (especially in advance of a problem) can help them willfully regulate their own behavior (e.g., Hoffman, 1994b; Kochanska, 1995; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996). For example, parents who think ahead and predispose their young children before going into a store that "we are not buying treats to eat right now because we need lots of room in our tummies for dinner" are more likely to avoid temper tantrums in the checkout line.

Burleson et al. (1995) suggested that such reflection-enhancing messages help children to understand situations "in a broadened way and see that courses of action should follow from consideration of relevant situational features and enduring values" (p. 62). For example, reasoning with children about consequences of their actions and possible solutions to interpersonal conflict helps focus children on the attitudes, feelings, perspectives, and needs of others (e.g., Bearson & Cassel, 1975). Other-oriented reasoning, particularly on the part of mothers, has also been consistently linked to children's sociable (i.e., prosocial) behavior at home and with peers (e.g., Burleson et al., 1992, 1995; Hart et al., 1992; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Pettit et al., 1998), particularly when accompanied by positive parental affect, prosocial modeling, and reinforcing statements (Grusec, Davidov, & Lundell, 2002; McGrath, Wilson, & Frassetto, 1995).

Reasoning-oriented regulation is associated with more adaptive and flexible parent interactions with children and facilitates more complex social problem-solving skills in them (Deković, Gerris, & Janssens, 1991). This appears to enhance preschool and school-age children's abilities to accomplish social goals while simultaneously maintaining relationships with peers. For example, children of parents who employ inductive regulation are prone to envisioning friendly–assertive sociable behavior as leading to instrumental gains and enhanced relations with peers (Hart et al., 1990; Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1992).

How children resonate to reasoning-oriented parental input depends on a variety of factors, including the age of the children, how "connected" their relationship is with the parent, and their ability to understand (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). For older children, reasoning can often come across as preachments and may provoke opposition if not carefully worded, particularly for more difficult children. Playing a "consultant role" often works better (Cline & Fay, 1992). This involves reflective listening, using less directive "I" rather than more intrusive "you" statements, musing and wondering aloud about potential consequences and alternatives, and leaving more ownership for problem solving to the child. Communicating and regulating in this way requires considerable parental skill and flexibility but is far more likely to result in positive outcomes.

Finally, in addition to aversive consequences noted earlier, authoritative regulation can, in some cases, include a use of confrontation, reproofs, scolding, and prohibitions (without reasoning) when logically tied to a misbehavior (e.g., Bates et al., 1998; Kochanska, et al., 2001). Research suggests that when this is done firmly in the context of a warm and engaged parent–child relationship, children are more likely to comply to parental wishes; however, when coercively administered as a way to vent parental anger or brandish authority rather than to calmly emphasize an important message, conformance is less likely, and child resentment and hostility may ensue (Baumrind, 1996; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

**Autonomy-Granting Features.** Children also benefit from making the choices that authoritative parents offer them and being allowed personal freedom in a variety of domains (e.g., Nucci & Smetana, 1996; Nucci & Weber, 1995). By developing decision-making skills and learning how to make personal decisions within limits that are acceptable to parents (e.g., allowing a child the option of taking the trash out in the evening or in the morning before school; asking if a child would prefer hot or cold cereal, etc.), children learn to become better self-regulators. In addition to self-regulation, supporting children's autonomy in this manner functions to help children view adults as providers of information and guidance rather than as deliverers of

messages of control (Deci, Eghari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). Psychological control and authoritarian parenting (described in the next section) work against this important aspect of children's development (Barber & Harmon, 2002; Olsen et al., 2002).

Even though the best of parents will, under difficult circumstances, lose patience and be demanding with children from time to time (e.g., Holden, Coleman, & Schmidt, 1995), parents who are predominantly authoritative are more likely to interact with warmth and responsiveness, thereby allowing for more "give-and-take" in relationships with their children (e.g., Bronstein et al., 1996; Russell et al., 2002; Siqueland, Kendall, & Steinberg, 1996). Parental communication is more likely to be open and nonjudgmental, with more emphasis on listening to understand rather than on talking (McFadyen-Ketchum, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 1996). Respect for authority and independent thinking and feeling are valued, rather than viewed as being mutually exclusive. Research has indicated that children are more likely to be respectful to parents and others when there is this type of reciprocity and a degree of power-sharing in their relationships with parents (e.g., Dumas et al., 1995; Pettit & Lollis, 1997).

Allowing young children to experience, value, and express their own thoughts, emotions, and desires is important in parent-child communicative interactions and for subsequent peer-group outcomes. Illustrative are studies showing that more socially competent children have mothers who are more likely to model power sharing and autonomy granting in horizontal relationships by communicating in ways that are positive, synchronous, and agreeable with children's views (e.g., Bronstein et al., 1996; Harrist, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 1994; Putallaz & Heflin, 1990). Black and Logan (1995) also recently demonstrated that autonomy granting and synchronous parent-child communications, as reflected in turn-taking style and utterance type, were related to more sociable child interactions with, and acceptance by, peers. However, nonresponsive communications with parents that did not allow for verbal give-and-take (e.g., irrelevant or simultaneous turns or turns that fail to leave time for a response following a request) have been linked to similar communication patterns with peers, internalizing and externalizing problems, and peer rejection (e.g., Fagan & Iglesias, 2000; Kahan, Katz, & Gottman, 1994).

In a related vein, when parents have been observed to dismiss or be judgmental about child views, to not tolerate differences of opinion, or to not allow input into family decision making, their preschool or school-age children have been found to be more prone to internalizing disorders (e.g., Olsen et al., 2002; Siqueland et al., 1996). Such displays of parental control that diminishes child expression appear to model a form of exclusionary behavior that has also been recently associated with preschool-age children enacting ostracizing, relationally aggressive tactics with peers (Hart, Nelson, et al., 2000).

Autonomy granting through "collaborative problem solving" (Crockenberg, Jackson, & Langrock, 1996) and "joint decision making" (Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1996) also plays out in potential conflict situations in which firm rules and restrictions are deemed less vital and parents model and encourage negotiation and compromise (e.g., allowing child's input into when to take the trash out). Finding ways to say yes more often than no to a child's request lends more credence when a parent has to say no in areas that require more vertical regulation. When children are given latitude for decision making in areas that matter less, they are more likely to conform to parental expectations that matter more (cf. Crockenberg et al., 1996; Kochanska, 1992; Kuczynski & Lollis, in press; Russell et al., 2002). The resolution of conflict in collaborative decision making between parents and children is not all that dissimilar to ways that children learn to resolve

interpersonal issues when trying to “partly get their way” in peer-group interactions (Bigelow, Tesson, & Lewko, 1996; Crockenberg & Lourie, 1996; Kochanska, 1992).

Developmental stages and child dispositions are also important to consider in autonomy granting. As children grow older and more mature, they can typically be granted more autonomy and a greater share in individual and family decision making (Baumrind, 1996). More spirited children, however, often require more creative regulation and limit setting coupled with opportunities for expressing individuality (e.g., Bates et al., 1998). Even for difficult children, positive psychological interventions that entail choice giving, encouragement of independence, and collaborative problem solving are less likely to provoke rebellion and oppositional behavior reflected in externalizing outcomes (e.g., Hinshaw et al., 1997). Recent evidence also suggests that more fearful and inhibited children’s tendencies as reflected in reticent behavior noted earlier, may actually be exacerbated or maintained by parental overcontrolling and overprotective means that allow for less autonomy granting (e.g., Rubin, Nelson, Hastings, & Asendorpf, 1999). This may account for why some children preclude themselves from social exploration (Rubin et al., 1998; Rubin, Cheah, & Fox, 2001).

In summary, authoritative parenting that includes balanced features of autonomy granting, along with regulation through limit setting, follow-through, and reasoning, as well as connection that is reflected in mutually responsive and satisfying relationships likely sets the stage for social and communication skills to thrive. As noted earlier, the degree to which these skills flourish are likely constrained or enhanced by biological and genetic factors that are inherent to each child. Connection, regulation, and autonomy features of authoritative parenting skill appear to be most effective when they are individualized and calibrated to provide the best fit to each child’s unique set of strengths and limitations. These features are not mutually exclusive. Autonomy granting, for example, can foster connection in parent-child interactions. Connection may, in turn, be played out in children being more responsive to parent regulatory efforts.

## Coercive Interaction Styles

The authoritative parenting style represents a challenging and creative endeavor that requires considerable flexibility, time, patience, and energy. The focus of authoritative approaches is more on teaching and preparing children than on regulating and controlling them (Hastings & Rubin, 1999). Conversely, when parents are prone to employ “all-fits-one” controlling approaches across most child-rearing contexts and rely solely on punishment, isolation, or restriction, less creativity and flexibility is involved. Accordingly, authoritarian approaches provide fewer opportunities to meet individual child needs in ways that can optimize social and communicative competence. Like authoritative regulation, coercion functions to persuade children to adopt parental views on certain issues and to regulate their behavior accordingly; however, it is more likely to be administered in a harsh, arbitrary manner (Baumrind, 1996; Brody et al., 2001). Although coercion may often result in immediate compliance in children, it is suggested that it comes with a number of costs including the diminishing of children’s abilities to learn how to regulate their own behavior from within (e.g., Gershoff, 2002; Rodgers, 1998). For example, parents who shut off their children’s negative emotions in punitive or dismissive ways only invite more intense expressions that children have difficulty regulating with peers (Fabes, Leonard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001).

Persistent parenting that derides, demeans, or diminishes children by continually putting them in their place, putting them down, mocking them, or holding power over them via physical and verbal or psychologically controlling means are manifestations of coercive stylistic interactions. Research exploring outcomes for these coercive features indicates that such parenting appears to impede social and communication competencies in children (e.g., Stafford & Bayer, 1993) and may be systemically maintained through mutually coercive parent-child exchanges (e.g., Dishion, Duncan, Eddy, Fagot, & Fetrow, 1994; Vuchinich et al., 1992) that are driven by both child and parent aggressive behavior (Stoolmiller, Patterson, & Snyder, 1997).

**Physical and Verbal Coercive Features.** A persistent use of physical and verbal coercion often takes place in homes in which there is a climate of hostility manifest by frequent spanking, yelling, criticizing, directing, and forcing and has been linked to many forms of childhood externalizing behavior directed toward peers that include relational and physical forms of aggression noted earlier (e.g., Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998, 2000; McFadyen-Ketchum, et al., 1996; Nix et al., 1999; Russell, Hart, Robinson, & Olsen, in press; Shumow, Vandell, & Posner, 1998; Pettit, Clawson, Dodge, & Bates, 1996; Travillion & Snyder, 1993). As noted earlier, coercive stylistic features tend to exacerbate already difficult temperamental dispositions in children. Hostile parenting of this nature has also been linked to peer-group rejection (e.g., Deković & Janssens, 1992; Hart et al., 1990; Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992; Travillion & Snyder, 1993). There is also evidence suggesting that associations between reciprocally hostile parent-child interactions and rejection by peers is mediated by aggressive behavior with peers (MacKinnon-Lewis et al., 1994).

In moderate forms with more normative samples, this style of parent-child interaction has been associated with children thinking they will get their way by using force with peers (e.g., Hart et al., 1990; Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1992), particularly if parents model coercion as an efficacious means of resolving interpersonal conflict (see Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick et al., 1999; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Pettit, Polaha, & Mize, 2002; Parke et al., 1994). Interestingly, recent research suggests that the lack of connection (noted earlier in the authoritative style) for fathers and more coercion on the part of mothers are the most important predictors in the development of childhood aggressive behavior, at least in Russian parenting (Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998). Similar findings have recently been obtained in mainland China (Chen, Wang, Chen, & Liu, 2002). Whether these patterns hold in all cultural settings in which coercive parental behavior is viewed as normative by children and adults is a point of debate in the literature (e.g., Baumrind, 1996; Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Stormshak, Bierman, McMahon, & Lengua, 2000; Yang et al., in press).

Compared with the literature examining the effects of moderate but persistent levels of parental coercion, there is less certainty about whether milder forms and less frequent use of physical coercion lend themselves to similar problems noted above. There is a body of literature, for example, that suggests "nonabusive" spanking consisting of one or two mild slaps on the buttocks in limited situations (e.g., out-of-control behavior that poses danger to the child or others) can be beneficial for authoritative regulation as a last resort, but only for children between 2 and 6 years of age and when conducted sparingly in the context of a warm and responsive relationship (e.g., Baumrind, Larzelere, & Cowan, 2002; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Larzelere, 1996; Larzelere, Sather, Schneider, Larsen, & Pike, 1998). Alternatively, another group of studies support the notion that even though limited spanking to

regulate behavior may immediately stop a child from misbehaving and willfully defying in the short term, it actually increases the likelihood of greater disobedience and antisocial behavior inside and outside the home later on (Gershoff, 2002; Strassberg, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997; Stormshak et al., 2000). Additional research suggests that spanking is more likely to be enacted in anger (Holden et al., 1995).

More certain in the literature are findings associated with abuse. In more extreme samples of maltreated children (cf. Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997), severe forms of coercive parenting as manifested in extremely harsh and abusive treatment by adults appears to dysregulate and handicap children by altering their ability to successfully encode social cues and correctly interpret ambiguous peer provocations (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990; Dodge, Pettit, Bates, & Valente, 1995) lending itself to reactive aggression (Shield & Chicchetti, 1998). Rather than being goal-oriented toward self-serving gains, reactive aggression is characterized by hostile attributional biases toward the aggressor and an angry and hypervigilant style of personal interaction (e.g., easily taking offense). Supporting research suggests that reactive aggressive children experience more extreme abusive family backgrounds when compared with proactive aggressive children (e.g., Schwartz et al., 1997). Similar findings concerning abusive parenting appear likely to hold across various cultural settings (e.g., Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997).

**Psychological Controlling Features.** An emerging literature on psychological controlling parenting styles also suggests difficulties for children (e.g., Nelson & Crick, 2002). Psychologically controlling behaviors include communicating disinterest in what a child is saying, invalidating or discounting a child's feelings, attacking a child in a condescending or patronizing way, or using guilt induction, love withdrawal, or erratic emotional behavior as means of control and manipulation (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Psychological control, designed to manipulate children's psychological and emotional experience and expression, has been associated with "externalizing" and "internalizing" disorders in children of various ages and in diverse cultural contexts (e.g., Barber & Harmon, 2002; Grotjahn & Crick, 1996; Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998; Mattanah, 2001; Olsen et al., 2002; Pettit et al., 2001; Siqueland et al., 1996). It has also been linked to more internalizing behavior in temperamentally irritable children (Morris et al., 2002).

## Permissive Parenting

Permissive-prone parents do exert some control over their children, but to a lesser degree than coercive and authoritative parents. They are less actively involved and may overindulge or neglect their children. They tend to avoid using their authority at all costs, are more tolerant of children's impulses (including aggression), encourage children to make their own decisions without providing parameters, and refrain from imposing structure on children's time (i.e., bedtime, mealtime, television watching). They also keep at a minimum restrictions, demands for mature behavior, and consequences for misbehavior (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Research suggests that children raised by permissive parents may have greater difficulty respecting others, coping with frustration, delaying their gratification for a greater goal, and following through with their plans (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Unlike coercive parenting, in which child outcomes are predominately negative, permissive parenting produces mixed results. Outcomes associated with permissive

parenting suggest that children are more sociable and tend to have a relatively low rates of internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety); however, they do less well academically, are more defiant of authority figures, and exhibit a higher rate of externalizing behavior (e.g., Barber & Olsen, 1997).

## Parenting Practices

In our earlier discussion of parenting styles, we noted that the context created by style likely moderates how receptive children are to certain parenting practices. The concept of *style* captures an enduring manner in which mothers and fathers parent across "a wide range of situations that are presumed to create a pervasive interactional climate" (Mize & Pettit, 1997). *Practices*, on the other hand, refer to particular efforts that parents undertake to accomplish specific goal-oriented tasks with children. Whether it be engaging in a mutually enjoyable activity to foster connection, reasoning about consequences to ward off misbehavior, spanking to punish for misdeeds, or providing choices to foster decision-making skills, parents may practice features of an authoritative or authoritarian style to accomplish their ends (see Mize, Russell, & Pettit, 1998, p. 42). Sometimes, however, these features may be enacted with no specific goal in mind. When goal driven, authoritative parents will still be more likely to use connection, regulation, and autonomy-granting practices than will more coercive parents.

Parents may not intentionally act to foster children's peer relationship skills and social-communicative competence but accomplish precisely that end. For example, when reasoning about consequences for certain actions (e.g., picking flowers in the neighbor's flower garden) or playing a mutually enjoyable game with a child, parents are likely engaged with other goals in mind and are likely not considering how these interactions might be fostering social-communicative skills that carry over into peer-group interaction. Thus, these interactions may have indirect and unintentional positive implications in the peer arena; however, when unintentional style effects on peer competence are examined together with intentional practices used to foster social development, research indicates that both parenting style and practice make independent contributions to children's social-communicative competence (Mize & Pettit, 1997).

We now consider parenting practices that parents intentionally employ to foster social competence in children. These practices can embody authoritative, coercive, or permissive stylistic features in how they are enacted. As will be seen, the function of each of the following practices is generally to foster social skills and social awareness in ways that result in sociable outcomes. There is considerable variation in whether these parenting practices are employed, however, as well as in ways stylistic features associated with these practices result in positive sociable or negative internalizing and externalizing outcomes for young children. Our discussion centers around ways that parental involvement in initiating peer contacts, supervising, or advising and consulting has been found to enhance sociability in young children.

**Initiation Practices.** Early research findings suggested that preschoolers with mothers who bridged between their child and playmates by fostering child-peer contacts had a larger number of playmates and more consistent play companions in their informal nonschool networks (Ladd & Golter, 1988). Children with initiating mothers were also found to spend more time playing in peers' homes. This, in turn, was associated with better classroom adjustment and greater acceptance by peers

(Ladd, Hart, Wadsworth, & Golter, 1988). Other findings have linked parental initiations to child sociability in preschool classrooms (Ladd & Hart, 1992), higher levels of peer acceptance for boys (Ladd & Golter, 1988; Ladd & Hart, 1992), and more stable and closer relationships among school-age friends (Krappman, 1989). Involvement, particularly on the part of mothers, is most effective when parents play a mediating role by "scaffolding" (e.g., verbally coaching about how to extend invitations to play) their child's peer engagements (Ladd & Hart, 1992). Positive involvement in this manner reflects authoritative regulatory features.

Interestingly, recent findings suggest that mothers from a variety of cultural contexts are more prone to facilitate peer contacts if their children are perceived by teachers as being more socially inept (Hart et al., 1998). This raises the possibility that some parents may view peer associations as serving a remedial role for children with social skill deficiencies. They may adjust their parenting practices accordingly to provide meaningful associations with peers. Alternatively, evidence suggests that mothers who perceive their children to be more sociable, and who believe that child social skills are important, are more likely to play an active role in the further socialization of these competencies (e.g., Mize et al., 1995; Prinstein, 1997; Proflet & Ladd, 1994). In summary, parents of young children who are involved in initiating peer-group interactions are likely to foster social competencies with peers. Parents also appear to adjust their parenting practices according to perceived social skill strengths and deficits seen in their children.

**Supervision Practices.** The strategies that parents use to supervise peer-group interactions and advise their children about peer-group issues have also been linked to child social-communicative outcomes with peers. Variations in these practices reflect both regulatory features of coercive parenting as well as positive regulatory and autonomy-granting features of authoritative parenting. For example, higher levels of maternal involvement, coupled with disruptive interventions and irrelevant or power assertive communications, are related to less socially skilled child behavior with peers (Mize et al., 1995). Alternatively, Finnie and Russell (1988) and Russell and Finnie (1990) obtained evidence suggesting that less intrusive (e.g., not taking direct charge of activities), group-oriented communication lends itself to children being more liked by peers (e.g., mothers making statements about what the other children are doing and encouraging their children to fit into the ongoing play). For older children, parental monitoring (tracking and surveillance) is important for reducing antisocial behavior; however, this practice is likely more effective when parental knowledge about a child's whereabouts and activities is based on voluntary child disclosure in a "connected" parent-child relationship than on parental intrusiveness (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Pettit et al., 2001).

**Advising and Consulting Practices.** How parents consult with their children about how to initiate friendships, manage conflicts, and identify solutions to interpersonal problems can go far in helping children negotiate their peer culture (cf. Flannagan, 1996; Flannagan & Baker-Ward, 1996). There is some evidence to suggest that parental communication patterns are linked to variations in child abilities to communicate in socially contingent ways (e.g., Black & Logan, 1995). It is also widely believed that these skills are enhanced or diminished in the context of reciprocal parent-child turn-taking communication activities. This provides a discourse structure from which children learn communicative rules of social engagement (Lamb, Ketterlinus, & Fracasso, 1992; Stafford & Bayer, 1993).

For helping children learn how to negotiate their social world, parents often engage them in “decontextualized discussions” that can occur during dinner, after school, before bedtime, or during travel (Ladd, Profilet, & Hart, 1992). Proficiently consulting with children entails considerable creativity and skill (e.g., Kuczynski, 1984; Ladd & Le Sieur, 1995) and can be designed to prepare children to face future social dilemmas (e.g., discussing how to dissuade a bully) or can provide a sounding board for children’s self-generated solutions (e.g., for how to mend a friendship). Research on parental advising and consulting practices has also been conducted in contrived laboratory and in peer-group settings. Parental engagement reflecting authoritative connection and autonomy-granting features has been positively associated with child sociability. Such engagement may include frequent conversations in which there is reciprocity in turn taking, high quality of advice that is relevant to resolving a peer issue, good listening skills, and warmth (Laird, Pettit, Mize, Brown, & Lindsey, 1994; Profilet & Ladd, 1996; Putallaz, 1987; Russell & Finnie, 1990). Alternatively, coercive maternal consulting that is intrusive and focused on blaming the child for social shortcomings has been linked to childhood withdrawal from peers (Profilet & Ladd, 1996).

Although the literature reviewed thus far seems to suggest that optimal parenting matters, there is considerable controversy about this conclusion. As noted earlier, there are varying views about how important parenting is to children’s development. We now consider the view that parents don’t matter and provide our response.

## DO PARENTS MATTER?

Recent highly publicized reviews of research on parenting have concluded that there is no evidence that parenting in the home is related to ways children behave outside of the home (see Harris, 1995, 1998, pp. 75–77, 296, 330). Only genetics and peers matter in children’s social development (Harris, 2002). This conclusion was made by drawing heavily on behavior-genetics research; Harris also cited—and misrepresents—a paper coauthored by the senior author of this chapter (Ladd et al., 1992). Harris’s conclusion has been called into question by a number of scholars (Collins et al., 2000; Parke et al., 2002; Vandell, 2000; Wachs, 2000), with opportunities for rebuttal (e.g., Harris, 2000; Loehlin, 2001; Rowe, 2001). We now briefly consider several issues that extend already published work on the topic (see also Borkowski, Ramey, & Bristol-Power, 2002; Hart, 1999).

First, in addition to other purported methodological flaws that are addressed elsewhere (Vandell, 2000), Harris denounces parenting research (2000, p. 712) for shared method variance problems (e.g., parents reporting on their own behavior as well as their child’s); however, the majority of studies cited in this chapter (but overlooked in the Harris critiques) have used different informants for measuring parenting and peer-group behavior in ways that overcome this problem. Findings regarding parenting-peer-group linkages are remarkably consistent across studies that use observational or self-report measures of parenting and teacher or observational ratings of child social behavior (cf. Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998). Studies cited in this chapter (including Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998) often show stronger cross-contextual correlations (e.g., between home and school) than what Harris (2000, p. 718) credited.

Second, socialization research is criticized for not documenting the direction of effect (whether parents influence children or children influence parents). Yet at least 20 major longitudinal investigations conducted over the past decade were not considered in this critique (e.g., Bates et al., 1998; Booth, Rose-Krasnor, McKinnon, & Rubin, 1994; Bronstein et al., 1996; Carlson, 1998; Kochanska, Aksan, & Koenig

1995; McGuire, Dunn, & Plomin, 1995; Pettit & Bates, 1989). Results clearly indicate that parents have lasting influence on children's behavior outside of the home, as reflected in independent measures of parenting and peer interaction (e.g., Elicker et al., 1992; McFadyen-Ketchum et al., 1996; Pettit et al., 1996, 1997; 2001).

Although claims of causation running from parent to child are not entirely conclusive (cf. Baumrind et al., 2002; Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Nix et al., 1999), these investigations do suggest that direction of effect can go from parent to child, at least in terms of parental influence maintaining child behavioral patterns or bidirectional parent-child interactive processes that play out in peer relations (e.g., Bradley et al., 2001; Dodge, Pettit et al., 1995; Heller & Baker, 2000; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Kochanska & Murray, 2000; Shaw et al., 1994; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Zhou et al., 2002). This in no way discounts the perspective that the effectiveness of parenting can vary for children with different dispositions as we noted earlier (cf. Vandell, 2000). We have cited ample evidence suggesting that parent behaviors likely enhance or mitigate child dispositional tendencies towards sociability, internalizing, and externalizing both inside and outside of the home. Taken together, this literature contradicts the view that parents only differentially respond to varying child dispositions and have no influence on their behavior outside of the home (see Harris, 1998, p. 48; Harris, 2000, pp. 712, 715, 717).

Third, Harris (1998) criticizes parenting research by suggesting that socialization effects can only be artificially contrived in diverse rather than in homogenous samples that include, for example, similar socioeconomic groupings of parents and children rather than mixed socioeconomic groupings. Numerous studies conducted in homogenous groupings discount this claim (e.g., Barber & Harmon, 2002; Baumrind, 1993, 1997; Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992; Hart, Nelson, et al., 1998; Shumow et al., 1998; Wachs, 2000). Although there are some exceptions (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Stormshak et al., 2000), research consistently shows that coercive parenting is associated with similar types of child peer-group behavior problems in middle-class samples as well as in disadvantaged samples (e.g., Hart, DeWolf, & Burts, 1992; Hart et al., 1990).

Fourth, drawing primarily from behavioral-genetic research, Harris argued that genetics and peers matter, not parents. Notwithstanding limitations in behavioral-genetic methodology (Collins et al., 2000), it should be kept in mind that results from classic designs using this approach can only say that many sibling similarities may be primarily due to genetics. Sibling similarities in behavioral adjustment are linked to shared parental treatment, even after controlling for genetic similarity (Deater-Deckard, 2000); however, the direction of effect leading from child genetics to parenting or vice versa cannot be ascertained in these designs. Nonshared environmental effects show up in all behavioral-genetic studies. When differences in parental behavior toward siblings covary with sibling differences in behavioral adjustment, it is still unknown if sibling behavioral differences are a cause or consequence of parental differential treatment. As Deater-Deckard (2000) pointed out, root causes of sibling differences are typically unspecified in behavioral-genetic research because it is difficult to determine whether they result from shared (e.g., different child perceptions of and reactions to the same parenting) or from nonshared environmental sources (e.g., differential parental treatment). Thus, behavioral-genetic research cannot say whether parents matter or not. These studies can only indicate that many things that parents do similarly with siblings often do not make siblings turn out the same. In critiques of parenting research, sibling differences reflected in nonshared effects have been attributed only to forces outside the family, namely peers (Harris, 1998, 2000, 2002). Pike (2002) noted that these claims were made in the

absence of studies that consider whether peer-group characteristics, like parenting styles, might also correspond with genetic influence. Contrary to the assumption that only peers matter beyond genetics, this leaves ample room for the importance of parents as contributors to child outcomes (cf. Parke et al., 2002). Indeed, there is convincing data to suggest that both parents and peers matter in children's social-communicative competence (e.g., MacKinnon-Lewis, Rabiner, & Starnes, 1999; Parke et al., 2002; Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999; Vandell, 2000).

Finally, there is evidence from intervention studies indicating that parents do matter. Although these studies do have methodological limitations (see Borkowski, et al., 2002; Harris, 2000), several investigators have used experimental designs, including random assignment to treatment groups in which parenting skills have been modified (see Vandell, 2000). A number of these studies have demonstrated subsequent changes in child behavioral-communicative outcomes within and outside of the home (see Tremblay et al., 1992; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997; Yoshikawa, 1994). As will be seen in the next section, even though not all studies have reached this conclusion, there is available supporting evidence.

## **INTERVENTIONS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL-COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN CHILDREN AND PARENTS**

We have reviewed how parents' socialization and communication practices and styles are linked to children's social and communicative competence; however, much of the parent intervention literature does not focus on children's social or communicative competence as outcome variables, concentrating instead on academic aspects of children's development. The purpose of this section is to examine recent intervention research, with an eye toward helping interventionists consider a number of issues in designing future programs that could enhance child outcomes and parenting skills in ways that promote social-communicative competence. We first consider the aims and elements of successful interventions and the need for quality intervention studies. This is followed by a summary of conceptual and methodological issues in intervention studies. We conclude by discussing selected intervention programs that have particular relevance in promoting social-communicative competency skills.

### **Aims and Elements of Successful Interventions**

It is common for developers of interventions to focus on supportive parenting, as reflected in features of authoritative styles, which can foster children's social competence, self-esteem, self-reliance, adaptability, and school achievement (Bronstein et al., 1998). Many of the programs available reflect efforts to operationalize this information into practical interventions designed to help parents and children who are struggling.

Interventions have increasingly targeted different relationships within the family system, such as the marital dyad, mother-child dyad, and father-child dyad (Cowan, Powell, & Cowan, 1998). Other parent education programs provide a variety of emotional, informational, and instrumental support to families, as well as striving to develop family ties to formal and informal support networks. Such networks have been found to have an indirect effect on children's behavioral development through their effect on parenting (Yoshikawa, 1994).

Perceptions, expectations, and beliefs also appear to be important factors contributing to decisions about and success in participating in a training program or intervention activity (Powell, 1998). For example, researchers indicate that the most common factor preventing parents' participation in intervention or education programs was the belief that the program would not make a difference for their child (Powell, 1998).

Yoshikawa (1994) identified the following common elements of successful interventions: (a) produces effects on multiple risk factors, such as ineffective parenting or child behavior; (b) includes ecological, multiple-setting designs, providing support in multiple settings, such as peer groups, schools, and families; (c) involves urban, low-income populations; (d) continues for at least 2 years; and (e) is implemented during the child's first 5 years of life. Unfortunately, many interventions do not meet these criteria.

These elements support the aim of early family support and education, facilitating the optimal development of the child and family (Yoshikawa, 1994). A holistic approach—parent, child, and context—provides the most effective means of positive intervention and the enhancement of social–communicative skills.

## The Need for Quality Intervention Approaches

Cowan et al. (1998) present four explanations that proponents use to justify a need for parent and family interventions. First, parents are central to children's development, but they lack natural competence and need direction. Second, traditional parenting practices may not be effective and need revising in light of scientific findings. Third, there is a need to reinstitute traditional family structures and practices that have been shown to shore up families in light of contemporary family disarray. Fourth, families need support in coping with the stressors of modern life (e.g., financial, medical, child-rearing concerns, drugs, and negative peer influences).

To address these needs, a diverse and considerable body of intervention-related studies and programs has been developed. A range of programs is available; however, empirically validated programs are few, and the programs that have been widely disseminated are those with the least evidence about their effectiveness (Cowan et al., 1998).

## Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Intervention

Reviews of the parent–child intervention literature conducted over the past decade have considered the strengths and weaknesses of various intervention approaches and have yielded different conclusions (e.g., Bryant, Vizzard, Willoughby, Kupersmidt, 1999; Cowan et al., 1998; Howrigan, 1988; Mash & Barkley, 1998; McFadyen-Ketchum & Dodge, 1998; Powell, 1994; White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992; Yoshikawa, 1994). A number of reviews have concluded that early childhood interventions show promise in preventing delinquency later on (Farran, 1990; Farrington et al., 1990; Kazdin, 1990; Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992). Powell's (1994) evaluation of family support and education programs identified "mixed" as well as "promising directions." Others, however, have questioned the usefulness or effectiveness of interventions due to methodological problems, limitations in evaluation methodologies, and mixed results of program effects (e.g., Eddy, Dishion, & Stoolmiller, 1998; Gorman & Balter, 1997; Harris, 2000; White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992). Thus, the opinions regarding the efficacy of early intervention programs range from optimism to despair.

In highlighting less optimistic views of intervention effectiveness, White et al. (1992) posited that in previous well-controlled studies, the “almost universal perception” regarding the benefit of parent involvement and education has not been found to be valid. Reasons for the null effects may include (a) using parents as supplemental interveners with their children, (b) poor implementation strategies, and (c) being at the beginning stages of measuring the effects of parent involvement and education activities on parents and family members. These problems appear to be exacerbated by the lack of agreement about the definition of parent involvement and education (Galper, 1998).

Recently, Cowan et al. (1998) identified a number of methodological standards that will help to overcome design and measurement flaws in existing intervention studies. These standards include the following:

samples larger than 10 to 15 families; inclusion of fathers as well as mothers; inclusion of no-treatment or alternative-treatment controls; random assignment to experimental conditions, and multi-measure, multimethod assessments that include parent self-reports, parents' reports about children, observations of parents' behavior, and independent assessments by both teachers and researchers of outcomes such as children's cognitive and social competence and behavior problems. . . . [and] data from children's perspective. (p. 54)

Cowan et al. lamented the fact that recent literature reviews show that “only a handful of studies” meet more than one or two of these criteria.

## Specific Parent–Child Focused Intervention Programs

In this section, we offer an overview a few selected intervention programs developed in the past decade that have been found to enhance social–communicative skills or diminish negative behavioral and communication patterns (see also Baumrind et al., 2002). This narrowing of focus necessarily eliminates many interventions that enhance academic and cognitive skills, as well as programs that focus exclusively on changing parental behavior (e.g., Smith, Perou, & Lesesne, 2002). In addition, programs that primarily involve contexts beyond the family (such as schools) are not included even though they often have a parent intervention component (for example, Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999; Olweus, 1994; Reynolds, 1994). For a current review, see Eisenberg and Valiente (2002).

The role of parenting in child behavioral outcomes has been researched extensively by Patterson (1982) and his colleagues (Patterson et al., 1992; Patterson, Dishion, & Chamberlain, 1993) at the Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC). This seminal parenting training effort has focused on replacing negative parent–child interactions with more positive ones, so that children will learn to use positive ways to deal with others (see Dumas, 1989; McMahon & Wells, 1989; McFayden-Ketchum & Dodge, 1998).

Results from the OSLC program suggest that interventions targeting parenting skills can help diminish aggressive behavior in children as reciprocally coercive chains of parent–child interaction are broken (Patterson & Fisher, 2002). In random assignment studies, interventions that are successful in reducing child antisocial behavior require that parents be trained to consistently reinforce sociable behavior and to use punishments that are authoritatively regulating in nature (rather than authoritarian), such as implementing natural or logical consequences (Forgatch & Patterson, 1989).

The basic assumption is that using more effective (authoritative) regulations directly reinforces prosocial behaviors and reduces the reinforcement for deviant behavior (Stoolmiller et al., 1997).

Tremblay et al. (1992), using an intervention model based on OSLC, taught a series of social–communicative skills to parents over the course of 2 years. Compared with control peers, treatment children showed lower levels of teacher-rated externalizing, higher levels of school achievement, and higher levels of overall teacher- and peer-rated adjustment, as well as less self-reported delinquent behavior (cf. McFayden-Ketchum & Dodge, 1998).

Another intervention project that focused parents on different aspects of authoritative skills in working with their children during the early childhood years comes from the Houston Parent-Child Development Center. The first year of the project, paraprofessionals visited mothers from low-income Mexican American families 25 times for 1.5-hour sessions, in which they taught about child development, parenting skills, and the home as a learning environment. Siblings and fathers also participated in several weekend sessions. The second year, mother and child came to the project center 4 days a week and participated in classes on child management, child cognitive development, family communication skills, and other topics. The experimental-group mothers were more likely to be affectionate and responsive with their children, as well as less punishing than control-group mothers as a result of the intervention. In 5- to 8-year follow-ups, their children were rated by teachers as being less aggressive, impulsive, and disruptive when compared with control-group children (Johnson & Walker, 1987).

Draper, Larsen, and Rowles (1997) evaluated a parent education program designed to teach parents general principles of developmentally appropriate child-rearing practices. Lessons included topics such as positive parent–child relationships, effective family discipline and communication, and individual and age differences in children. Instructional content was conveyed in one of three ways: reading lesson materials, listening to cassette tapes, or receiving instruction via home visits. The goal was to have a positive effect on the emotional climate in the home by focusing on family communication, organization, and the exercise of supportive leadership, as well as developmentally appropriate parenting emphasizing authoritative connection and autonomy granting in parent–child interactions. In assessments conducted at the end of the program, Draper et al. found that compared with control parents, program participants were less likely to engage in conflict and more likely to take a supportive leadership role (lowered task expectations, focusing more on process than outcome) in various puzzle-solving tasks with their children. Preschoolers in participating families showed better social skills than children in nonparticipating families. This was due in part to reductions in family conflict.

Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1997) compared the effects of three types of interventions (parent training, child training, parent and child training) on children with early-onset conduct problems. In the “child training” group, children between the ages of 4 and 7 years old who had been diagnosed with early-onset conduct problems attended 22 two-hour sessions in which they watched vignettes of children coping with interpersonal difficulties normally encountered by children their age. Therapists discussed each vignette, eliciting children’s reactions, ideas, and questions. In the “parent training” group, parents of children with early-onset conduct problems met weekly for 22 weeks with a therapist for 2-hour sessions, in which they viewed videotaped programs on parenting and interpersonal skills. A third group received both child and parent training. After completion of the intervention, children’s

behavior was compared with that of a control group. Results indicated that child training combined with parent training was superior to either one alone. Combined parent and child training resulted in improved parent-child interaction, improved behavior at home, and better conflict management and social problem-solving skills. One-year follow-up assessments showed the improvements had been maintained.

Bronstein et al.'s (1998) Aware Parenting intervention with lower income families builds on a model that includes five components: support, attentiveness, responsiveness, guidance, and receptivity to emotion. A couple's group and a single mother's group met weekly for 2-hour sessions over 11 consecutive weeks. Each session focused on one of the components and included facilitators sharing information, group discussion, and instructional exercises, such as role playing. Among other things, the mothers who attended the education and support groups reported positive changes in parenting, including higher levels of responsiveness, guidance, and receptivity to emotion, as well as improved communication. Those parenting changes were reflected in positive child behavioral outcomes over time, including treatment-condition children making a more positive adjustment to middle school compared with control-condition children, who experienced a decline in adjustment.

McNeil, Capage, Bahl, and Blanc (1999) assigned 32 families of young children who had been referred for treatment of disruptive behavior to either a treatment or wait-list control group. Parents in the treatment group received a 12-week parenting program in which therapists taught them skills that promoted prosocial behavior, as well as authoritative discipline strategies. The behavior of children in the treatment group improved over the 3-month treatment period, whereas the behavior of children in the control group remained problematic. In addition, at the end of the intervention, treatment parents scored significantly lower on the parenting stress index than control parents.

Sanders, Montgomery, and Brechman-Toussaint (2000) used a 12-episode television series as an intervention and evaluated its impact on disruptive child behavior and family adjustment. Participants were randomly assigned to either a wait-list control group (WL) or to watch the television series (TV), which covered topics such as authoritative parenting strategies that could be used to address common behavioral problems, teaching children new skills, and helping them master difficult tasks. Each segment was of approximately 20 to 30 minutes' duration and parents also received written self-help information sheets. Parents in the TV condition, when compared with the WL group, reported significantly lower levels of disruptive child behavior and higher levels of perceived parenting competence immediately following intervention. All postintervention effects were maintained at 6-month follow-up.

Cowan et al. (1998) noted that many intervention programs focus on teaching discipline skills to parents of children who are aggressive, whereas few programs focus specifically on how to help parents who have children who are anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or manifest other internalizing problems. One exception is recent research completed by Spence, Donovan, and Toussaint (2000), who conducted an intervention for children aged 7 to 14 years who had a principal diagnosis of social phobia. Children were randomly assigned to one of three groups: waiting-list control (WLC), cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT), or CBT plus parent involvement. The CBT program involved social skills training, social problem solving, positive self-instruction, cognitive challenging, and graded exposure to social situations. The intervention involved 12 one-hour sessions, conducted weekly, followed by two booster sessions, one at 3 months and one at 6 months after course completion. Each treatment session was structured to be age-appropriate, was followed by a half-hour social practice "games" session, and included a weekly homework task.

Parents were taught to authoritatively prompt, model, and encourage appropriate social skills. Compared to control children, significantly fewer children in both treatment conditions retained a clinical diagnosis of social phobia. There was a reduction in problem social skills and general anxiety among children in both treatment groups, which was retained at the 12-month follow-up.

## **Summary and Implications**

Interventions, such as those mentioned above, assist parents and children in the development of social and communication skills that lead to positive outcomes; however, they face numerous challenges at multiple levels. The contributions of intervention research and several of the programs highlighted here are significant and worth noting: the behavior of parents and children often changed in positive ways and the intervention studies went beyond correlational studies in informing us about mechanisms of change (Cowan et al., 1998).

Some long-term outcome data that include externalizing and internalizing child behaviors indicate that interventions focused on both parent-child interactions at home and on teacher-child and peer-child interactions in the school may produce the greatest long-term gains (McFadyen-Ketchum & Dodge, 1998; Yoshikawa, 1994). Consequently, effective intervention programs must look to the whole child and consider the contexts of family, parents, school, peers, and each unique individual as potential objects of intervention activity.

In identifying directions for future studies, Cowan et al. (1998) discussed specific research questions regarding interventions that remain unanswered including the following: (a) Is work with parents essential to affecting children's outcomes? (b) What is the role of parents' and children's gender in parenting intervention? (c) What are the mechanisms of change in parenting interventions? (d) What is the most effective parenting intervention for a specific family? and (e) How long do intervention effects last?

In answering these and other questions, a need exists for long-term, multiple follow-up assessments in multiple settings and continued research on effective, comprehensive, practical intervention approaches that will enhance both child and parent social and communication skills which, in turn, may improve relationships, diminish problem behaviors, and promote positive outcomes. Parent-child social communicative intervention seems to be a process that is logically, even intuitively beneficial, yet it clearly warrants more rigorous scientific attention from family, developmental, and communication researchers.

## **GENERAL SUMMARY**

Children vary considerably in their expression of social-communicative competence. Research has provided an understanding of how socially skilled children are better able to read the emotional states of others, have appropriate expectations for how their behavior will impact peers in interpersonal conflict situations, and communicate in socially contingent and relevant ways during social interaction. Children lacking these skills are more likely to exhibit externalizing or internalizing difficulties in peer group interactions. Molecular genetics, behavioral genetics, temperament, and physiological research have provided clues as to possible biological predispositions that lend themselves to the expression of more or less socially skilled behavior.

How biological propensities play out in social behavior depends in part on interactions with the child-rearing environment. Children with varying dispositions may

evoke unique responses from parents and seek out social experiences that best fit their constitutional natures. They may also respond to parenting behaviors according to how experiences are filtered through their individual perceptions. Thus, parental influence has been generally thought to operate within the constraints of child genetics; however, more recent evidence suggests that parenting behaviors can serve to enhance or diminish children's biological predispositions. The temperament and disposition of each child can vary significantly within the same family, and consequently the relationship between parents and different siblings is dynamic and unique, with each individual responding to and modifying the behavior of the other (cf. Bell & Chapman, 1986; Dumas & LaFreniere, 1995; Lytton, 1990; Nix et al., 1999; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Just as child nature can evoke different socialization practices on the part of parents, parents can also proactively serve to enhance or diminish positive or negative social-communicative characteristics in children, depending on the styles and practices that they employ. Reciprocal transactions between parent and child likely play out for better or worse in children's sociable, internalizing, and externalizing behavior (e.g., Dumas & LaFreniere, 1995; Kandel & Wu, 1995). Discovering and maintaining the right fit between parenting and individual child temperament is one of the most challenging aspects of child rearing. It requires considerable flexibility and creativity.

The most flexible approach to parenting is the authoritative style. Parents who skillfully read their child's predispositions strive to tailor connection, regulation, and autonomy granting features across developmental time frames, varying types of child transgressions, and disciplinary versus nondisciplinary contexts according to individual child needs. By adjusting to individual child characteristics and engaging in specific practices designed to foster social and communicative competence (e.g., initiating peer contacts, advising and consulting), research suggests that parents are more likely to help their children become more socially skilled in peer group interaction. Children of parents who do so are less likely to display internalizing and externalizing difficulties during social interactions with peers. Alternatively, all-fits-one approaches to parental control exemplified by coercive and psychologically controlling parenting styles increase the likelihood that children will experience social and communicative deficits.

Contrary to recent views suggesting that parents matter little in children's development beyond the influence of genetics and peers, there is ample evidence to suggest that genetics, parents, and even peers all play vital roles in the development of child social and communicative competence. The results of a number of recent intervention studies, for example, indicate that when negative parenting behavior is modified to correspond with features of authoritative styles, child behavior inside and outside the home can change accordingly in positive ways. Taken together, the research reviewed herein suggests that parenting represents a complex interplay between nature and nurture. How parents practice features of authoritative, coercive, and permissive styles in interactions with their children can have far-reaching implications for child adjustment in peer group interactions.

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PART

# V

SKILLS IN PUBLIC AND PROFESSIONAL  
CONTEXTS



CHAPTER

# 20

## NEGOTIATION SKILLS

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Negotiation processes pervade our daily lives. Whether we are buying a house, negotiating a contract at work, or bargaining with a spouse to see a movie, we often decide among an array of options through exchanges with others. Although negotiation is associated with collective bargaining (Stevens, 1963), buyer-seller transactions (Karass, 1970), and international diplomacy (Lall, 1966), interest in negotiation has expanded and scholars have found it fruitful to study negotiation in the workplace (Strauss, 1978), marital settings (Scanzoni & Godwin, 1990), and legal contexts (Van Koppen, 1990).

When a particular behavior such as negotiation is valued, formal research is conducted to identify the skills that lead to effective enactment of that behavior, the results of which form the basis for educational and training programs that help individuals acquire skills. From this perspective, to be skillful implies that one can act in a manner that meets or surpasses criteria or indicators of effectiveness. Negotiation skills, then, refer to a subset of knowledge and behaviors that influence bargaining performance (Lewicki, 1997). These skills are effective when they achieve negotiation goals or when they grow out of an understanding of the process that surpasses minimal performance. The goal of skill development in negotiation is to teach students how to create something new that neither party could achieve independently so that they can resolve complex problems through bargaining (Lewicki, 1986).

Achieving this goal results in a number of significant benefits. Effective negotiators often obtain resources, develop contracts, and reach tough agreements in situations that could have otherwise broken down (Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 1999). A second benefit of negotiation is to manage conflict effectively and to avoid capitulating, withdrawing, or relying on decisions made by higher authorities. Effective negotiation means that parties collaborate in decisions about their own fate and build healthy relationships through working with other disputants. Skill in negotiation also entails

effectively managing the intangible aspects of conflict management, such as adapting to psychological motivations, saving face, and balancing power difference. Thus, effectiveness in negotiation is linked to career success, often derived from adapting to, analyzing, and addressing complex problems.

Negotiation effectiveness is not only beneficial, but it overcomes the missed opportunities arising from poor negotiation skills. One consequence of weak skill development is the failure to recognize that a situation calls for bargaining (Lewicki et al., 1999). In such cases, individuals manage problems ineffectively or pass up opportunities to reach their goals. Poor skill development and failure to understand what bargaining entails also leads to exploitation, lose–lose outcomes, suboptimal solutions, rigid and inflexible positions, escalation, and dysfunctional conflicts. For example, a married couple negotiating about their summer vacation might end up angry and frustrated, thus leading to a lose–lose outcome of deciding to take separate vacations. Moreover, inability to bargain in good faith may lead to a stalemate or impasse in which no settlement is reached. Thus, good negotiation skills help parties obtain their goals, resolve conflict effectively, and build healthy relationships, whereas deficiencies in skill development result in lost opportunities, inability to achieve goals, suboptimal settlements, and conflict escalation.

Another problem with negotiation skill development is that trainers often approach their work through the narrow lens of one discipline. Even though some training materials are quite good, many of them suffer from a rather narrow conception of the skills required to negotiate successfully. To some degree, this myopia arises from the training and research interests that fail to bridge the myriad of disciplines in which negotiation research occurs, including economics, management, law, urban planning, political science, sociology, psychology, communication, and marketing (Lewicki, 1997; Shell, 1999). Although the study of negotiation is multidisciplinary, relevant knowledge typically occurs within a disciplinary home and does not diffuse beyond the academic boundaries in which it was conducted.

Discipline-based research on negotiation is not inherently deficient. Indeed, scholars trained to focus on a particular aspect of negotiation can discover important tendencies that would be overlooked by those who lack such a specific lens. Negotiation is a complex phenomenon, however, and no research program has articulated a single set of necessary and sufficient negotiation skills (Lewicki, 1997). Hence, to understand negotiation, students need to acquire knowledge from a variety of domains. To achieve this end, we adopt a multidisciplinary approach in this chapter and examine scholarship from a wide array of fields.

Although we review scholarship published in a variety of fields, the formidable size of the negotiation literature forced us to set boundaries for studies to include in our review. First, we centered on empirical research on the skills possessed by individual negotiators. Hence, we excluded opinion pieces and those that relied on the experiences of a single negotiator, unless these conceptual reviews addressed training or pedagogy in negotiation. Second, we concentrated on empirical research that set forth criteria for evaluating skill effectiveness. Because individuals possess skills, we excluded studies in which the group was the unit of analysis. Finally, we did not review research on related topics such as conflict management or third-party intervention (e.g., mediation or arbitration). Even with these exclusions, we found a substantial body of relevant research.

This chapter begins by defining negotiation and distinguishes it from related constructs. Next we review two approaches to the study of negotiation skills—expert based and outcome based. Expert-based approaches rely on the opinions and

behavior of professional negotiations to identify skills and they include skill nomination, reputational surveys, and behavioral observation. Outcome-based approaches are not restricted to studying a particular group of negotiators, but instead focus on behaviors and strategies that are statistically related to the ability of negotiators to achieve their own outcomes, joint outcomes, and relational outcomes. Finally, we center on negotiation training and pedagogy through exploring the goals and content of training programs, types of skills included, teaching and training methods, and effectiveness of these approaches.

## DEFINITION AND APPROACHES TO NEGOTIATION

Sawyer and Guetzkow (1965) characterized negotiation as “a process through which two or more parties—be they individuals, groups, or larger social units—interact in developing potential agreements to provide guidance and regulation to their future behavior” (p. 466). From this perspective, negotiation is a communication-based activity through which parties attempt to create understandings, agreements, or contracts that define the nature of their future interdependence. Interdependence is a key element in negotiation because parties depend on each other to attain their goals and at the same time they are competing for resources and striving for divergent ends. Hence, negotiation is mixed motive, in that parties both cooperate and compete through their social interaction.

These characteristics distinguish negotiation from related types of social interaction, such as persuasion, argumentation, compliance gaining, conflict management, and group decision making. In negotiation, parties exchange proposals, explore and define issues, and conceal weaknesses in their position while revealing options, whereas in persuasion, one party is trying to get the other party to do something he or she would not ordinarily do. In argumentation, parties assert claims and support these claims with evidence and reasoning. Both argumentation and persuasion occur outside of conflict situations and in circumstances other than those characterized by perceived incompatibilities; hence, both are communicative processes that are broadly applied to a variety of situations. Thus, as a form of social interaction, negotiation employs persuasion and argumentation, but it extends beyond these arenas to create and manage exchanges, deal with mixed-motive interactions, and formulate acceptable solutions (Putnam & Roloff, 1992).

In like manner, negotiation differs from compliance gaining, a process that employs persuasion and influence strategies. Even though tactics such as threats and promises are used in both arenas, negotiation interaction entails unique processes such as issue development and developing creative solutions that move beyond tactical and persuasive appeals. In some ways, negotiation resembles group decision making in that persuasion and argumentation are communicative activities that occur within the deliberation process of group members. Negotiation differs from group problem solving in that, to maximize self-interests or joint gain, disputants develop preset proposals before they enter the process. Hence, both negotiation and group decision making employ exploratory problem solving, but negotiation searches for an acceptable agreement through making concessions and exploring options in a mixed-motive environment.

Finally, negotiation resembles conflict management; in fact, bargaining is a way to manage incompatibilities through finding mutually acceptable solutions. Thus, negotiation parallels a classic style of conflict management, compromise, as a way to uncover options, reframe the situation, and explore potential settlements. But

negotiation is only one way to approach conflict management. In summary, negotiation is a unique form of social interaction—one that is rooted in managing conflict and addressing perceived incompatibilities. Its mixed-motive nature, concern for constituents' interests and positions, and activity of exchanging proposals and counterproposals make it a unique arena of social interaction.

Another distinctive element about negotiation arises from its traditional role as a means to determine how resources will be exchanged or distributed. Indeed, the etymological root of the word negotiation is the Latin term *negotiari*, which means to transact business (Bell, 1988). Scholars have identified two perspectives that guide a negotiation over an exchange, each of which involves different strategies and skills (Walton & McKersie, 1965). A distributive perspective involves a desire for self-gain in which negotiators set targets for preferred settlements, resistance points for walking away from the process, and ways for claiming maximum value. From a distributive perspective, parties should make extreme opening offers, concede slowly, exaggerate the value of concessions, conceal information, argue forcefully, and get the other party to move toward his or her resistance point (Lax & Sebenius, 1986). An integrative perspective reflects a desire to maximize the interests of both parties through expanding the pie, creating value, and attaining win-win solutions. Rooted in joint decision making, successful integrative negotiation hinges on open exchange of information, being inventive and cooperative, and finding common interests.

Although distributive and integrative perspectives seem mutually exclusive, some negotiations draw heavily from both types of processes, either in sequences or at different times during the interaction (Putnam, 1990). Effective negotiation, however, requires skills that draw from both models and that enable bargainers to pursue only one or a combination of both processes. Recently, training programs in negotiation have concentrated heavily on developing integrative bargaining skills because negotiators often have difficulty uncovering common interests, creating value, and working collaboratively to reach agreement (Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1994; Friedman, 1993; Lewicki, 1997), but bargainers also aim to sharpen their skills in distributive negotiation.

Negotiation, then, is a unique form of social interaction that incorporates argumentation, persuasion, and information exchange into reaching agreements and working out future interdependence. As a mixed-motive endeavor, negotiation can develop through distributive processes aimed at maximizing self-interest, centering on positions, and claiming optimal value, or it can evolve in a "win-win" manner in which parties pursue common interests, seek creative options, and engage in cooperative problem solving. Different types of negotiation skills accompany these processes and lead to effectiveness in achieving a bargainer's own outcomes, joint outcomes, and relational outcomes.

Because negotiation research is interdisciplinary, there is considerable variation as to what constitutes skills-based research. Indeed, many different indicators of effectiveness have been used to identify negotiation skills and each has produced somewhat different findings. Our literature review reflects two general approaches to negotiator effectiveness: expert-based and outcome-based indicators. Within each approach, we focus on the criteria used to assess negotiation skills and the research findings regarding effective and ineffective use of these skills.

## EXPERT-BASED APPROACHES

Expert-based approaches to research focus on the actions of individuals who negotiate as part of their profession. As such, these approaches share an assumption

that the best way to identify effective negotiation skills is to examine the behavior of individuals who have experience or expertise in negotiation. We review the research associated with three methodological variations commonly used in the expert-based approach: (a) skill nomination, (b) reputational survey, and (c) behavioral observation.

## Skill Nomination

One way to identify key negotiation abilities is to ask professional negotiators what skills they think are important. In an early example of this research, Karrass (1970) conducted a series of surveys among professional negotiators in which respondents were presented with six skill clusters, each of which contained seven or eight traits. Respondents were asked to rank order each trait within a given cluster as to how essential it was for successful negotiation and to nominate four traits that they thought were most important. From the first survey, 26 senior male purchasing executives nominated the following rank-ordered skills: (a) planning and problem solving, (b) power exploitation and competitiveness, (c) personal integrity and open-mindedness, (d) verbal clarity and listening and coordinating skills, (e) ability to gain opponents' respect and esteem, and (f) clear thinking under stress and general practical intelligence.

To assess whether these findings were generalizable, additional surveys were conducted across professions and gender; 483 negotiators of both genders representing 10 different professions completed the questionnaire. Not surprisingly, some differences in the relative importance of skills were evident across professions and gender; however, respondents concurred that seven traits were important: (a) planning skill, (b) ability to think clearly under stress, (c) general practical intelligence, (d) verbal ability, (e) product knowledge, (f) personal integrity, and (g) ability to perceive and exploit power. In both studies, planning and problem solving ranked as the top skill.

Graham and Sano (1989) extended this research by investigating whether rated trait importance varied with the culture in which a negotiator resided. Using the same 45 items and judgment task employed by Karrass (1970), they compared rankings of the top seven essential skills by business executives from the United States, Japan, Brazil, Taiwan, and Korea. The samples of U.S. and Brazilian negotiators produced an almost identical rank ordering of skills, with preparation and planning skills, ability to think under pressure, and judgment and intelligence skills being the three most important. Respondents in the Taiwanese and Korean samples ranked persistence and determination and the ability to win respect and confidence of the opponent as the two most important skills, with planning and preparation skills as third. Interestingly, negotiators in the Japanese sample felt that the most essential traits were dedication to the job, ability to perceive and exploit power, and the ability to win the respect and confidence of the opponent. Unlike negotiators from the other cultures, the Japanese respondents did not rank planning and preparation skills among the top seven. This does not mean that the Japanese consider planning unimportant; instead, the researchers concluded that the U.S. and Japanese negotiators value different skills, with the former emphasizing information processing skills that lead to a rational conceptualization of the deal and the latter endorsing skills that focus on the nature of the relationship. Negotiators from Taiwan and Korea appeared to value both skill sets.

Thus, the relative importance of a given skill appeared to vary across professions and cultures; however, the aforementioned studies had a number of methodological limitations. It was unclear from the reports how and from what locations the

samples were drawn, what response rates were achieved in the surveys, the exact demographic profiles of the samples, and whether the differences in ranks were statistically significant. Also, the researchers relied on preformed lists of skills, and no explanations were provided for how the lists were generated. Hence, we cannot be certain that the lists are exhaustive or are consistent with some larger conception of negotiation skill. Furthermore, it was difficult to determine whether the skills judged to be essential actually differentiated between successful and unsuccessful negotiators.

## Reputational Surveys

This approach relies on the reports of professional negotiators as to how their colleagues acted and the relative effectiveness of their negotiation skills. Williams (1993) sent a questionnaire to a random sample of 1,000 attorneys from the Denver metropolitan area, of which 351 responded. The questionnaire asked them to "think of an attorney against whom you have negotiated, who was so effective as a negotiator that you would hire the person to represent you if you were involved in a similar case in the future" (p. 156). Each respondent was also asked to think of an "average" and "ineffective" negotiator. The respondent then evaluated each target negotiator on 130 items that assessed his or her style and skills.

Williams (1993) anticipated that negotiators who were viewed as having a cooperative style (e.g., personable, ethical, open) would be seen as effective, whereas those who were reported to be aggressive (e.g., dominating, rigid) would be judged as ineffective. Although most cooperative negotiators were viewed as effective (59%), a considerable number were seen as average (38%), and a small number were judged as ineffective (3%). As expected, some aggressive negotiators were considered ineffective (33%), but almost as many of them were judged to be effective (25%) and more of them were viewed as average (42%). These findings indicated that style differences did not predict perceived effectiveness. Thus, although cooperative negotiators were perceived to share common goals (e.g., to be ethical and to be fair) and enact similar behaviors (e.g., courteous, personable), not all were judged to be equally effective. Moreover, aggressive negotiators shared the desire to get the best settlement for their clients and to do so by being rigid and attacking the opponent, but some aggressive negotiators were viewed to be effective, and some were not.

In part, the complex relationship between styles and effectiveness might result from skills that were necessary for the successful enactment of both styles. Williams (1993) found that regardless of their style, effective negotiators shared some skills. Effective negotiators were judged to be well prepared on the legal facts and the customs of the bar. Interestingly, both cooperative and aggressive negotiators judged to be ineffective lacked these skills. More specifically, ineffective cooperative negotiators were too trusting and critical of their opponent's positions, which could reflect their relative lack of preparation and knowledge of the law. Ineffective aggressive negotiators made excessive demands and threats that were inconsistent with the facts of the case and the law. Unlike their effective aggressive counterparts who were well prepared and knowledgeable, they relied on hostility and hyperbole rather than facts and case law to support their position.

Although different in methodology, the preceding studies yield findings that are congruent with research that used the skill nomination method. In both cases, planning and preparation and the capacity to analyze issues rationally emerge as valuable

skills. Of course, reputational surveys are also subject to methodological limitations. It was unclear as to whether the judgements of observers accurately reflect the target's behavior. Moreover, the assessed skills were often cast at such a high level of abstraction that it was unclear how they could be translated into practice. In other words, planning seemed to be an important skill, but the research did not indicate whether the amount or the type of planning might be critical for effectiveness. To overcome these problems, some researchers conducted behavioral observations of expert negotiators.

## Behavioral Observation

Rackham and Carlisle (1978a, 1978b) reported two studies that compared the specific behaviors enacted by skilled and unskilled negotiators. The research was conducted in Great Britain, and the sample consisted of a mixture of professional negotiators including union and management representatives and contract negotiators. Skilled negotiators met three criteria: (a) they were reported to be effective by both colleagues and opponents, (b) they had a track record of negotiation success, and (c) they had low incidence of contract rejections by their constituency. The unskilled group was composed of negotiators who failed to meet at least one of the effectiveness criteria or for whom there were no data indicating that they were successful. The researchers then recorded and analyzed how skilled and unskilled negotiators performed before and during actual negotiation sessions.

In their first report, Rackham and Carlisle (1978a) focused on behaviors enacted during negotiation sessions. They observed that successful negotiators, relative to their unsuccessful counterparts, avoided linguistic irritators, which the authors defined as gratuitous statements about themselves or their offers, for example, characterizing their own proposals as a "generous offer" or as a "fair" or "reasonable" proposal. Second, skillful negotiators were less likely than their unskilled counterparts to respond to an opponent's proposal with an immediate counterproposal. Skilled negotiators realized that introducing a previously undiscussed proposal complicates the issue at a time when the opponent was primarily focused on his or her own proposal. Moreover, the opposition often perceived such immediate counterproposals to block their own offer rather than to be a sincere alternative.

Third, skilled negotiators were less likely than unskilled ones to enter into defend-attack spirals. Essentially, this pattern reflected the tendency of one negotiator to attack the other party's position, which prompted defensiveness and counterattacks that were repeated in subsequent speaking turns. Skilled negotiators rarely initiated an intense attack, and when they did, they gave no warning, which caught the opponent unprepared. In contrast, unskilled negotiators gradually increased the intensity of their attacks, which allowed the opponent the opportunity to plan and enact a defense that in turn, prompted more intense attacks. Finally, skilled negotiators presented fewer reasons to support their positions than did the unskilled negotiators. Skilled negotiators only advanced their strongest arguments, whereas the unskilled presented as many reasons as possible regardless of their strength. The mixture of strong and weak arguments created an "argument dilution effect," whereby the opponent focused primarily on the weaker arguments, which undercut the persuasiveness of the stronger ones.

Skilled negotiators were more likely than unskilled ones to engage in four actions. First, skilled negotiators labeled or highlighted the type of behavior they were about to perform. This practice included statements such as, "Can I ask you a question?"

or "If I could make a suggestion." Such forecasting slowed down the negotiation so that both parties could collect their thoughts, introduce some formality to the proceedings, and, most important, signaled the speaker's intent. There was one exception to this pattern: Unskilled negotiators were more likely than skilled ones to clearly signal they are about to disagree with the opponent (e.g., "I disagree with that because . . ."). Skilled negotiators articulated the reasons for disagreement before indicating that they were disagreeing with their opponent. Second, skilled negotiators more frequently than unskilled ones tested whether both sides understood statements made during the negotiation and summarized the proceedings more frequently. Such behaviors verified whether parties accurately understood each other and probed for additional information. Third, skilled negotiators engaged in more information seeking during the negotiation than did the unskilled negotiators. Finally, skilled negotiators provided emotional and cognitive reactions to the issues being discussed more frequently than did unskilled bargainers. Instead of simply disagreeing with the opponent's proposal, the skilled negotiator might say, "What worries me about the idea is . . ." or "I have mixed feelings about your idea." Overall, this first study indicates that skilled negotiators enact behaviors that create understanding while avoiding actions that might set off destructive spirals.

In their second study, Rackham and Carlisle (1978b) examined how skilled and unskilled negotiators prepare for a negotiation. In a subset of the negotiations reported in the first study, the authors interviewed bargainers about their preparation and sat in on planning sessions. For the most part, skilled and unskilled negotiators planned in similar ways, particularly in the amount of time they planned and their focus on short-term rather than long-term implications of the issues. Their planning differed in four respects, however. First, skilled negotiators considered a wider number of alternative proposals than did unskilled negotiators, particularly ones that the opponent might introduce as well as ones that they might offer. Second, although both skilled and unskilled negotiators focused on areas of disagreement, skilled negotiators, unlike unskilled ones, identified areas of common ground. Third, skilled negotiators conceived of their goals as a range (i.e., the most they think they can get, what they hope to get, and the least they are willing to take), whereas unskilled negotiators set their objectives as a fixed point (i.e., they set a single targeted amount). Finally, skilled negotiators engaged in issue planning whereas the unskilled negotiators pursued sequence planning. Issue planning involved identifying all of the key issues and their respective arguments and positions, but not envisioning any given sequence in which they must be presented. Sequence planning laid out all of the issues but planned for them to be presented in a particular order (e.g., available resources must be discussed before considering possible solutions). Issue planning afforded great flexibility in that a negotiator could argue a given point regardless of what was discussed before raising an issue. Sequence planning might cause a negotiator to lock into a single chain of arguments that if disrupted or changed could undercut the logic of his or her case. Overall, Rackham and Carlisle concluded that, relative to skilled negotiators, unskilled negotiators spend insufficient time considering how to convince the opponent to move and deciding what conditions needed to be present to initiate concessions.

The results of these investigations complemented and considerably extend the skill nomination and reputational survey methods findings. Researchers now have an indication of the planning skills that are helpful to negotiators and the kinds of statements that bargainers should make during a negotiation. However insightful,

the utility of the two studies is restricted by methodological considerations. The authors provided limited information about the negotiations (e.g., length, issues), the negotiators (e.g., gender, age, education), their coding procedures (e.g., coder training, intercoder reliability), and statistical tests conducted on their data.

## Summary

Taken as a whole, data gathered from experts suggest that planning is a critical skill. Being well informed on the issues before the negotiation may allow cooperatively inclined negotiators to question the veracity of the opponent's position rather simply to acquiesce, and it permits aggressive negotiators to press for their concerns without resorting to damaging histrionics. Furthermore, considering a range of outcomes and proposals before the negotiation allows greater flexibility during sessions, which results in successful outcomes. During the negotiation, bargainers need to exert self-control, actively seek information, and engage in behaviors that avoid escalatory cycles.

Although these results seem reasonable, studies conducted on experts suffer from a myriad of methodological problems. In part, these weaknesses stem from the difficulty of studying experts when they are engaged in actual negotiations. Professional negotiators are busy people who may not have time to participate in research. Also, the principal parties to a negotiation may not allow an audio recording of the deliberations.

Moreover, research conducted with experts employs an inductive rather than a deductive approach to knowledge generation. Instead of working from a theoretical framework about skills that promotes the testing of a priori hypothesized relationships, researchers have gathered data to build a model of effective practice. Researchers speculate about why some skills are more important than others, but this speculation is not grounded in a formal theory. Although the purpose of the research could lead to use of the inductive approach, expert-based research in most cases occurred as part of a training program. Hence, the primary goal was to generate knowledge that could be easily taught and the issue of whether the research was theory driven was less important.

Finally, the results associated with the study of experts are quite complex. A number of different skills emerge and some are unique to a particular study or methodological approach. Hence, it is difficult to assess which one of the nominated skills, or the skills that differentiated effective from ineffective negotiators, is most critical. To assess the importance of skills, other researchers have directed their attention to the links between a given skill and negotiation outcomes. We turn to this literature next.

## OUTCOME-BASED APPROACHES

As noted earlier in this chapter, negotiation is a tool for creating agreements; however, simply reaching an agreement may not always indicate that a negotiator has been successful. One must also consider the quality of the outcomes associated with the agreement. Traditionally, researchers have studied the skills that allow a negotiator to achieve (a) his or her own outcomes, (b) joint outcomes, and (c) relational outcomes. Each section examines the skills related to each outcome and the behaviors that form the basis of these skills.

## Own Outcomes

When entering a negotiation, individuals often have resource goals that they wish to accomplish, and their feelings of success are related to how well they were able to meet their own objectives (Thompson, 1995). This observation implies that researchers should identify skills that allow negotiators to maximize their own outcomes, independent of the way that these skills impact on their opponents' abilities to meet their own objectives. Sadly, in some situations, negotiators may actually feel that they are more successful when their opponent is disappointed rather than happy with the agreement (Thompson, Valley, & Kramer, 1995). Some readers may question the wisdom of assisting negotiators to develop skills that serve such an individualistic and egocentric orientation; some bargaining contexts offer little opportunity for both negotiators to accomplish their goals, however. For example, when negotiating over a single issue that is of critical importance to both sides, it may be difficult or impossible for opposing parties to reconcile their differences and to accomplish both sets of goals. To reach an agreement, one party must make concessions, and, by definition, one will receive a larger portion of the resource pool than will the other. The key question is what distributive skills allow negotiators to extract concessions from their counterparts. Research suggests that skilled distributive negotiators do six things.

***First, Skilled Distributive Negotiators Engage in Tough Bargaining.*** Tough bargainers make extreme opening offers, provide few and small concessions, and present "last clear chance offers" (Hamner & Yukl, 1977). Aspiration level theory posits that such recalcitrant behavior causes an opponent to lower his or her goals and to make concessions (Siegel & Fouraker, 1960). Indeed, a meta-analysis of experimental bargaining studies verifies that using a tough bargaining strategy results in greater individual outcomes than does using a softer approach (Allen, Donohue, & Stewart, 1990).

Tough bargaining has its downside, however. Some experimental research suggests that tough bargainers may experience an increased likelihood of a deadlock (Hamner, 1974). After all, when a negotiator starts with an extreme offer from which he or she does not move and then says, "take it or leave it," his or her opponent must bear the brunt of concession making. Furthermore, individuals derive satisfaction from a negotiator who indicates a willingness to bargain and who will make concessions (Allen, Kahler, Tatham, & Anderson, 1977). Thus, although a low-power negotiator might accept a lopsided outcome rather than deadlock (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981), a tough bargainer will need to make a proposal that is palatable to the opposition. Tough bargaining, then, is a strategic practice in which excelling on one dimension (higher individual outcomes) may diminish performance on other dimensions (potential deadlock). Consequently, this skill may only be useful under certain conditions (Alfred, 2000).

Starbuck and Grant (1971) found that negotiators who began with an extreme offer and then committed to a reasonable position much later in the negotiation were more likely to deadlock than were those who committed to a reasonable offer early in the negotiation and refused to move from it. In this sense, tough bargaining required a strong sense of timing. To avoid this problem, tough bargainers might intentionally hold back concessions and use them to "sweeten the deal." From a framing perspective, the "sweetener" induces a gain frame that prompts the opposing negotiator to accept the deal rather than run the risk that a better one will not come

along (Neale & Bazerman, 1991). In a series of field experiments, Burger (1986) found that buyers were willing to pay the asking price of a product, if the seller included in the deal another product at the initial price. Importantly, buyers were more willing to pay the asking price when the new product was added than when it was included in the original mix. Thus, planned “token” concessions might be useful way to avoid a deadlock and still maximize one’s benefits.

**Second, Skilled Distributive Negotiators Are Argumentative.** Druckman (1977) noted that “negotiators use rhetoric to cajole, persuade, and wheedle their opposite numbers. Each attempts to steer the talks in a direction that will yield a favorable outcome for himself” (p. 26). Argumentativeness or being predisposed to advocate and refute positions, however, differs from verbal aggression, which is attacking an opponent’s self-concept instead of his or her position (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Verbal aggressiveness, is often a liability in reaching acceptable settlements (Keough, 1992). As support for the importance of argumentativeness, Donohue (1981a, 1981b) posited that the negotiator who made the most unrefuted arguments could construct an agreement that best met his or her own needs. In effect, by attacking and refuting the opponent’s claims, the successful negotiator could achieve relative advantage over his or her opponent. Using a simulation in which participants played the role of lawyers attempting to reach an out of court settlement, Donohue (1981b) found that successful negotiators responded to attacks that their clients were at fault by completely rejecting the claim, whereas unsuccessful negotiators ceded partial culpability on the part of their client. Furthermore, successful negotiators, more than unsuccessful ones, reacted to their opponent’s supporting evidence by introducing a new idea that was favorable to their own position. Not surprisingly, successful negotiators made fewer concessions than unsuccessful negotiators and characterized their opponent’s concessions as inadequate.

In a field experiment, Cialdini, Bickman, and Cacioppo (1979) also found that making arguments was successful. Male confederates engaged salespeople in a negotiation about the price of two new cars. In one condition, the confederate was cooperative, indicating that the deal that the salesperson could offer for a given model was a “good price.” The confederate then said he was also interested in another model and began to negotiate its price. In a second condition, the confederate was argumentative and complained that the asking price of the first model was much too high and then began to negotiate over the price of the second model. In a third condition, the confederate did not mention the first model and only asked for the price of the second one. The results indicated that the salesperson made a significantly lower initial and final offer on the second model when the confederate was argumentative relative to when he made a cooperative statement or did not negotiate on the first model.

As with tough bargaining, being argumentative can have its drawbacks. Sometimes, individuals react to an opponent’s attacks by resisting or counterattacking, which increases the chances of a deadlock or entering into extended cycles of defensive actions (Donohue, 1981a; Putnam & Jones, 1982). Thus, skilled negotiators should be argumentative but should avoid locking into a destructive reciprocal pattern by softening the level of their argumentation. In a field experiment, male confederates negotiated the price of a new car using argumentation strategies of differing intensity for rejecting the initial price (Mueller & Galinat, 1982). The results indicated that the confederate received a much better initial price on the second car model when he had intensely rejected the offer on the first car. Although these findings are consistent

with those of Cialdini et al. (1979), confederates received much better deals on the final offer of the second car when they adopted a less intense argumentative style. Regardless of whether the confederate had been restrained or intense, salespeople made larger final discounts when the confederate had mildly rather than intensely rejected the asking price of the second car.

***Third, Skilled Distributive Negotiators Have Resources That Are Valuable to the Opposition.*** Negotiation is a means of resource exchange. If a negotiator has resources that are valued by the other party, the opposition should offer valuable resources in exchange. Hence, a negotiator must signal, either verbally or nonverbally, that he or she controls something of value. In a field experiment, female confederates, dressed informally as a college student or formally so as to appear gainfully employed, negotiated the price of a car at different auto dealerships (Johnston & Bonoma, 1983). The confederates also randomly informed the salesperson that the buyer had sufficient funds to pay for the car or that she would need considerable financing. Regardless of her appearance and ability to pay, most salespeople were willing to negotiate with the confederate and offer her a discounted price; however, the confederate received significantly greater price reductions when her dress indicated that she was employed rather than when she was dressed like a college student, and when she had sufficient funds to buy the car compared with requiring financing.

***Fourth, Skilled Distributive Negotiators Create Alternatives to Reaching Agreements.*** Bacharach and Lawler (1981) argued that bargaining power flows from the perception that a negotiator can acquire a variety of resources that his or her opponent cannot. In this case, the negotiator can extract more concessions from his or her opponent because the person who has access to resources is less dependent on the other party to reach an agreement. According to Fisher and Ury (1981), the negotiator has a BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement) that makes him or her less dependent on the opponent. Alfred (2000) found that developing and improving one's BATNA was a best practice that worked effectively across negotiation situations.

Additional research has supported this proposition. Landau and Leventhal (1976) investigate a counteroffer situation in which the supervisor varied the quality of the counteroffer (similar to current compensation or much better), the productivity of the employee (low or high), and the retention policy of the company (give raises to keep only productive employees, give raises to retain all employees, or give raises as the supervisor sees fit). Overall, the better the offer from the other company, the greater the size of the counteroffer; however, this pattern was much stronger when the employee was seen as highly productive. Interestingly, regardless of how productive the employee was reported to be, individuals perceived that employees with attractive offers were more effective and hardworking than were those employees who had received offers that were similar to their current package.

Not all disclosures about one's alternatives may be effective. An alternative job offer can be attributed to a number of different causes, not all of which reflect a negotiator's ability or value (cf, Weiner et al., 1971). In a series of hiring simulation studies, Williams, Radefeld, Binning, and Sudak (1993) provided college students and actual job recruiters with information about applicants, specifically, whether this person had interviewed for other jobs or whether the candidate was geographically restricted. Other applicants indicated that they had offers from other companies and that they had received these offers either based on impressive credentials or their

availability to relocate geographically. The results indicated that, recruiters were more impressed with applicants who had received job offers based on their competency rather than their geographic mobility. Also, recruiters evaluated the candidates who were geographically restricted more positively than they did candidates who had not received offers. In a follow-up study, the relative advantage of having received a job offer based on one's credentials accrued only with objective evidence that the applicant was indeed competent (i.e., had a high grade point average). Thus, the effect of disclosing information about one's alternatives or the absence of them depended on availability due to geographical constraints. Moreover, when one negotiator has an alternative and uses this BATNA to extract concessions from his or her opponent, the odds of reaching a deadlock significantly increase (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981).

***Fifth, Skilled Distributive Negotiators Sometimes Mislead the Opposition.*** Skilled distributive bargainers may misrepresent their position about a preferred settlement or use bluffing (Lewicki, 1983). In multiissue negotiations, some negotiators feigned disagreement on an issue about which they actually agreed to extract concessions from their opponents (O'Connor & Carnevale, 1997). Using a collective bargaining simulation, they found two forms of misrepresentation: commission and omission. Commission involved creating the impression of false disagreement (i.e., pretending to disagree about an issue on which one agrees), whereas omission entailed taking advantage of an opponent's erroneous assumption of disagreement (i.e., accepting an opponent's concession on an important issue in exchange for something one was willing to give him or her anyway). The results indicated that occurrences of omission were more frequent than commission. Importantly, misrepresentation was (a) more frequent when negotiators had an individualistic (i.e., maximize your own outcome regardless of the impact on the opponent) as opposed to a cooperative motivation (i.e., maximize your own and your opponent's outcomes), (b) were used in conjunction with threats and warnings, and (c) yielded high individual benefits to the user.

Misleading the opposition may backfire in the long run, however, as evident in the research on bluffing. Bluffing occurs when negotiators announce that they are going to do something that they have of no intention of doing or do not have the ability to carry out the threat. A common example of bluffing is threatening to walk out of the negotiation if the opponent does not concede to one's demands, even when the negotiator has no intention of doing so (Lewicki et al., 1999). Using sequential negotiations between female confederates and naïve participants, Shapiro and Bies (1994) randomly assigned confederates to three conditions: (a) having an offer from another negotiator and claiming to take this offer if the opponent did not meet the demands, (b) indicating that an alternative offer was possible but uncertain and that this alternative would be pursued if a concession was not made; (c) making no threat. In effect, negotiators who made bald threats were perceived to be more powerful than were those who attached a disclaimer to their bluff or made no threat. Regardless of the existence of a disclaimer, negotiators who made threats were perceived to be less cooperative. Bluffing negotiators received better outcomes relative to their opponents than did those bargainers who used disclaimers or made no threat at all. Before the second negotiation, however, the naïve participant was either told that the earlier threat was a bluff or the opponent received no information about the veracity of the threat. Not surprisingly, when the bluff was exposed, retaliation occurred and the confederate's outcomes were significantly reduced, especially when the negotiator made a bald threat.

The long-term impact of bluffing and misrepresentation can be profound. Although negotiators expect some forms of exaggeration and actually view some bluffs as appropriate (for example, making an extreme initial offer, hiding one's real bottom line, or pretending to be in a hurry to reach an agreement), intentionally misrepresenting one's position is often viewed as unethical (Lewicki & Robinson, 1998).

**Finally, Skilled Distributive Negotiators Act in Good Faith.** The notion of good faith negotiation means that a bargainer is honestly trying to reach an agreement. The importance of this skill is evident in collective bargaining documents because this clause is included in regulatory statutes and court rulings (Wortman & Randle, 1966). It simply means that a bargainer is willing to reach an agreement and to signal that he or she is sincere about the bargaining process.

One way to signal a desire to reach an agreement is to provide an accurate description of the conditions under which a person enters negotiation. Using a buyer-seller simulation, Paese and Gilin (2000) studied whether openly disclosing information about an alternative to reaching agreement would prompt cooperative behavior from the opponent. At the beginning of the negotiation, the opponent, who was a confederate, either disclosed the existence of a low-quality, standing offer or began to negotiate without mentioning the other offer. When the confederate disclosed the information, parties made less demanding offers, disclosed more truthful information about their own alternatives, and settled for less profit (i.e., ceded more profit to the confederate) than they did when the confederate withheld this information.

One must be cautious about disclosing information about one's circumstances, however. Only some types of information may be helpful. In a field experiment, in which confederates negotiated the price of rare coins with actual coin dealers, the confederate indicated that he knew little about coin collecting and that he had inherited the coins from a family member (Dorris, 1972). Then, the confederate made different types of disclosures about needing to sell the coins, for example, encountering financial problems and needing to buy textbooks, no longer being interested in coin collecting, or receiving less than market value for the sale of some of the coins. The results indicated that the dealers offered better prices for the coins when the confederate needed money to buy textbooks than when he simply wanted to sell the coins; however, disclosing information that indicated that another coin dealer had exploited the confederate did not significantly impact the amount of the dealer's offer.

**Summary.** Research that focuses on bargaining skills used to increase one's own outcomes employs a diverse set of methods and samples. In some ways, this diversity provides a rich database from which to draw conclusions, but because so few studies explore a given issue, the diverse methods make it difficult to determine if conflicting or qualified results are an artifact of different samples or methods or genuine differences. Regardless, there is sufficient research to provide tentative support to these claims.

An important point concerns the qualified nature of these findings. For example, negotiators should be tough bargainers, but they must be prepared to soften their approach to avoid a deadlock. Negotiators should be argumentative, but they may have to reduce their intensity to avoid destructive cycles. Negotiators should develop alternatives to reaching an agreement, but if the opposition does the same, the bargaining may deadlock. And, acting in good faith by accurately disclosing one's circumstances can be helpful, but only if the circumstances are sympathetic. Thus, to optimize their

own outcomes, negotiators must be sensitive to the conditions necessary for a given strategy to work.

## Joint Outcomes

Early on, negotiation professionals recognized the limitations of distributive styles and advocated switching to integrative approaches to enhance joint benefits (Follette, 1942). Indeed, there are a number of excellent books that review the integrative bargaining literature and offer advice for both parties to optimize their outcomes (Lewicki et al., 1999; Thompson, 1998). Research suggests that a skilled integrative negotiator does six things.

***First, Skilled Integrative Negotiators Set Specific and Reasonably High Goals for Themselves.*** Although seeking high goals may seem obvious for optimizing one's own outcomes, it is less clear as to how they help negotiators reach high joint gains. Pruitt (1983) noted that the integrative potential inherent in a negotiation is not always obvious from the outset. Because negotiators have insufficient information about their needs and are sometimes under time pressure to reach an agreement, they resort to cognitive heuristics (e.g., split the difference, winner take all) to guide their behaviors rather than to expend effort seeking a creative solution. In doing so, they are influenced by the superficial characteristics of the situation (cf, Chaiken, 1987). Because high goals are difficult to achieve, negotiators must look beyond the conventional strategies for less salient ways of achieving their goals.

In effect, high goals energize negotiators to conduct a more thorough analysis of the situation and uncover option for joint gain. Roloff and Jordan (1991) found that during prenegotiation planning, negotiators assigned high goals were more likely than those assigned lower objectives to uncover the integrative potential inherent in a situation (that is, issues of different priorities) and to create a logrolling strategy to capitalize on it (that is, they were willing to trade low-priority issues in exchange for concessions on high-priority ones). Alternatively, those negotiators assigned lower goals formulated a simple concession making strategy (namely, start high on all issues and then make concessions) that yields a compromise or split the difference solution.

Negotiators can set their goals too high, however. Huber and Neale (1987) found that when negotiators were assigned profit levels that were easy to achieve or were nonspecific (for example, "do your best"), they settled for compromise agreements, but when they were assigned moderately specific goals, they reached integrative agreements. If negotiators held specific goals that were extremely difficult to reach, they were less likely to find integrative agreements. If one negotiator was given an extremely difficult goal and the other was assigned a moderately difficult one, integrative agreement emerged as frequently as when both negotiators received moderately difficult goals. Thus, if both negotiators have goals that are unrealistically high, they become discouraged and give up.

***Second, Skilled Integrative Negotiators Lower Their Goals Reluctantly.*** Once negotiation begins, individuals may feel pressured to lower their objectives. The opposing negotiator may try to intimidate them or convince them that their aspirations are unrealistic. In such cases, it may be easier to make concessions than to continue trying to achieve one's goal, but this course of action may result in a premature compromise rather than an integrative agreement.

Alternatively, Pruitt (1981) argued that negotiators should follow a strategy of flexible rigidity. This seemingly contradictory advice calls on negotiators to be flexible on the means of achieving one's goal, but hold firm to the goal itself—a best practice of integrative bargaining identified in Alfred's (2000) study. Pruitt recommended a search model that involves setting a specific goal and identifying the various ways that it might be achieved. In negotiation for a job, for instance, an individual might set an income goal and identify different ways an employer might provide income (e.g., salary, benefits, stock options, bonuses, early promotion). The individual might then create an offer or counteroffer that combines income from different sources. Should the recruiter object to the package, instead of lowering his or her overall income goal, the candidate might reconfigure the various elements so that the goal could still be met, but the amount of money from a given revenue source is changed (i.e., the benefit package is reduced, but the difference is made up through stock options). In this way, the job candidate might develop a package that meets his or her goals and is still acceptable to the recruiter.

A search model has several key components, including the packaging of issues rather than considering a single item or considering multiple items sequentially (Pruitt & Lewis, 1975; Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988) and retaining the ultimate goal even while altering individual elements of package—a process known as systematic concession making (Lewis & Fry, 1977; Pruitt, 1981; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975). In the search model, negotiators engage in low-priority concession making by conceding on issues that are of less importance to discover ways to increase joint benefits (Fry, Firestone, & Williams, 1983; Lewis & Fry, 1977). A final component of the search model is incorporating some elements of the opponent's prior proposals into the package to counter the other party's objections. Incorporation may help a negotiator achieve his or her outcome; however, its impact on the agreement or the opposing negotiator might be small (Pruitt, 1981).

***Third, Skilled Integrative Negotiators Share Information About Their Priorities and Make Trade-Offs Among Issues of Differing Importance.*** Simply because multiple issues are under consideration does not mean that the priority ranking among issues will be identical for opposing parties. When issues are of differing priority, negotiators may use a logrolling strategy as part of their search model (Pruitt, 1981). Logrolling involves negotiators trading concessions on each person's low priority issues in return for receiving agreements on high priority items. When both negotiators logroll, they make trade-offs among issues depending on their priorities, hence, they are willing to compromise on something of lesser importance to gain something of greater importance—a best practice identified in Alfred's (2000) study. Logrolling differs from conceding on unimportant items in that negotiators develop packages based on their own and the other party's priorities; however, low-priority concession making can result in integrative agreements, even in cases in which the negotiators misperceive each other's priorities (Kimmel, Pruitt, Magenau, Konar-Goldband, & Carnevale, 1980). Logrolling is more efficient in that negotiators can move toward an integrative agreement faster than using trial and error concessions (Pruitt, 1981).

The ability to logroll successfully may depend on acquiring accurate information about the opponent's priorities. Indeed, seeking information about priorities facilitates the discovery of integrative solutions (Kemp & Smith, 1994; Kimmel et al., 1980; Pruitt et al., 1978; Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988; Weingart, Thompson, Bazerman, & Carroll, 1990) and logrolling agreements (Thompson, 1991). Moreover, these benefits accrue even if only one negotiator receives the priority information (Thompson, 1991).

**Fourth, Skilled Integrative Negotiators Are Aware of and Control Their Cognitive Biases.**

An integrative bargainer must be a rational decision-maker in that he or she (a) sets reasonably high goals, (b) identifies and prioritizes multiple ways to achieve these goals, and (c) if necessary, adjusts the plan to incorporate the priorities of the opposing negotiator. If a negotiator's decision-making skills are deficient, then he or she will be unsuccessful. Negotiators are subject to a variety of cognitive biases, including two persistent judgment errors that block successful integrative bargaining (see Neale & Bazerman, 1991).

First, individuals often assume erroneously that their own ranking of issues is identical to that of their opponent—a fixed-sum error (Thompson & Hastie, 1990). As noted earlier, if two negotiators have opposing viewpoints on issues, but different priorities, they may be able to logroll the issues to achieve an integrative agreement. If they assume their priority rankings are identical, the potential for finding trade-offs and logrolling is greatly diminished. Research indicates that individuals assume similar priorities before they start negotiations, but after bargaining begins, they acquire accurate priority information that allows them to reach integrative agreements through logrolling (Thompson & Hastie, 1990). Moreover, providing instructions that alert negotiators to potentially different priorities increases information exchange and the likelihood of achieving integrative agreements (Kemp & Smith, 1994). Finally, as people acquire experience with integrative bargaining, they are less subject to the fixed sum error, which improves their ability to find integrative agreements (Thompson, 1990a, 1990b). The positive effect of experience can be enhanced if after a negotiation is completed, parties receive feedback about each other's outcomes and priorities (Thompson & DeHarppport, 1995).

A second cognitive bias stems from a negotiator's assumption that his or her preferences on all issues are in conflict with the opponent's views, even when some positions are compatible; hence, bargainers overlook commonalities and areas of agreement (Thompson & Hastie, 1990). Negotiators who overcome this incompatibility error are better able to achieve integrative agreements than are those who do not (Thompson & Hastie, 1990). Unlike the fixed-sum error, however, the incompatibility error is extremely difficult to overcome. In a meta-analysis, Thompson and Hrebec (1996) found that although integrative bargaining experience reduced the incompatibility error, the effect was not large. For some negotiators, the error persisted, especially when they were provided monetary incentives for reaching agreements or had ample time to negotiate. Thus, instead of reaching integrative, win-win agreements, some negotiators settled for suboptimal, lose-lose outcomes. This bias may stem from faulty information seeking in that negotiators rarely questioned each other about their respective interests. Regardless, those individuals who were able to overcome the incompatibility error were more likely to reach integrative agreements.

**Fifth, Skilled Integrative Negotiators Are Selectively Contentious.** Much of our analysis suggests that integrative negotiators act like problem solvers. They rationally analyze the issues and then engage in cooperative behaviors that will prompt similar responses from their opponent. Indeed, across Pruitt's (1981) experimental studies, the more contentious the negotiation (that is, argumentative, threatening, insulting), the less likely that integrative agreements were reached. Research suggests that this outcome results from a competitive atmosphere (Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988) and the likelihood of deadlocks that follow contentiousness (Roloff, Tutzauer, & Dailey, 1989).

Yet contentiousness may be an important part of integrative bargaining through signaling that a negotiator is firmly committed to achieving his or her goals and will not be intimidated (Pruitt, 1981). By being argumentative, negotiators may better understand each other's interests, refine current issues, or add new ones to the mix (Putnam, 1990). The key, then, is knowing how to be contentious without suffering its downsides. Putnam suggested several ways to do this.

First, negotiators should take care in how they phrase contentious actions. For example, Putnam, Wilson, and Turner (1990) found that in a school board negotiation, problem-solving responses were more likely when a negotiator made a specific commitment to a particular position (for example, "we stand firm on a 6% salary increase"), than when they made a general commitment statement (for instance, "we are serious and firm about revising policy"). Also, Putnam and Wilson (1989) found that use of threats was linked in integrative outcomes, especially those aimed at preventing the opponent from delaying the negotiation or from repeating issues that were previously rejected. In effect, the use of strategically placed threats served to keep the negotiations moving forward.

Second, when generating proposals, negotiators should merge contentious comments with integrative moves. Instead of simply putting an offer on the table, negotiators should attack the opposition's proposals as well as include arguments that supporting their own position. In essence, the contentiousness should focus on the quality of the solutions rather than on the legitimacy of other party's interests. Indeed, Putnam and Wilson (1989) found that the use of workability arguments (that is, those about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a proposal) and arguments about the availability of resources were positively correlated with reaching integrative agreements.

Third, negotiators must prevent extended sequences or reciprocity of contentious behaviors. These extended sequences result in cycles of destructive behavior; hence negotiators must refocus their interactions or suffer a deadlock. If negotiators respond in kind to their partner's contentious communication (e.g., verbal attacks, claims of superior rights), the partner will continue to reciprocate contentiousness in subsequent speaking turns (Brett, Shapiro, & Lytle, 1998; Donohue, 1981a; Putnam & Jones, 1982). However, if a bargainer combines facts and information seeking with a contentious remark, the partner is less likely to continue his or her behavior. Moreover, continuing the use of a contentious tactic is less likely when a negotiator points out that such behavior is counterproductive.

Finally, negotiators must avoid misperceiving the intent of contentious remarks. Contentious behavior is inherently unsupportive, and negotiators are prone to attribute it to an opponent's disagreeable personality, even when situational factors contribute to contentiousness (Morris, Larrick, & Su, 1999). Consequently, what may be a genuine expression of concern about the merits of a proposal could be construed as a vicious personal attack that must be met with a tough counterresponse. Putnam (1990) noted that members of a negotiating team often spent caucus time considering alternative interpretations for an opponent's negative actions and attributing them to accidents or lack of preparedness.

**Sixth, Skilled Integrative Negotiators Signal That They Are Concerned About Their Opponent's Needs and Interests.** To signal firmness, integrative bargainers must sometimes be contentious. To signal flexibility, they must also act in a concerned manner. Research suggests that concern about the opponent's needs and interests might be communicated prior to or during a negotiation.

Before negotiation, Lindskold and Han (1988) had people interact in the Prisoner's Dilemma game. During the game, a confederate expressed concern for the partner in different ways: In an explicitly concerned manner (that is, announcing that both of them would achieve high scores in the way he played the game), an implied concerned manner (that is, acting in ways to increase the opponent's benefits, not explaining why before doing so), or a deceptive approach (that is, announcing intentions to increase the opponent's benefits, but behaving in ways to enhance his own benefits). The findings revealed that when the confederate explicitly and honestly announced an intent to increase joint benefits, integrative agreements occurred more frequently and faster than in the other two conditions.

During the negotiation, integrative bargainers might signal their concern through the use of verbal and nonverbal communication. Vogelzang, Euwema, and Nauta (1997) analyzed the transcriptions of integrative bargaining simulations and found that frequent use of communality words ("we") were deemed more friendly, integrative, and effective than were frequent use of individuality words ("you" or "I"). In a recent study, Drolet and Morris (2000) observed that integrative agreements were more frequent when negotiators used accommodating nonverbal communication (e.g., converge posture, synchronize gestures, engage in compatible facial affect) to establish rapport.

**Summary.** As with the scholarship discussed in other sections, the results of integrative bargaining research are limited by the methodology that is frequently used. Most studies use experimental methods and role-play simulations in which participants receive a quantitative goal to meet (e.g., profit) and charts that indicate the value (e.g., profits) attached to a number of settlement points (e.g., prices) across multiple issues (e.g., different appliances). Thus, the issues reflect a conflict of interests over resources. Often the issues have a degree of logrolling potential (i.e., the highest priority issue for one bargainer is the lowest priority for his or her opponent and vice versa). These characteristics raise three important issues.

First, do the integrative skills that emerge from a situation in which goals, outcomes, and values are clear generalize to situations in which the possible outcomes and values are not specified on an *a priori* basis? Because so little research exists on the latter situation, a definitive answer is not possible, but one study suggests similarities. Research using well-defined contexts suggests that cognitive processing is critical for finding integrative agreements. Using a less defined context, Barry and Friedman (1998) had individuals play the role of landlord and tenant and to negotiate the contract language of a lease and construct a deal that served their interests. Two trained coders then rated each agreement for how well it bridged both parties' interests and reflected all of the potential joint gains. The researchers found that dyads in which both members scored high on a measure of cognitive ability reached agreements that were more integrative and yielded high joint benefits than did mixed dyads (one person is high and other low) or dyads in which both negotiators scored low in cognitive abilities. In effect, integrative skills may generalize to situations in which the outcomes and values are not specified.

The second question concerns whether the process of reaching logrolling agreements parallels reaching other types of integrative settlements. Some evidence suggests that they may be different. Putnam and Wilson (1989) coded the outcomes of school board negotiations into four types drawn from Pruitt's typology of integrative agreements. The most integrative was called "bridging" and consisted of a newly created proposal that reflected expanding the resource pie or options for reformulating

the problem. The second most integrative settlement, "sharpening," met the demands of one party while reducing the costs and burdens of the other party. The third was "trade-offs," which interestingly, was a package deal that reflected low-priority concession making, or logrolling. The least integrative was "win–lose," which included accepting the initial offer of the opponent or dropping a proposal after the opponent objected to it.

The most frequent type of outcome in the school board negotiations was bridging. Moreover, each type of outcome resulted from a somewhat different process. Typical processes leading to bridging agreements included frequent initiations of proposals, exploratory problem solving, and arguments about the workability of proposals. This pattern suggested a problem-solving process not unlike those discovered in the logrolling studies. Sharpening was associated with frequent concession making, demands, and opinion giving. In a sense, the antecedents of sharpening were more argumentative than were those associated with bridging. Win–lose agreements were linked with frequently making proposals and opinion giving. Although this study was exploratory, it provided some preliminary indication that researchers should expand their focus to include other forms of integrative agreements.

Third, are the skills that help to reach an integrative settlement for a conflict of interest equally effective with other types of conflicts? One study indicates that they may not be. Using a bargaining simulation, Harnick, De Dreu, and Van Vianen (2000) had individuals negotiate a conflict of interest (i.e., one over valued resources), a conflict over intellectual ideas (i.e., the effectiveness of a course of action), or a conflict over evaluation (i.e., whether a course of action is just). The findings revealed that negotiators focusing on a conflict of interest were more likely to propose trade-offs among issues and to achieve higher joint benefits than were those who undertook a conflict about intellectual ideas or evaluations. Although this study did not examine the use of trade-offs in conflicts over intellectual ideas or evaluation, it suggested that they were either rejected or rarely used in this type of negotiation. Clearly, extant research on integrative bargaining skills provides important insights; however, researchers need to broaden the contexts in which they are studied.

## Relational Outcomes

In addition to distributive and integrative skills, parties in a negotiation have entered into a relationship, defined in a general sense as the probability of interaction (Hinde, 1979). In some cases, that relationship may continue into the future as individuals repeatedly negotiate with each other. Thus, negotiators may want to acquire skills for creating a good working relationship with the other party. The key question, of course, is what constitutes a good working relationship in negotiation. One indicator is relational strength or the predisposition "to value ongoing interaction with the other party" (Greenhalgh & Chapman, 1998, p. 471). Assessed with a 32-item scale, a respondent reports specific aspects of his or her relationships with another negotiator including trust, comfort with disclosure, respect, affection, and reliability. Although this research is new and few skills have been identified, some preliminary statements are possible.

***First, Skilled Relational Negotiators Avoid Using Tactics That Might Harm the Relationship.*** The strength of a preexisting relationship influences the use of negotiation strategies, emotional reactions during the negotiation, and, subsequently, the nature of the relationship. More specifically, research reported that the stronger a

prenegotiation relational bond, the more likely that negotiators engaged in information sharing and avoided the use of coercive tactics (Greenhalgh & Chapman, 1998). Although information sharing facilitated the discovery of integrative agreements, the strategy was not key to achieving relational outcomes. Because coercion was positively and significantly related to relational harm, however, its avoidance prevented negotiators from harming their relationship.

Other research suggested that effective relational negotiators avoided behaviors perceived as rude or deceptive. Greenhalgh and Gilkey (1993) compared the negotiation behaviors of relationally oriented individuals (i.e., empathic and viewing interactions as events in ongoing relationship) with transaction-oriented bargainers (not empathic and viewed interactions as isolated events). Although both sets of negotiators engaged in empathic inquiries (asked the opponent's opinion), the relationally oriented negotiators engaged in fewer interruptions and made fewer deceptive statements than did the transaction-oriented bargainers.

The aforementioned studies suggest that the key to being relationally effective is not necessarily what a bargainer does, but rather what he or she chooses not to do. These studies also imply that finding integrative agreements may not be secondary to achieving relational outcomes.

***Second, Skilled Relational Negotiators Sometimes Sacrifice Their Own Outcomes to Preserve the Relationship.*** Simply negotiating can prompt a level of disagreement that is uncomfortable, especially for people who are in a cooperative relationship. Indeed, Thompson and DeHarport (1998) found that negotiators who were friends before a negotiation, relative to those who were strangers, reported less liking of each other after the negotiation ended. Consequently, friends may avoid disagreements by reducing their demands. In a distributive bargaining simulation, Polzer, Neale, and Glenn (1993) observed that friends made lower demands than did strangers.

Other research extends these findings to romantic relationships. Fry et al. (1983) reported that negotiators who were dating as opposed to those who were strangers abandoned their resource goals and made quick concessions. Romantic love, then, decreased the likelihood that negotiators engaged in low-priority concession making, requesting reactions from each other, or incorporating each other's ideas into their proposals (Fry et al., 1983). Thus, under some circumstances, particularly high emotional involvement, relationally oriented negotiators missed opportunities to find integrative agreements.

Also, a negotiator's desire for a long-term relationship might make him or her too willing to sacrifice for the partner. Sondak, Neale, and Pinkley (1995) discovered that the ability to reach integrative agreements in a task with unequal contributions was reduced when a negotiator had an interest in maintaining a long-term relationship with the other party. The negotiator who made the greater contribution allowed the one who gave less to receive a greater share of the rewards. Tenbrunsel, Wade-Benzoni, Moag, and Bazerman (1999) identified a similar pattern. They allowed individuals to choose their negotiation partner from a group of acquaintances and friends. When negotiators chose a friend, they were less able to reach an optimal agreement. Moreover, in this case, high-power negotiators achieved lower profits, whereas low-power negotiators increased their profits. This finding suggested that to optimize one's own outcomes, negotiating with a stranger would be better than bargaining with a close friend, especially if you have power.

Of course, the outcomes of a particular negotiation might be less important to friends than to strangers, as Greenhalgh and Chapman (1998) noted in their finding

on the importance of relational quality compared with outcome assessments. Perhaps relationally oriented negotiators anticipate that losses in one negotiation with a partner will be compensated by gains in future interactions with him or her; however, the results of the Tenbrunsel et al. (1999) study call this supposition into the question. Alternatively, individuals in ongoing relationships may find other sources of satisfaction (e.g., esteem, companionship, time spent together) that compensate for material losses from a given negotiation. Finally, as noted in the Tenbrunsel et al.'s study, individuals may prefer to negotiate with a person who is presumed to be honest, fair, and flexible, even if they sacrifice material gains by doing so.

**Summary.** Scholarship on relational skills is in its infancy compared with research on individual and joint outcomes. Consequently, only a few and tentative conclusions are possible. Clearly, the most pressing need is to expand the focus of this work from studying relatively short-term relationships in single negotiations to focusing on interactions that occur over a long time. This work could reveal how relationally oriented negotiators successfully cope with losses from a single negotiation.

Furthermore, research should examine whether a relational orientation puts a bargainer at risk of being manipulated. That is, some negotiators use relationship building (e.g., act friendly so that the opponent thinks he or she is getting a good deal) as a tactic for goal attainment (Jordan & Roloff, 1997). When bargaining with a stranger, negotiators who use such tactics achieve higher individual outcomes than their opponents (Jordan & Roloff 1997).

## NEGOTIATION TRAINING AND PEDAGOGY

As noted earlier, the burgeoning interest in negotiation has led to a number of training courses aimed at improving negotiation skills. These efforts grew in the mid-1980s with teaching development grants funded by the National Institute for Dispute Resolution. As the number of courses increased, resources and trade books have proliferated. These courses include workshops, seminars, and executive training in addition to regular college curricula on negotiation (Lewicki, 1997). This section reviews the goals and content of negotiation pedagogy, skills included in these courses, teaching and training methods, and effectiveness of the skills training.

### Goals and General Content

Most training programs focus on developing practical skills for negotiating effectively and on presenting analytical frameworks for understanding negotiation (Fortgang, 2000). Although training varies across disciplines, most courses combine the development of skills with conceptual training in negotiation processes (Lewicki, 1986). For the most part, training programs are prescriptive, centering on how to diagnose problems, structure deals, and build win-win outcomes (Cobb, 2000; Fortgang, 2000). Surveys and interviews of 40 law, business, public policy, and international relations courses reveal three dominant approaches: distributive, integrative, and mixed motive (Fortgang, 2000), with an emphasis in management schools on transactional negotiation and maximizing self-interest (Landry & Donnellon, 1999). Based on a survey of four distinct adult training programs, the typical curriculum emphasizes the strengths and weaknesses of hard and soft bargaining, the problem-solving process, phases of negotiation, and communication skills for negotiating agreements (Schultz, 1989). Courses differ as to whether negotiation should be taught from a normative

perspective and include a discussion of ethical behaviors and altruistic purposes (Fortgang, 2000). In a critique of negotiation training, Landry and Donnellon (1999) contend that courses place a premium on skills rooted in logic and rationality, often excluding the role of politics, status, and emotion that typifies actual negotiations. In effect, negotiation courses typically operate from an expert model rather than from an understanding of the context and its impact on dynamic processes (Cobb, 2000).

## Negotiation Skills Taught

Students enter negotiation courses with varying degrees of expertise and often have to unlearn old, unproductive skills to learn new ones (Lewicki, 1986). The type of skills included in courses varies across disciplines with a general focus on quantitative and economic analysis of issues, tactical and strategic moves, negotiation preparation, structuring deals, and interpersonal communication (Bordone, 2000; Fortgang, 2000). Consensus about what constitutes effective conflict management in recent years has led to a strong emphasis on developing interpersonal skills such as assertiveness and effective empathy (Bordone, 2000). Communication skills in negotiation courses focus on active and reflective listening, establishing trust, making opening statements, and formulating questions (Schultz, 1989).

## Teaching and Training Methods

Based on learning theories applied to negotiation, most courses employ a cyclical model that entails development of concepts, principles and generalizations, enactment of concrete experiences, observations and reflections on these experiences, and applying concepts to new situations (Lewicki, 1997). Although most courses incorporate elements of this model, trainers differ as to whether to begin with abstract concepts or with experiences; however, both are usually included in a pedagogical package. This framework leads to three arenas of learning: experiential, reflection, and analytical-conceptual, each with different tools and teaching methods.

Experiential training employs simulations, negotiation exercises, and virtual tutorials through role-playing activities or computerized games. Simulations create mutual experiences that incorporate behavioral application, opportunities for reflection, and reinforcement of conceptual development (Landry & Donnellon, 1999). Skills are broken into component parts, such as negotiation planning, modeling effective negotiation, or requiring particular behaviors (e.g., integrative bargaining). Videotaping negotiations helps students broaden their repertoire of behaviors and view their own reactions differently, especially if the instructor offers a new script for approaching the simulation in a more effective way (Bordone, 2000).

Online negotiation offers an opportunity to track the dialogue of the negotiation, provide programmed responses to the learner, and measure enacted skills (McKersie & Fonstad, 1997; Lewicki, 1997; Saunders & Lewicki, 1995). Moreover, computer simulations can manipulate variables such as single versus multiissues to test patterns of responses and to examine the durability and generalizability of skills. Computer simulations are only as good as their system designers, however, hence, the technology, logistics, hardware, and set up need considerable attention to make this pedagogical tool work (Saunders & Lewicki, 1995).

Reflection follows simulation and provides an opportunity to analyze and generalize from experiential learning. Methods that promote reflection include debriefings of simulations, diagnostic feedback, use of assessment tools, analytical journals,

videotape critiques, and formal written analyses that apply concepts to simulations. Trainers differ as to whether reflection should be inductive or deductive, but both processes are widely used to highlight conceptual issues, note deficiencies in negotiation process, and compare bargaining outcomes (Fortgang, 2000; Lewicki, 1986). Analyses applied directly to particular skills, such as identifying turning moves that disrupt negotiation or revealing naïve assumptions that lead to poor agreements, hold particular promise to help learners improve their negotiation skills (Kolb, 2000; Loewenstein & Thompson, 2000).

Analytical–Conceptual learning employs readings, cases, and film to examine negotiation behavior in context, observe nonverbal behaviors, and understand the complexities of the process (Lewicki, 1986). Research on the use of case studies reveals differences between case comparison and case analysis as methods of teaching negotiation. Overall, participants are more effective at finding integrative agreements when they explicitly compare cases for their common solution than when they analyze a case separately (Loewenstein, Thompson, & Gentner, 1999). This pattern holds even when participants are asked to write advice to the negotiators in the case (Thompson, Loewenstein, & Gentner, 2000). Apparently, comparing two cases forces individuals to move beyond their superficial similarities to discover the underlying principles embedded in the cases. To some extent, those in the advice condition become too caught up in the details of a case rather than in uncovering integrative potential across cases.

## **Effectiveness of Skills Training**

Determining the effectiveness of negotiation skills training entails a number of tests, including feedback from participants, indicators of goal achievement, assessment of skills utilization, and transfer of skills to different situations. Training programs frequently employ feedback surveys to ascertain participant satisfaction with negotiation courses. For the most part, participants report high satisfaction with negotiation skills training; however, few programs actually assess whether training increases participants' knowledge or improves their bargaining skills (Schultz, 1989).

In the area of goal achievement, several empirical studies examine whether focusing on cognitive understanding of practical skills helps individuals negotiate more effectively. In particular, Weingart, Hyder, and Prietula (1996) observed that negotiators who were provided with knowledge of distributive, integrative, and neutral strategies engaged in more integrative behavior and achieved higher joint outcomes than did those who did not have tactical knowledge. In a follow-up study, Weingart, Prietula, Hyder, and Genovese (1999) found that negotiators with tactical knowledge responded immediately in kind to integrative behaviors and were more likely to continue these strategies, regardless of their opponent's behavior. These studies suggest that informing negotiators about tactics could facilitate integrative bargaining. Thus, enhancing the goal of cognitive understanding helps individuals bargain more effectively than does no exposure to negotiation tactical knowledge.

In assessing skill utilization, negotiation training receives low marks. As evidence for this claim, roughly 90% of a group of executives who received intense negotiation training on integrative bargaining performed ineffectively in subsequent simulations (Thompson et al., 2000). In like manner, Lewicki (1997) monitored 40 sales negotiators who had received several multiday seminars on negotiation and found that most of them could not employ integrative negotiation skills in their real-life interactions. Similar findings exist for training in mutual gains or principled negotiations with

union and management groups (Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1994; Friedman, 1993, 1994; Hunter & McKersie, 1992). Even though training in integrative bargaining enabled negotiators to build trust, it did not alter traditional positional bargaining in a number of labor-management groups (Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1994).

These findings lead Lewicki (1997) to conclude that much negotiation training is cosmetic or superficial, particularly in developing skills that transfer to new problems. Transfer refers to the ability to apply a concept, schema, or skill learned in one situation to a relevant but different problem. Several explanations may account for this deficiency, including complexity of negotiation skills, need for structural similarities that transfer across contexts, and low self-efficacy.

First, complexity of negotiation skills may contribute to poor performance in transferring knowledge to new situations. As noted earlier, negotiation skills encompass a collection of behaviors including strategizing, advocacy, persuasion, cognitive processing, economic analysis, and interpersonal communication. Trainers typically concentrate on one or two of these skills without sufficient attention to critical subsets of skills (Lewicki, 1997). In effect, training tends to focus on key behaviors, thus falling short in developing competency sets and skill clusters.

A second concern in transferring skills to new situations is acquiring structural similarities between different types of negotiations. Gillespie, Thompson, Loewenstein, and Gentner (1999) demonstrated that solving one negotiation exercise did not improve the likelihood of resolving a second one because negotiators concentrated on surface rather than structural similarities, for example, assuming a fixed pie approach and moving quickly to compromise. They compared four types of learning—feedback, repetition, observation, and analogy—and concluded that observation and analogy were effective methods for transferring knowledge of negotiation skills. Employing multiple examples that illustrated the same principle enhanced analogical reasoning and promoted transfer of negotiation skills to new situations. Moreover, if this coherent system of knowledge paralleled repertoires of experts, negotiation performance showed improvements even months later. Thus, learning should be tied to underlying structures or principles of negotiation rather than to particular skills or negotiation contexts.

A third potential problem with transferring negotiation skills is self-efficacy. Some individuals may acquire useful information but still have low confidence in their abilities to perform the necessary skills (low self-efficacy) or control the situation (low perceived control). In this case, self-management training or ways to increase a person's feelings that he or she can use tactical knowledge successfully should supplement content training or teaching the negotiation process. Essentially, self-management training involves anticipating performance obstacles, monitoring one's own performance, rewarding success, and overcoming performance problems (Gist, Bavetta, & Stevens, 1990). Research indicates that this type of training improves negotiation skills relative training in tactical knowledge alone (Gist et al., 1990), particularly for negotiators who have low self-efficacy (Gist, Stevens, & Bavetta, 1991).

Furthermore, self-management training aids in addressing the gender bias in negotiation (Stevens, Bavetta, & Gist, 1993). Stevens et al. (1993) created a training program to examine discrepancies between men with MBAs (masters of business degrees) who continually negotiated higher salaries than did women with MBAs (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991). They speculated that higher salaries resulted from male bargainers setting higher goals, having higher levels of self-efficacy, and perceiving more control than female negotiators did. Thus, they designed a study in

which half of the participants were trained in goal setting and the other half received self-management training in how to identify and overcome performance obstacles.

They found that training in goal setting significantly improved male and female performance, but men surpassed women in receiving higher negotiated salaries; however, in self-management training, women slightly outperformed men. Hence, the critical variable in closing the gender gap was enhancing perceived control. When women received self-management training, their perceived control increased significantly from its level in content training or goals setting. Overall, low self-efficacy could block transfer of bargaining skills to new situations and could contribute to poor negotiation performance.

## Summary

Research on negotiation training is truly in its infancy. Most of these studies are based on limited sample sizes, generalized descriptions, and short-term evaluation of programs. Analysis of negotiation training needs to be grounded in reliable and valid assessment tools that can be administered before, during, and after taking a course. Moreover, skills acquisition needs to be measured in aggregates as well as through individual behaviors, over time, and across situations. For example, Landry and Donnellon (1999) critiqued negotiation training for its narrow focus on transactional bargaining, its limited attention to social power, and its failure to incorporate the multiple realities that define most complex bargaining situations. Despite these shortcomings, negotiation training appears firmly grounded in models of learning that combine reflection, coaching, and repeated experimentation. Active programs of research are examining issues of tactical knowledge and transfer of skills to new situations.

## CONCLUSIONS

This review of the literature uncovered generalizations about the skills that increase negotiator effectiveness; however, as noted throughout this review, these conclusions are qualified by the methods used to study negotiation effectiveness. Moreover, these generalizations reflect the current state of knowledge and will undoubtedly need to be qualified or rejected as research continues. To facilitate future research, some important issues need to be addressed.

First, are some skills more fundamental than others are? Often scholars act in a manner that implies that they are. For example, in the introduction to their book, Neale and Bazerman (1991) wrote, "The central argument of this book is that to negotiate more effectively negotiators need to make more rational decisions. Making such decisions requires that negotiators understand and reduce the cognitive errors that permeate their decision process (p. 1)." Although research indicates that such errors adversely impact negotiation success, the issue of whether rational decision making is the primary skill is unclear. Indeed, a negotiator may have the cognitive skills to identify an integrative solution but lack self-efficacy or sufficient communication skills to convince the opponent to accept it. As Thompson (1998) noted,

The presence of two or more people implies that the decision-making process is inherently interdependent—that is, what one person does affects the other party. It is not

sufficient for us to focus only on our own judgement skills to be an effective negotiator; we must understand how to interact, persuade and communicate with others. (p. 2)

Hence, future research should focus on the interrelationship among skills. In other words, how or to what extent do cognitive skills depend on interaction skills? Can interaction skills compensate for inadequate cognitive skills?

Second, because research indicates that particular skills are linked to achieving a different outcome, which skills should negotiators learn? Perhaps the answer lies with the orientation that a person has toward negotiation. Some scholars believe that individuals and societies are better served if people engage in integrative rather than distributive bargaining (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Indeed, integrative agreements increase the outcomes for each negotiator without harming their relationship. Hence, training in distributive bargaining simply continues dysfunctional behavior.

Others might suggest that bargainers learn skills that are appropriate to the contexts that he or she encounters. For example, in his survey of professional negotiators, Karras (1970) found variation across professions with regard to essential skills. Engineering program managers were highly individualistic, saw little value in personal rapport, and ranked the most important negotiation skills as setting clear objectives, exploiting power, and taking risks. Design engineers valued product knowledge and self-control but saw little value in insight, establishing personal rapport, or taking risks. Supplier salespeople, in contrast, valued persistence, product knowledge, and intelligence but saw little value in problem-solving skills. Conversely, attorneys and accountants felt that problem solving was the most important skill.

Beyond role, the most desirable skills may be dependent on the kind of situation that one encounters. Barry and Friedman (1996) argued that success in distributive negotiations results from gamesmanship, nerve, and aggressiveness, whereas effectiveness in integrative bargaining flows from creative problem-solving skills. Indeed, they found that the more agreeable a negotiator's personality, the less successful he or she was in a distributive context but that agreeableness had minimal impact on reaching integrative outcomes. Furthermore, cognitive ability enhanced integrative bargaining, but it was not related to successful distributive bargaining.

Yet other evidence suggests that effective negotiators should learn a wide range of skills. Putnam (1990) argued that integrative and distributive processes inherently co-occur; hence, effective negotiators should acquire skills in both areas. Indeed, even if integrative and distributive processes sometimes occur in separate stages rather than co-occur (Donohue & Roberto, 1996), a negotiator would need to know how to effectively enact both sets of strategies and when to use them. This implies that a negotiator should be sensitive and adaptive to situational cues. For example, Roloff and Jordan (1991) found that when integrative potential was high, experienced negotiators planned to logroll, but when little integrative potential existed, they prepared a distributive argumentation strategy.

Third, how are individual difference variables related to negotiation skills? The volume of negotiation research focused on the effect of individual differences such as personality and gender is substantial and largely does not yield clear and simple findings (see Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 1999). Hence, one must be cautious so as not to overgeneralize. Nonetheless, research on individual differences may be helpful in two ways. A particular trait might reflect important skills that can be taught in a training program. For example, Jordan and Roloff (1997) found that because of their superior planning skills, high self-monitors are more effective negotiators than are low self-monitors. Additionally there is evidence that some individuals confront

unique problems that require specialized training programs. As noted earlier, Stevens et al. (1993) created a negotiation training program tailored to the specific needs of women in business.

Fourth, how do cultural differences impact negotiation skills? Expert negotiators found both commonality and variation across cultures with regard to what constitutes important skills (Graham & Sano, 1989). The greatest differences emerged between Japanese and U.S. negotiators such that the latter emphasized rational decision-making skills and the former focused more on interaction skills. Future research should center on how these different skill orientations impact intercultural negotiation. Brett and Okumura (1998) had U.S. and Japanese negotiators engage in integrative bargaining simulations with an opponent from their own nation (intracultural) or from the other nation (intercultural). They hypothesized that because the two cultures have different schemas with regard to self-interest (U.S. culture stresses self-interest to a greater extent) and power (Japanese culture is more hierarchical) and different scripts for how to share information (U.S. negotiators prefer directness to a greater extent), intercultural negotiators would be less likely to reach integrative agreements than would intracultural negotiators. Indeed, joint benefits were lower in intercultural negotiations than in intracultural ones. In part, the difficulties associated with intercultural negotiation stemmed from an inability to use priority information to reach logrolling agreements. Intercultural as opposed to intracultural negotiators adopted a rather narrow focus on issues and reached premature closure.

In a more recent study, Adair, Okumura, and Brett (2001) investigated whether behavioral adaptation facilitates integrative bargaining in intercultural negotiations. They had U.S. and Japanese negotiators engage in intracultural negotiations so as to determine normative patterns for each culture. The patterns were compared with those observed when negotiators from the two countries engaged in intercultural negotiations. During intercultural negotiations, the Japanese demonstrated significant adaptation. Relative to their behavior with another Japanese negotiator, they increased their use of direct information exchange and reduced their use of influence strategies. In effect, their behavior became similar to that observed in intracultural negotiations between U.S. negotiators. Although U.S. negotiators did not adapt their behavior, they increased their attempts to clarify their positions and intentions. Nonetheless, despite these attempts, negotiators from different cultures were less able to reach integrative agreements than were those from the same culture. The researchers concluded that the missed opportunity might have resulted from a lack of motivation rather than a skills deficit. Clearly, much more research is required on intercultural negotiation skills.

In 1976, Cushman and Craig argued that during the 20th century, communication had shifted from being a tool primarily used to convert others to being a method by which consensus is negotiated. As such, they noted that it is imperative that we understand the nature of negotiation skills. Reflecting that call, the volume of research on negotiation has grown enormously over the last three decades. From this database, we identified a variety of skills that allow negotiators to be effective; however, we noted that some desired outcomes require different skills than do others, and it is likely that a truly effective negotiator will need to learn several skill sets. Relative to other areas of negotiation, little research has been conducted on training, but, albeit limited, there is evidence that negotiators can acquire skills that make them more effective. Certainly, more research needs to be done and with greater rigor, but the body of knowledge is sufficient to make one optimistic about the future.

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CHAPTER

# 21

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR GROUP DECISION MAKING

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Of the many topics on which communication scholars interested in the study of groups have focused, none has been the object of more sustained attention than that of decision making (Gouran, 1999). This is understandable in light of the fact that decision making is an activity in which individuals and groups engage numerous times virtually every day. It is even more understandable when one considers the significant ramifications such activity often has for the decision makers and others' well-being. At an individual level, the activity is exclusively cognitive, unless, of course, one solicits input from others while attempting to reach a decision. In groups, the process of making decisions is manifested and unfolds in the communicative exchanges that occur among the members. In either case, the likelihood of choosing appropriately (Gouran, 1988) depends on a number of skills. In this chapter, I identify such skills and relate them to the outcomes that decision-making groups achieve.

The term *skill*, as I am using it, refers to a capacity, either mental or behavioral in nature, that, in structured form, enables one to perform tasks necessary for the production of particular outcomes. Skills can be genetic in origin or acquired. In both instances, they fall along a continuum from undeveloped to highly refined and vary as a function of neurological, physical, and social factors. For the most part, the skills I discuss in this essay are acquired and in need of development, as opposed to being innate.

The types of situations decision makers confront and to which their choices apply range in the amount of cognitive effort, the number and sorts of skills, and, typically, the degree of deliberation required to produce desired outcomes (Beach, 1997). At one end of the scale, an individual or group may need to do little more than determine whether a set course of action applies to a current set of circumstances requiring a choice. A teacher, for instance, may have a policy specifying that three unexcused absences from class will result in the lowering of one's grade for a course by one letter. Confronted with a student's having three such absences, the teacher need only apply the policy. In this situation, matching the facts to the policy presumably would be the only requisite skill. Even if a final decision in the case cited had to be reached by a

group, such as a grade appeals committee, the task would reduce largely to a determination of whether the student in question had, in fact, violated an explicitly formulated and stated policy and, hence, whether the indicated penalty is thereby warranted.

At the other end of the scale, making a decision can involve substantial cognitive effort, an array of associated skills, and active deliberation. One instance might be when a group is trying to generate a solution to a problem that satisfies a variety of specific criteria and for which there may be no precedents or well-established guidelines. Public school administrators concerned with attempting to prevent student violence, for example, have precisely this sort of task. For such a situation, decision makers presumably would need to be skilled not only in recognizing and articulating the problem, matter, or issue to be addressed and resolved, but also in reasoning, creativity, argument, maintaining an environment that is conducive to effective deliberation, managing conflicts, and the like. The cognitive and behavioral burdens could therefore be numerous as well as diverse. For the group in the example to perform well, communication skills would be particularly important. As Hollomon and Hendrick (1972) have noted, quality of decisions is a function of the amount and quality of discussion.

In light of the fact that the situations decision makers address are so highly variable, to be optimally prepared to function effectively, one needs either to possess, or to acquire, and develop a broad repertoire of pertinent skills. As noted, a major, if not the central, purpose of this chapter is to identify those skills. Before turning to that task, however, it is important that I acknowledge that competence in one skill category may be, and often is, contingent on one's competence in another category. For example, how skillful one is in the management of relationships may, in many instances, depend on how adept he or she is in making sense of situations (Barge, 1994). Because scholars have not as yet determined the precise nature of such contingencies, however, I treat the various skills discussed separately, but within three general categories: task-related, relational, and procedural. Such a taxonomy offers greater clarity than more complicated organizational schemes and therefore should contribute to a better understanding of the material covered.

## TASK-RELATED SKILLS

Task-related skills concern how individuals and groups manage the substance of the issues with which they grapple. Of the skills that one could classify as task-related, four appear to be particularly germane to group decision making: problem-recognition and framing, inference-drawing, idea-generation, and argument. Not all of these skills have the same relative importance in every situation involving the need to reach a decision. Consequently, I have avoided ordering them in any sort of hierarchical fashion, explicitly, implicitly, or otherwise. (I have done the same in the later discussions of skills representing the relational and procedural categories.) In my discussion of task-related skills, if there is an order, it corresponds more directly to the sequence of activities in which groups must engage as decision tasks move from being nearly automatic, routine, or perfunctory to being complex and requiring deliberation than it does to the relative importance of the relevant skills. Against this backdrop, then, is an examination of each of the four task-related skills mentioned earlier.

### Problem Recognition and Framing

Even if an individual or group's decision-making task reduces merely to determining whether an existing policy, precedent, or standard operating procedure is applicable

to a given situation requiring a choice, recognizing what is to be resolved and proper framing of it are important (Beach, 1997). Improper recognition or misframing of a problem can have unfortunate consequences. A good example comes from work by Saks and Hastie (1986), who observed that, in the context of jury decisions, how a judge's instructions are framed can and does lead to inappropriate understandings of the applicability of laws to given cases. Differences in framing can also result in widely discrepant sentencing decisions. These discrepancies suggest that individuals convicted of crimes may, unfortunately either for them or for those they have allegedly victimized, receive penalties that are more or less severe than their acts would merit.

Evidence exists to establish that skill in problem recognition and framing is often lacking among decision makers—or, assuming at least that they have such skill, that they do not consistently use it. Cohen, March, and Olsen (1976), for instance, in developing their so-called garbage can model of organizational choice, reported that decision makers often implement solutions to problems that may or may not exist or that are of an unclear nature. In some instances, decision makers cannot even articulate what it is they are, or were, trying accomplish by engaging in some action. In line with Janis's (1989) observation that problem analysis is one of the greatest deficiencies decision makers commonly display, Hirokawa (1988) identified inadequate problem recognition and analysis as a variable distinguishing effective decision-making groups from ineffective decision-making groups. This finding was consistent with one in earlier research by Hirokawa and Pace (1983).

When groups engage in decision making, the members often have in mind different framings of the matters to be addressed or issues to be resolved. Such variation can account for a phenomenon reported by Mitchell and Beach (1977), who observed that decision makers tend to be inconsistent in their application of policies to identical or highly similar problems. They apply policies inconsistently, apparently because they frame the problems they address differently. It is insufficient for decision makers to rely on the possibility that among the different perceptions and, hence, framings of a problem, issue, situation, or the like, one will automatically or necessarily stand out as obviously most accurate.

Proper recognition of what the object of a decision is and how it should be understood requires skill in the interpretation of what signs and signals related to a judgment may indicate (Minsky, 1968; Murrell, 1977). Given that group decision making is interactive, such recognition and understanding require, in addition, that at least one member of the group be able to articulate the problem or issue to be resolved and frame it verbally in a manner that leaves little or no question as to the most reasonable, if not correct, representation.

Bazerman (1998) cited a great deal of laboratory evidence suggesting that framing can determine how conservative or risky individuals or groups are apt to be in making certain kinds of choices and, in the process, act counter to their best interests. Matters framed in terms of losses, for instance, can lead to unduly risky decisions, whereas ones framed in terms of gains often result in excessively conservative choices. Apparently, we are frequently willing to take considerable risks to avoid losses but are reluctant to taken chances if that means foregoing a sure gain, as in the case of one's accepting a firm job offer even when there is a high likelihood that a much better opportunity is in the offing.

Possibly more to the point of the framing-quality of decision relationship, Beach (1997) used an extended example of an executive who consistently sees a poor profit showing by his company as a production problem when, in fact, it is a sales problem. The misframing leads to an unnecessary investment in improving the product and at

the same time a continuation of unacceptable profits. As the example indicates, these sorts of misconstruals can be costly in organizational life. They can be minimized, if not avoided altogether, however, when communication functions to ensure that a group considers the full range of underlying problems that a given set of symptoms may represent and rules out those having the least weight of evidence behind them or smallest degrees of plausibility.

## **Inference Drawing**

Although skill in problem-recognition and framing is important to ensure that groups reach appropriate decisions, and in some instances may even be sufficient, the demands of the situation are such that members also have to be skilled in inference drawing. In fact, Alma Johnson, one of the pioneers in research on decision making in groups in the field of communication studies, saw ability in drawing inferences as a key to distinguishing between effective and ineffective groups (see Johnson, 1939, 1940, 1943).

Whereas problem recognition and framing reflect one's perceptual and interpretive capabilities, inference drawing extends into the realms of analysis and reasoning and takes the form of descriptive, predictive, analogical, and causal judgments (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). It is often thought of as equivalent to critical thinking (see Bensley, 1998). As the discussion that follows shows, skill in drawing inferences is important not only for the establishment of one's own positions, but also for determining the defensibility of other group members' ideas and the information from which decisions derive (Newman & Newman, 1969).

An inference is a judgment, claim, or conclusion that goes beyond the information on which it is based. Hence, inferences necessarily involve assertions for which validity and truth-value are, at best, somewhat uncertain. An individual or the members of a group making a decision having any degree of consequentiality presumably would want to reduce uncertainty to the extent possible for any inferences on which a choice depends.

That individuals, whether functioning alone or as members of groups, typically use such inference-drawing skills as they may possess in an appropriate manner is not well documented. Some evidence suggests that they do not. Gouran (1983), for example, conducted a study in which members of decision-making groups questioned virtually none of the inferences one another made, including the ones that did not appear to have much warrant. Such data do not, in and of themselves, establish that decision makers lack such skill; they are merely suggestive of that possibility. More direct evidence that they lack this type of skill comes from a variety of sources, such as those discussed in the following paragraphs.

Conger (1998) noted that many organizational leaders are not especially adept at forecasting. Langer (1975), moreover, reported that such decision makers not uncommonly fall prey to the view that having made a prediction *ipso facto* increases certainty. Supportive of Conger's and Langer's observations is work by Cyert, Dill, and March (1958) showing that decision makers' predictions in the business context are frequently distorted by how much they desire to see particular outcomes occur. This also appears to be the case in medical prognoses. In this regard, Meehl (1954) surveyed a number of studies showing that linear regression models (or formulae derived from correlational data) provide a better basis for predicting the outcomes of various disorders and forms of treatment than medical practitioners' assessments.

Dawes and Corrigan (1974), in discussing linear models of decision making, mentioned other findings indicating that people, in general, are poor in predicting future events. As a conspicuous illustration, they pointed to predictions of academic success by college admissions committees. Such predictions tend not to be accurate, because those who make them frequently attach undue importance to some types of data for which relationships to academic success have never been satisfactorily demonstrated.

In the study by Meehl (1954), even expert and experienced decision makers do not appear to be especially good at making predictions and frequently permit the sort of irrelevant information noted in the preceding example to influence their judgments (Einhorn, 1986; Einhorn & Schact, 1977; Gaeth & Shanteau, 1986; Hirschberg, 1977). In fact, Nisbett and Ross (1980) wrote an entire book concerning humans' inferential shortcomings, further establishing that laypersons and experts alike frequently make unwarranted inferences and, in the process, reach many poor decisions.

Prediction and forecasting are not the only areas in which decision makers tend to display inferential deficiencies. Neustadt and May (1986) pointed to similar deficiencies with respect to analogical reasoning, when decision makers have inappropriately judged noncomparable events to be similar and acted on the basis of faulty inferences. They offer the Ford Administration's implementation of a massive program of vaccination in response to the swine flu scare of 1976 as an excellent illustration of decision making based on ill-founded analogical reasoning. In this incident, decision makers presumed that the strain of flu was equivalent in its virulence to the one of 1918, which resulted in large numbers of deaths; this proved not to be the case. The new strain was not deadly, nor did it spread widely. Regrettably, those facts did not become clear until after the government needlessly expended a large number of tax dollars on the program.

Deficiencies are also evident in causal judgments. Bensley (1998) saw this type of inferential weakness as especially problematic in the formation of clinical judgments and as contributing to misdiagnosis of psychological disorders, as did Dawes (1988). Frequently at the base of such difficulties is the well-known tendency decision makers have to take correlational evidence alone as indicative of a causal relationship (Golding & Roper, 1972; Shaklee & Mims, 1986).

Research growing from attribution theory provides additional evidence that decision makers are often given to making questionable causal judgments and therefore may be lacking skill in this type of inference drawing. Allison and Messick (1987) summarized a considerable body of information showing a tendency among both individuals and groups to attribute the causes of others' behavior on the basis of those individuals and groups' own dispositions rather than on the basis of external, objective evidence. This commonly results in the misattribution of intentions, which may, in turn, lead to decisions that become a source of conflict (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001). Carroll (1986) noted similar tendencies (in this case, to see prior criminal behavior exclusively in terms of personal dispositions) in making parole decisions. Finally, Gemmill (1989) found the misattribution of causality to be at the base of the phenomenon of scapegoating, which often has the added consequence of potentially impairing relationships among the members of decision-making groups.

There are undoubtedly many reasons for such inferential inadequacies. One that has been especially well researched in recent years, however, is the excessive reliance people place on heuristics in forming judgments. Heuristics are mental shortcuts and rules of thumb that we apply to specific situations requiring judgments (Janis, 1989).

Bazerman (1998) referred to them as "simplifying strategies" that provide "standard rules that implicitly direct our judgments" (p. 5).

As an illustration, one might rely on a rule of thumb, such as the assumption that a person accused of a crime is more likely to be guilty than not guilty, in forming a judgment or reaching a decision concerning actual guilt. Davis, Spitzer, Nagao, and Stasser (1978), as a matter of fact, uncovered precisely such a tendency among individuals and groups participating in a study of mock juries. It could well be the case that a majority of those who have been accused of crimes may have committed them, in which case one might make an appropriate decision a certain percentage of the time. The determination of guilt in a specific case would seem to require much more than the statistical odds, however.

Bazerman (1998), and Nisbett and Ross (1980) before him, offered detailed discussions of the heuristics that enter into day-to-day judgments. More important than the specific varieties of the heuristics themselves are the biases that heuristics may induce and the ways those biases can affect decisions. Frey, Schulz-Hardt, and Stahlberg (1996) suggested that the shortcuts heuristics represent contribute to the emergence of selective information seeking and confirmation bias. For example, a person who believes that individuals who are accused of crimes are more likely than not to be guilty of them might well be inclined in a trial to focus on evidence indicative of guilt more so than evidence that is exculpatory. Janis and Mann (1977) indicated that such bolstering of inadequately or prematurely formed judgments is common among decision makers.

That biases resulting from a reliance on heuristics and resulting deficiencies in drawing inferences may lead to questionable decisions has been demonstrated in research on the sanctioning of deviant behavior. Wahrman (1977), for instance, reported a greater incidence of severe sanctions applied to individuals for violations of group norms when the parties were of low status rather than of high status. Gouran, Ketrow, Spear, and Metzger (1984) and Gouran and Andrews (1984) uncovered similar tendencies in penalties assigned to individuals for infractions of school policies and violations of criminal law. The decision makers in these studies appear to have formed different judgments concerning the causes of the perpetrators' behavior and were, as a result, more inclined to excuse the same behavior when attributed to individuals of high status than of low status.

Lack of skill in drawing inferences warranted by the information to which decision makers have access has other consequences. Horai (1977) related erroneous inferences to disharmony in groups, as did Hatfield (1983). Maier (1967) noted a pronounced connection to premature commitment to potential solutions to problems, as did Bazerman (1998). Kruglanski (1986) and Kruglanski and Freund (1983) further pointed to an irrational escalation of commitment as characteristic of many decision-making groups and to which they apply the term *freeze-think*.

Freeze-think is consistent with the tendency Dawes (1988) discussed under the heading of "sunk-cost" thinking, for which he cited continued U.S. involvement and military escalation in Vietnam as a prime example. As another example, some of his critics see President George W. Bush's desire to move forward with the development and deployment of a "missile defense shield," despite a number of unpromising tests and outright failures, as a more recent and conspicuous instance of such "nonrational escalation of commitment" (Bazerman, 1998, p. 66).

People reveal an implicit understanding of the dangers in sunk-cost thinking in their use of such expressions as "throwing good money after bad" and "money down the drain," but they do not always apply that understanding in reaching decisions. This

kind of inferential deficiency, as well as others, can even lead to group members' concurring in decisions they do not privately share. Harvey (1974) noted such a situation in the case of family in rural Texas who took a trip on a miserable Sunday afternoon to Abilene, only to discover after the fact that no one had wanted to go.

Of all the consequences that inferential shortcomings can have, the one most central to this essay is that they heighten the likelihood of a decision-making group's choosing inappropriately. Poor inferential judgments were at the base of a number of foreign policy disasters that Janis (1982) identified in his influential book on the phenomenon of groupthink. Other evidence of the inference/decision-making outcome relationship may be found in Gouran's (1976, 1984) studies of the Watergate case and his and his collaborators' investigations of the *Challenger* disaster (see Gouran, Hirokawa, & Martz, 1986; Hirokawa, Gouran, & Martz, 1988). Finally, Beach, Jungermann, and De Bruyn (1996) reviewed a large body of research showing that lack of skill in making predictive inferences frequently leads to poor decisions, particularly in the context of planning.

When group members display skill in drawing inferences, they are more likely to make appropriate decisions and to behave rationally (Bonomo, 1977). Making appropriate or warranted inferences requires a knowledge of rules of reasoning and an ability to apply them in specific situations. Limitations in space preclude cataloging all of the species of reasoning and their corresponding rules, but the following illustrations should be sufficient to make the point. Reasoning by analogy is a form of induction in which a person infers the likelihood that an object or situation will have a particular attribute on the basis of its similarities to other objects or situations that have the attribute. Such reasoning requires that the similarities outweigh the differences in the objects or situations involved if one is to serve adequately as the basis for drawing some conclusion about the other or others (Makau, 1990). As another illustration, establishing a cause-to-effect relationship (which may be either inductive or deductive in nature) requires, at minimum, that the alleged cause precede the presumed effect, that the alleged cause and presumed effect be contiguous, and that the alleged cause be sufficient to produce the presumed effect (Capaldi, 1979). If one ignores the rules or they do not apply, then his or her inferences are apt to be of questionable validity.

Knowing the rules for drawing what constitutes a warranted inference and being able to apply them at a cognitive level, as important as such knowledge and skill are, are not sufficient to prevent groups from basing decisions on inferences of questionable merit. The knowledge and related skill must be reflected in the interaction of the group. In short, one must not only be able but also willing to express the bases on which he or she has arrived at particular judgments concerning such matters as causality and probability, defend the warrants that link evidence to claims, and be open to disconfirmation under conditions in which others can point to weaknesses in the extent to which relevant information appears to support the judgments to which it leads. The person must also be able and willing to identify and express what it is that, on logical grounds, make questionable the claims of other group members if, in fact, they are.

## Idea Generation

In addition to possessing and being able to use the task-related skills I have discussed to this point, the prospects for effective decision making in groups are further improved if members, or at least some of them, are adept in generating ideas. This skill

can be a valuable asset when it comes to the alternatives groups consider in making choices (Philipsen, Mulac, & Dietrich, 1979) and establishing the criteria by which they assess those alternatives (Gouran, 1982). Insufficiency in either the number of alternatives or pertinent evaluative criteria can be problematic.

As an illustration of the importance of ideational skill, consider the case of a family in need of a new car. Were the family to restrict its search, say, to two dealers in a community having 10 or more and to limit its selection criteria also to two (e.g., price and indicated mileage), it would be taking a calculated risk of not making the best possible choice among those realistically available to it. Conceivably, other dealers than the two identified might have lower prices for the same product, the same price, and better mileage for a comparable product or a variety of other combinations that would be to the family's advantage to consider. By restricting the criteria, moreover, the family might do something regrettable, such as decide to purchase an automobile that is within its price range and has the mileage desired and then later discover that the service costs are well beyond what they would have been at another dealer and more than offset the price advantage they realized at the time of purchase.

Skill in idea generation has been primarily the province of scholars interested in the study of brainstorming—a term originally coined as a spinoff of “barnstorming” by Alex Osborn (1957) to suggest his interest in seeing executives engage in greater levels of risk taking. Risk taking as a motive for brainstorming (what many refer to as “creative problem solving”) gave way to a larger, possibly more critical, concern with increasing the likelihood that the best solutions to problems (or, where appropriate, best alternatives pertaining to issues in need of resolution) would be in the mix.

A fundamental premise of brainstorming (and its variants of creative problem solving and idea generation) is that prohibiting the evaluation of ideas at the stage of generation releases creative potential that evaluation typically constricts, or even possibly eliminates. As a result, for brainstorming to be effective requires the rapid introduction of ideas so as to prevent tendencies toward evaluation to take hold and thereby limit creative thinking. A second premise is that the activity, if individuals seriously undertake it, increases the volume of ideas that members of groups would otherwise identify and consider. In addition, the proportion of good ideas relative to the total output will be greater than one could expect under more normally constrained processes of ideation. Hence, the probability that a group will have among its alternatives the best possible ones is high, or at least higher than more conventional approaches to problem solving might permit.

Parnes (1970) suggested that research up to 1970 was largely supportive of the premises of brainstorming. Since 1970, however, research findings concerning idea generation, as described above, have been mixed (Jablin, 1981; Jablin, Seibold, & Sorenson, 1977). One explanation for the inconsistency is apparent in Parnes and Meadows's (1959) early caveat that to be effective, participants in a brainstorming session have to follow instructions. They frequently do not. Another explanation comes from work by Vroom, Grant, and Cotton (1969), who observed that the overt expression of ideas under brainstorming instructions can actually inhibit creativity. This appears to occur, among other reasons, because participants have evaluation apprehension, feel less highly motivated to contribute because others have similar ideas, or possibly feel uncomfortable expressing their thoughts in the presence of others who enjoy higher status. All of these tendencies fall under the rubric of “production blocking” (Beach, 1997, p. 134). Ironically, then, an activity designed to help the members of groups unleash their creative potential often has just the opposite effect.

Given the potentially inhibiting influence of face-to-face communication, Van de Ven and Delbecq (1974) developed a variation in brainstorming, now commonly referred to as the nominal group technique (NGT; p. 203). In NGT groups, members record ideas in writing and then share them at a later point. This adaptation seems to yield outcomes more nearly in line with the presumption of conventional brainstorming, as originated and articulated by Osborn (1957).

Another promising development in the area of idea generation has been the emergence of group support systems (GSS). Although these computer-based, electronic technologies serve a variety of functions in decision-making groups (Scott, 1999), Walsh (1996) noted that they seem to be particularly useful as an aid to idea generation. He further noted that numerous studies have yielded evidence showing that GSS groups (especially ones using a version called electronic brainstorming) surpass nominal groups and conventional brainstorming groups by a substantial margin in ideational output and quality of ideas. They do so presumably because the technology not only ensures anonymity but also makes it easier for individual members to participate. Walsh went on to point out, however, that "the reasons why the tool is effective are not fully understood" (p. 139).

Despite the variations in approaches to idea generation and inconsistencies in research findings related to them, scholarship in the area has established that decision-making groups frequently limit themselves in the alternatives and related ideas they consider, or are even willing to consider, in making choices. Moreover, they do so to a greater degree than is either necessary or desirable. In this regard, the approach to idea generation is far less critical than recognizing the need for members of decision-making groups to expand their thinking and to be active in the search for ideas.

Nutt (1977), in an experimental study of three creative problem-solving approaches to the development of plans for health care services and home health care delivery, concluded that ideational competence depends, in part, on one's selecting the approach, relative to particular sets of circumstances, that is best-suited to those circumstances. He discovered, for instance, that an interactive mode he called a "systems approach," which begins with a focus on solutions and involves experts, yielded better plans but fewer ideas than a nominal group approach called "behavioral," which involves initially focusing on problems (p. 499). (The third approach, "heuristic" was completely unstructured and, from Nutt's perspective, would be appropriate under limited circumstances even though, in this particular study, it resulted in plans of comparable quality to those generated by those taking the other two approaches.) According to Nutt, the outcome a given approach to idea generation calls for is, in the final analysis, what determines the focus of one's skill in idea generation. If his study is representative, a focus on solutions appears to yield better plans, whereas a focus on problems may yield more ideational output.

Whatever the conditions under which the members of a decision-making group engage in idea generation, at some point they will need to transform what occurs at a covert, cognitive level into verbal output. If they are unable to translate their thoughts into coherent utterances that reveal their unique qualities and pertinence to the issues under consideration, their introduction will probably be of limited value in, as well as have limited impact on, what subsequently transpires in the decision-making process. As with problem recognition, framing, and drawing inferences, then, the successful translation of ideational activity into communicative action is critical to the realization of the potential success of a decision-making group.

## Argument

The skills discussed to this point, if carefully honed, would appear to be sufficient for a group to make appropriate, well-founded, and warranted decisions, presumably by enabling the members to fulfill the requirements typically posed by decision-making tasks. Gouran and Hirokawa (1996), consistent with Rubin's (1984) identification of defining problems, identifying alternatives, quantifying alternatives, applying decision aids, determining what alternative is preferable, and implementing decisions, outlined these requirements as follows:

1. showing correct understanding of the issue to be resolved;
2. determining the minimal characteristics any alternative, to be acceptable, must possess;
3. identifying a relevant and realistic set of alternatives;
4. examining carefully the alternatives in relationship to each previously agreed-upon characteristic of an acceptable choice; and
5. selecting the alternative that analysis reveals to be most likely to have the desired characteristics. (p. 77)

In principle, if a group satisfies the first four requirements, making a decision should be comparatively simple. Ensuring that members have satisfactorily addressed the requirements, however, frequently demands yet another type of skill—that of argument (see Meyers, 1997). The necessity of this skill surfaces in a variety of circumstances, which, I trust, will become clear in the ensuing discussion.

A common situation arising in decision-making groups involves a tendency among members to equate majority positions with correctness, legitimacy, or acceptability (Axsom, Yates, & Chaiken, 1987; De Dreu & De Vries, 1997). Widespread agreement, moreover, can function to reinforce that belief (Gouran, 1986). A consequence is the exertion of pressure on individuals not sharing the majority view to acquiesce to it (Boster, 1990). This tendency has been repeatedly documented in the literature on small-group behavior (see Bradley, 1980; Levine & Russo, 1987; Nemeth, 1986). Such pressure and resulting acquiescence can be injurious to the prospects for making appropriate decisions if the majority prevails under circumstances in which a dissenting individual, or minority, happens to have the stronger basis in evidence and reasoning for a position other than that of the majority. Dealing effectively with pressure for uniformity therefore can be critical to the success of a decision-making group and requires skill in argument (Bradley, Hamon, & Harris (1976), a skill Valentine and Fisher (1974) referred to as "innovative deviance."

Minorities are not inevitably at the mercy of majorities. Evidence exists to establish that skill in argument can contribute to a majority's accepting a minority point of view (Maass & Clark, 1984), that such influence can even carry over into future discussions (Bradley et al., 1976; Chaiken & Stangor, 1987), and that judgments by members of a minority who are skilled in argument can do much more to raise other arguments and counterarguments than those of the majority (Moscovici, 1980). The last of these functions, according to Moscovici, can have the ultimate effect of ensuring that errors have been identified and, if possible, neutralized.

To counteract majority influence, when it is adversely affecting the fulfillment of task requirements, involves more than mere opposition. An individual advancing a minority point of view must also be knowledgeable, confident, consistent, and

persistent (Nemeth & Wachtler, 1974). Consistency is especially important, as Moscovici, Lage, and Naffrechoux (1969) determined more than 30 years ago. These investigators conducted a study in which a two-party minority either consistently or inconsistently maintained opposition to a four-person majority's views in a color perception task. Conversion to the minority position was significantly greater when the minority remained consistent throughout the discussion than when it vacillated.

Majorities, when successful, produce compliance, but not necessarily concurrence with, or private acceptance, of their views. Minorities represented by individuals skilled in argument, in contrast, when successful, are more apt to achieve conversion of the majority to the minority positions than when they are represented by individuals who are not skilled in argument (Moscovici, Mugny, & Van Avermaet, 1985). Maass, West, and Cialdini (1987) explained this phenomenon in terms of the thought processes involved. They summarized research suggesting that minority views, especially when well-articulated and presented, activate different thought processes from those associated with the expression of majority views—thought processes that bring into sharper focus the considerations crucial to making informed choices. Moreover, these processes appear to be more strongly associated with the incidence of such choices than those associated with majority influence.

Supportive of this view is a study by Guillon and Personnaz (cited by Maass et al., 1987) showing that participants viewing segments of a taped group discussion characterized conflict associated with the majority as interpersonal, whereas they saw conflict associated with the minority as largely cognitive or substantive in nature. Further supportive of Maass et al.'s line of thinking is a study by Maass and Clark (1983), in which participants saw minorities as arguing more and counterarguing less than majorities. This suggests that the minorities involved were less on the defensive and more concerned with finding weaknesses in the majority point of view.

For argument to play a useful role in decision making, it is not necessary that views of group members be divided along majority and minority lines. Even under conditions in which unanimity exists, it may be important for a group member to enact the role of "devil's advocate." In fact, Janis (1982) recommended formalization and routinization of such a role as a safeguard against, and possible deterrent to, the occurrence of groupthink; if not a deterrent, it can function as a measure to reduce groupthink's impact on decisions reached.

The wisdom of Janis's suggestion appears to be supported by research involving devil's advocacy. Herbert and Estes (1977), for instance, reported that devil's advocacy, which consists of one's deliberately dissenting (independently of his or her private beliefs and feelings) from recommendations, pointing out logical and other fallacies, and noting inaccuracies in the interpretation of information, especially when hastily thought out and one-sided proposals are being considered, leads to better decisions. Schwenk and Cosier (1993) produced further evidence that devil's advocacy contributes to improved decision making in groups when characterized by these and related attributes.

Another responsibility of the devil's advocate is to prevent premature consensus, if possible (Janis, 1989), and thereby to aid in keeping groups from taking precipitous and otherwise ill-advised actions. A specific indication that this aspect of devil's advocacy can have the desired consequence is a study by Smith, Scott Tindale, and Dugoni (1996), who observed that when minorities in decision-making groups "deliberately" took a deviant position (that is, established opposition for the sake of opposition), less extreme decisions resulted than was the case when no one did or when no minority was present.

In line with devil's advocacy, dialectical inquiry has been identified as an argument-based approach for overcoming some of the sorts of obstacles to effective decision making noted earlier. Mason (1969) was among the first to recommend dealing with decision making within a dialectical frame of reference for strategic planning decisions. He did so in light of research findings indicating that it helps to minimize the emergence and effects of confirmation bias and selective information-seeking mentioned earlier in the discussion of heuristics. Mason became a strong proponent of dialectical inquiry (based on the Hegelian tripartite model of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis) as a result of a case study he did for a large anonymous national organization.

In the study, Mason had two teams of managers develop a plan or counterplan for expanding their market. The teams subsequently debated the merits and weaknesses of both the plan and counterplan until such time as a revised and widely acceptable uniform plan emerged. This was not an exercise in compromise; rather, as teams engaged in mutual argument, they began to see the elements of a new plan that, from their respective vantage points, would be superior to either the original plan or counterplan. In compromise, the parties to a dispute would prefer acquiring what they originally propose but settle for less in the interests of terminating the conflict.

Dialectical inquiry is essentially a process of pitting assumptions underlying decision strategies against counterassumptions and counterstrategies that eventuates in an integration of the best surviving ideas. As Meyers (1997) stated, "Dialectical inquiry involves structured debate between the advocates of one plan and the proponents of another plan. The two subgroups debate their different assumptions until they reach agreement" (p. 198). In short, it represents a process that aims at mutual discovery rather than compliance or control of outcomes. For instance, parties to a dispute concerning which of two or more alternatives is to be preferred at initial stages may, in the course of later sustained interaction, begin to see possibilities for combining elements of competing alternatives. In the process, they would have shifted from a distributive (win-lose) to an integrative (win-win) decision-making frame.

Mason (1969) discovered only that dialectic inquiry contributes to consensus and group-member satisfaction. Mitroff and Emshoff (1979) produced evidence showing that this practice also enhances the likelihood of groups' reaching good decisions. Grob (1984), a further proponent of argument as used within a dialectical approach to group tasks involving consequential choices, cited further evidence suggesting that it contributes to the production of appropriate decisions in groups, that is, ones that follow from evidence and the careful, critical analysis of that evidence (Gouran, 1988).

Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan (1986) reported an experimental study demonstrating that both dialectical inquiry and devil's advocacy, by a significant margin, were more contributory to effective decision making than were consensus-based approaches. Schweiger, Sandberg, and Rechner (1989) reported similar findings, as did Schwenk (1990) in a meta-analysis of prior research contrasting the two approaches to decision making. In both devil's advocacy and dialectical inquiry, argument is central to the process and clearly represents a communicative skill that appears to make a measurable difference in the performance of decision-making groups.

Amason and Schweiger (1997) pointed out that argument can limit both consensus and commitment to decisions in groups, but also that these clearly are not its inevitable consequences. In light of the demonstrable gains in the quality of decisions in groups in which argument functions in the ways indicated, the risks appear to be worth taking. It also appears to be the case that when arguments are issue centered and fact

based, conversion of the majority, not rejection of the minority, is the more probable result (Bradley, Hamon, & Harris, 1976; Maass et al., 1987). If these qualities are not evident in the verbalization of arguments, however, their value is likely to be much more limited than if they are (Schultz, 1982). The expression of arguments, in this sense, has to be isomorphic with their underlying characteristics. In other words, if one states an argument in a way that fails to make clear its substantive foundation, the argument is apt to have less impact than if the person states it in a way that does make its substantive foundation clear.

## RELATIONAL SKILLS

If all of the obstacles to effective decision making in groups were task related, an individual having skills in the four categories above (problem recognition and framing, inference drawing, idea generation, and argument) and the ability to transform them into relevant communicative behavior could have a significant impact on the chances of his or her groups' reaching appropriate or otherwise effective decisions. Lamentably, there are other problems with which one must be prepared to deal. One set of problems tends to be relational in nature. Although representing a different classification, these problems can be every bit as threatening to the interests of fundamentally sound, informed, and constructive decision making as those falling into the task-related category. As a result, they require additional skills, which for purposes of this essay I have designated as leadership, climate building, and conflict management.

### Leadership

In a sense, every skill identified and discussed in this essay could be considered an aspect of leadership. Scholars such as Fisher (1985), Miller, Hickson, and Wilson (1996), and Stein and Heller (1979) have noted that leadership entails not so much engaging in unique activities, but rather doing more of what everyone else in a group does, although not necessarily doing it better. Barge (1994), drawing on the work of Karl Weick (1978), portrayed leadership as the management of complexity.

For the discussion that follows, I conceive of and treat leadership in a more restricted way, specifically, as the exercise of "counteractive influence" (Gouran, 1982; Gouran & Hirokawa, 1986). In so doing, I apply the concept to conditions affecting relationships within decision-making groups that arise from the presence of constraints that Janis (1989) called "cognitive," "affiliative," and "egocentric" (see also Gouran & Hirokawa, 1996). Janis, like Gouran (1982) and Gouran and Hirokawa (1986), limited leadership to counteractive strategies. In so doing, he focused on relational problems posed by the three types of constraints referred to earlier. Also, as with Gouran (1982) and Gouran and Hirokawa (1986), Janis acknowledged that leadership in decision-making groups is not role specific. Any group member attempting to counteract negative sources of influence, in Janis's view, is exercising leadership.

Cognitive constraints arise when the members of a decision-making group believe themselves to be limited in their capacity to reach decisions because of time, resources, or skill. Under such conditions, according to Janis and Mann (1977), the members may develop a collective feeling that results either in hypervigilance (rush to judgment) or displays of inertia (defensive avoidance). For either response, the relational atmosphere of the group is one characterized by a felt incapacity to succeed in a task and, consequently, a corresponding lack of motivation to perform

the task at hand as well as possible. Affiliative constraints take hold when relationships among group members become a more important concern than successful execution of the task to be performed. Choices may occur in the interest of avoiding hurt feelings or preserving the harmony of the group rather than what the analysis of information relevant to the issues or other matters under consideration suggests. Finally, egocentric constraints are a result of the surfacing of individuals' needs for control and desire to prevail. Under the influence of egocentric constraints, reaching decisions that, if one is unable to think in favorable terms, have the least unfavorable personal consequences can become more important to members than making good decisions.

When it becomes apparent that one of the aforementioned constraints has taken hold, or is likely to, one should take steps to counteract it. Reducing the impact of relational constraints requires a good deal of interpersonal and communication skill (Andersen, 1984; Sorrentino & Boutillier, 1975) as well as effort. And even if one possesses these qualities, he or she has no assurance of success. On the other hand, doing nothing can only be detrimental, if not fatal, to the prospects for effective decision making in the long run. I trust that the observations and related information show how.

For all three categories of constraints identified, one consequence when they become dominant is that relational concerns, rather than task concerns, drive interaction and do so in ways that increase the probability of poor decisional outcomes. For instance, if motivation, morale, or the egocentric behavior of one or more of the members of a decision-making group were to become a focus of attention, the ability of the group as a whole to discharge its task in a propitious manner would be limited.

As Cattell (1948) noted long ago, a group's effective synergy (or the collective energy it can devote to successful task completion) is the difference between its total synergy and the amount it must invest in the members' maintenance needs. Steiner (1972) echoed this theme in his observation that a group's actual productivity is the difference between its potential productivity and losses in potential due to process. It should be obvious, then, that task performance suffers in direct proportion to the magnitude of the relational problems the members of a decision-making group encounter—at least theoretically.

A second and related consequence of various constraints' taking hold is that poor or expedient judgments may follow (Janis, 1989). Examples include (a) when a group acting in response to a cognitive constraint shows heightened susceptibility to a proposal to let the person in charge make the decision, (b) when an affiliative constraint leads group members to do what an individual whose feelings may be hurt wants, and (c) when an egocentric constraint leads to the view that arguing the merits of case against the position of a person who wants to dominate is not worth the hassle.

A third consequence of cognitive, affiliative, and egocentric constraints is the restriction of interaction (Janis, 1982). This condition has some invidious implications. Among these are the fact that as participation in decision-making groups becomes increasingly asymmetrical, so, too, does influence. Riecken (1958), for example, observed in one of his studies that the most talkative members of problem-solving groups had the greatest impact on the solutions adopted. Courtright (1978), in a laboratory investigation of groupthink, noted excessive influence on the decisions reached by those formally appointed as group leaders, as did Flowers (1977) in an earlier laboratory test of the groupthink hypothesis. That such asymmetry is unhealthy is suggested by the finding in both Courtright and Flowers's studies that the greater the

concentration of influence, the greater were the symptoms of groupthink. As Janis (1982) more than adequately demonstrated, such symptoms are not conducive to effective decision making. In fact, groupthink, from his perspective, represents the antithesis of effective decision making.

On the other side of the coin, some evidence clearly suggests that groups perform better when interaction is diffuse rather than restricted (Bryman, 1996). As one illustration, Bavelas's (1950) classic studies of group problem solving in different-sized communication nets established quite impressively that for complex tasks the groups involved functioned most effectively when the lines of communication among all members were direct and otherwise unrestricted. Hence, on the basis of this sort of information, it appears that when one or more of the sorts of the constraints in Janis's (1989) list has taken hold and is restricting participation, one would be well-advised to try to alter the situation by specifically encouraging both more involvement of all group members and greater focus on task-related concerns.

Such efforts may be more successful if a person acts in a considerate manner (Fleishman, 1951, 1953). It is also apt to be helpful if one brings some sense of vision to the situation, that is, a verbalization of a desired state in which group members presumably share an interest and that can accrue from making the best possible decision (Collins & Porras, 1998; Nanus, 1998). Finally, one is more likely to achieve positive results if he or she is able to adopt the style of interaction that is best suited to whatever may be inhibiting the efforts of group members to achieve the goal of making a good decision and realizing the vision that led to the goal (Jurma, 1978, 1979; Northouse, 2001).

In respect to the last of these points, path-goal theory (see House & Dessler, 1974) is helpful in the determination of the style of interaction that is most appropriate to a given situation. From this theoretical perspective, level of motivation is determined by group members' perceptions of their ability to complete a task and the benefits that will derive from doing so. How these sources of motivation combine is indicative the style of interaction one can most profitably enact. House and Dessler identified four such styles: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented. To have much chance of being successful in efforts to assure that members of decision-making groups perform effectively, one has to be able to read motivation levels accurately and then select the styles of interaction that are most well-suited to sustaining and, if necessary, restoring movement along a goal path when relational difficulties created by the presence of cognitive, affiliative, and egocentric constraints are inhibiting such movement.

According to House and Dessler, a directive style appears to be most effective when motivation is low due to both perceived limitations in competence and a perceived lack of benefit from performing well. A participative style seems to be best suited to situations in which the members of a group feel competent and also see personal benefit from successfully completing their tasks. A supportive style is indicated when group members perceive personal benefit but also see themselves as lacking necessary skills to perform effectively. Finally, the achievement-oriented style appears to have the most favorable consequences when just the opposite conditions pertain, that is, group members see themselves as having the ability to execute a task but no particular benefit to them from doing so.

Partially supportive of some aspects of path-goal theory, as applied in the context of group decision making, is a study by Jurma (1979). Jurma compared the performance and reactions of members of groups high or low in task orientedness with structuring (directive) and nonstructuring (*laissez-faire*) leaders. Groups having

members low in task orientedness made significantly better decisions in the view of trained judges and were more satisfied with the leadership under a structuring style than they were under a nonstructuring style.

This discussion of leadership barely scratches the surface of the volume of scholarship devoted to the subject. It has, however, served three functions. First, it has demonstrated that leadership measurably affects decision making in groups. Second, it has emphasized the view that effective leadership entails the use of skills that enable a person to counteract negative sources of influence stemming from the dominance of cognitive, affiliative, and egocentric constraints. Finally, it has shown that critical to the successful application of these skills in given situations is one's ability to read relevant cues and to adapt accordingly.

## Climate Building

In addition to being able to counteract negative sources of influence on the performance of decision-making groups through acts of leadership of the sorts I have been discussing, it is also important that participants promote and be able to contribute to the development of a positive climate. Folger et al. (2001) defined climate as "the prevailing temper, attitudes, and outlook of a dyad, group, or organization" (p. 185). In so doing, they developed the contention that it unquestionably affects the quality of performance.

Although decision-making groups functioning in a positive relational climate do not always perform well in the sense of making optimally appropriate choices, the odds that they will are far better than those operating in a negative climate. Bales (1999) concluded from years of research focusing on small groups that ones having low levels of dominance, high task orientation, and friendliness tend to do well. Groups functioning in climates characterized by the opposite conditions do not. It behooves the members of decision-making groups, then, to take steps to establish positive climates by behaving in ways that contribute to, and are consistent with, the characteristics Bales mentioned.

In addition to exhibiting the qualities Bales identified, showing sensitivity to and respect for other group members' contributions further aids in the creation and maintenance of a positive climate (Delbecq, 1968). When members of decision-making groups feel that they and their input are valued, they show a greater sense of responsibility for and commitment to task completion (Pepitone, 1952). One is more likely to develop these feelings when he or she remains relatively unopinionated and also acknowledges the merit in what other group members have to say, even if he or she is in disagreement with them (Hill, 1976). Moreover, to the extent that one feels obliged to change the views of another, persuasion, rather than coercion, intimidation, and rejection, is the preferable means (Bass, 1960).

The qualities I have described give rise to a spirit of cooperation in decision-making groups, which can, in turn, have a powerful effect on how well they perform. Highly instructive in this regard is the pioneering study by Deutsch (1949). In an experimental investigation involving 10 student groups in a psychology course over an extended period of time, Deutsch induced a cooperative climate in half and created a competitive environment in the other half. He established a cooperative environment by telling the members of designated groups that they would all receive the same grades, but that each group would receive a different grade. He created the competitive atmosphere by indicating that each member of each remaining group would receive a different grade.

In Deutsch's study, the cooperatively oriented groups performed significantly more effectively than the competitively oriented groups in a large number of categories, not the least of which was the quality of solutions they generated for a human relations problem. From this investigation, Deutsch launched a 25-year program of research, the bulk of which reinforced the findings mentioned above. Deutsch (1973) summarized much of this work in *The Resolution of Conflict*.

If individual group members see the social environment in which they are functioning as hostile, they are apt to lose interest in participating. This can be detrimental to the possibilities for effective decision making if those who begin to withhold their participation have knowledge and skills that could aid in the task of making informed choices. Interest and willingness to participate, because of their fragility, can easily decline under normal conditions of interaction (Harkins, Latane, & Williams, 1980; Heckathorn, 1989; Stroebe, Diehl, & Abakoumkin, 1996; Williams, Harkins, & Latane, 1981); therefore, one should make a conscious effort to avoid engaging in communication that might hasten such decline.

Showing respect for others' ideas and input by the manner in which one discloses his or her reactions to those others' input promotes the development of cohesiveness in groups, commitment to the task, and productivity (Elias, Johnson, & Fortman, 1989). So, too, do efforts to legitimate role and status differences when they, of necessity, exist (Bradford & French, 1948) and, when possible, to deemphasize them so as to minimize the probability that individuals having the most power and authority will exert undue influence on decisions reached, which they commonly do (Craddock, 1985; Torrance, 1954). A "we are all in this together" view of a decision-making task can have a strongly salutary effect on performance. Even highly competitive individuals actively promote the development of a positive, supportive climate and show considerable skill in being cooperative if they see groups in which they are members as competitively related to other groups (Carnevale & Probst, 1997).

Given that displays of respect for others' ideas and input, as well as deemphasizing role and status differences, contribute to the development and maintenance of cohesiveness, one must also be alert to the potential negative effects this quality can have on group performance and take precautions to prevent its becoming excessive (Berkowitz, 1954; Schacter, Ellertson, McBride, & Gregory, 1951; Swap, 1984a, 1984b). In general, however, cohesiveness is more likely to be an asset than a liability and should be cultivated (Green, 1989).

In addition to the value that being sensitive and respectful of others' input has for the development of cohesiveness, commitment, and productivity, such attributes can stimulate and enhance feelings of openness and freedom to participate. When group members feel they are not free to express their views, the quality of decision making may well suffer. As an illustration, Woodward (1999), in his study of American presidencies from Ford to Clinton, determined that many, if not most, of the decisions the incumbents came to regret were ones involving interaction under conditions of insularity by members of inner circles who performed their tasks in haste and without adequate consultation. One is, therefore, well advised, it seems, to engage in communicative acts that encourage willing and thoughtful participation. The evidence that follows gives further substance to the value of this type of behavior.

Open communication enhances the performance of decision-making and other kinds of groups (Guetzkow, 1968) and hence the quality of the outcomes they achieve (Guetzkow & Dill, 1957; Guetzkow & Simon, 1955; Leavitt, 1951). Harper and Askling's (1980) study is particularly revealing in this regard. In a semester-long investigation of six classroom groups having the task of designing multimedia messages

for target audiences, Harper and Askling determined, among other things, that the more open the members of these groups felt internal communication to be and the more they felt they had the opportunity to participate, the greater was their success in receiving favorable assessments of the quality of their output from the target audiences. Openness and freedom to participate also appear to have the added advantage of increasing group members' acceptance of decisions reached (Hall, 1972).

Although acknowledging that openness and freedom to participate do contribute to more effective performance in task groups, Crouch and Yetton (1987) pointed out that they can also lead to conflict. In that event, if group members are unable to manage the resulting conflicts successfully, then the positive impact of these usually constructive features of a group environment may well be lost. Familiarity with the material covered in the next section of this chapter can serve to ameliorate this possibility, however. Much more important at this point is understanding that climate definitely affects the performance of decision-making groups and that people have a variety of means for contributing to the development of a positive climate. Equally important is that one attempt to cultivate skill in employing these means by how he or she engages others in interaction. Consciously deliberate effort would appear to be a crucial first step.

## Conflict Management

Even if the climate in which a decision-making group functions is exceptionally positive, from time to time, conflicts of various sorts are almost certain to arise. These conflicts may be intense or comparatively mild. They also may be intellectual, procedural, or interpersonal in nature. Some scholars (e.g., Bell, 1974; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954) have reduced the types of conflict that occur in groups to two categories: substantive and affective. A few use the term *cognitive* in place of *substantive* (e.g., Carnevale & Probst, 1997; De Dreu, 1997). Substantive, or cognitive, conflict derives from differences and other incompatibilities among group members concerning matters related to the agenda. It is typically issue oriented in nature but also frequently encompasses differences and perceived incompatibilities associated with matters of procedure. Affective, or emotionally based, conflict, on the other hand, derives from differences and incompatibilities more directly concerned with relationships of group members. Whatever the origin or precise character of a conflict, some sort of management ultimately is required if a group experiencing it is to move forward.

Substantive conflict may appear to be out of place in a discussion of relational skills; however, its successful management frequently, if not always, requires some level of interpersonal adeptness in dealing with the parties involved. Moreover, the principles identified for managing conflict do not, by and large, vary according to the category. As a result, it seems to be appropriate to include substantive conflict as a condition for which members of a decision-making group may need to exhibit relational skill if they are to resolve successfully problems stemming from its emergence and continued presence. Conflict, in the context of group decision making, is a state in which there is a fundamental incompatibility in two or more ways of thinking, feeling, or behaving, and members experience pressure to eliminate the incompatibility or otherwise feel some need for uniformity. It is undesirable, perhaps even unacceptable, to permit the incompatibility to remain unaddressed for any length of time if the parties involved are to be able to make a decision at all, let alone a good one.

The mere existence of conflict in decision-making groups is not inherently problematic. In fact, as the earlier discussion of argument in this chapter reveals, conflict

can sometimes be useful in ensuring that task requirements are satisfied or in revealing underlying obstacles in the relationships among group members that are inhibiting progress in the decision-making process (De Dreu & Van De Vliert, 1997; Folger et al., 2001). Coser (1956) viewed conflict as serving a number of other valuable functions, not the least of which is helping to establish and maintain a balance of power, which, in turn, can prevent particular parties from having undue or excessive influence.

It is not the presence of conflict, then, about which members of decision-making groups need to be most concerned. Rather, the chief difficulty arises from the failure of group members to move beyond a state of conflict when it is proving to be dysfunctional and is adversely affecting prospects for making well-thought-out and warranted decisions (Shivers, 1983). Whether a conflict is substantive or affective, if left unmanaged, the inattention sooner or later will take its toll on the ability of group members to work collectively toward a common end and may even preclude the possibility for any sort of meaningful action.

Conflict is often a product of diversity and heterogeneity of the parties involved (Moreland, Levine, & Wingert, 1996), which is somewhat ironic in light of evidence indicating that heterogeneous groups tend to perform more effectively than homogeneous groups (Shaw, 1981). Be that as it may, when conflict threatens to prevent the members of decision-making groups from completing their tasks or limits their potential to do so, one must be prepared to respond to in a constructive and therefore presumably a pragmatically sound fashion. Unfortunately, members of decision-making groups often avoid dealing with conflicts, apparently in the hope that they will go away, only later to discover that they do not and, in fact, may have become more pronounced (Gero, 1985).

In addition to avoidance, another common response to conflict in decision-making groups is for the parties involved to adopt a competitive orientation and distributive approach to its management. In short, they see conflicts in terms of winning and losing and as a consequence do what they can to win. Such an approach, however, is not constructive (Gray, 1998) and ill serves the interests of effective decision making. In fact, Kohn (1986), in a book-length review of research on cooperation and competition, found little to commend competition, even in social contexts in which it is supposed to occur, such as athletics.

Approaches that have the potential for inducing cooperation, or at least contribute to an appropriate balance between one's competitive urges and need for cooperation both from and with others (for example, problem solving and collaboration), appear to be far superior to ones that do not (Deutsch, 1983; Mackie & Goethals, 1987). Not only do such approaches enable the members of decision-making groups to move beyond a conflict but also subsequently to maintain an atmosphere that is reasonably harmonious and therefore conducive to effective task performance and sound decision-making practices.

A good example in support of this proposition is work by Wall, Galanes, and Love (1987). In a study of 24 four- to seven-member decision-making groups comprising college students, these investigators had members of each rank order a list of topics for a miniconference in order of importance and to produce a justification for their rankings. The task lent itself well to the generation of substantive conflict. In the view of trained evaluators who rated the quality of the documents the students produced, those from groups taking an "integrative" approach to the management of their conflicts were significantly better than were those from groups whose approach would be better described as "distributive."

Among the approaches that may contribute to the development of a cooperative climate, Hall and Watson (1970) identified deliberately avoiding advocacy, avoiding the adoption of win–lose orientations, avoiding capitulation, and avoiding conflict suppressing measures such as voting. In addition to these tactics, according to Hall and Watson, viewing differences of opinion as positive and easily reached agreement with suspicion can contribute to the development of an environment that promotes better management of conflicts. In regard to the latter point, a series of studies by Van de Vliert, Nauta, Euwema, and Janssen (1997) is illuminating.

Van de Vliert et al. (1997) conducted three studies in which the ways parties to a dispute approached the conflict varied. The approaches of interest were “forcing” (which is largely competitive in nature) and “problem solving” (which is largely cooperative in nature). The first study involved a simulated conflict between a senior nurse and physician regarding patient care. Actual medical personnel participated, however. Ratings of the effectiveness of the interaction of those enacting the two roles correlated more highly with those for problem solving than for forcing; however, the combination of problem solving and forcing showed an even stronger correlation with effectiveness than problem solving alone. The second study drew on a different population (members of a police establishment) and varied the conflict situation accordingly. The results, however, were essentially the same as those of the first study. The third study, which drew from a general population representing industries, private professional firms, and government agencies and dealt with a hiring decision, focused on the sequence in which problem solving and forcing occurred. The data revealed that forcing followed by problem solving led to more effective interaction and resolution of differences for the decision-making task than did the reverse pattern. Apparently, it is helpful to make clear that one “means business” before showing a willingness to be cooperative, but not so good an idea to begin a conflict interaction in a cooperative vein and then become competitive.

Folger et al. (2001) considered tactics, such as those proposed by Hall and Watson (1970), under the rubric of “counteracting trained incapacities” (p. 88). In addition to these, Folger et al. pointed to reframing issues, reframing interaction, and sharing power as means by which members of groups can influence the climate in which they are functioning and thereby improve their prospects for constructive collaboration.

Other measures that contribute to the successful management of conflict, communicatively speaking, include (a) conceiving of conflict and portraying it as an opportunity for problem solving (Likert & Likert, 1978); (b) when appropriate, employing palliative strategies, such as indicating that the conflict may not be as severe as the parties to it perceive (Baron, 1984); (c) if possible, shifting the matter at issue from the affective to substantive domain (Bell, 1974); (d) suggesting more formal negotiation and, if need be, adjudication, of the conflict (Putnam, 1997); (e) showing appropriate concerns for face (Folger et al., 2000); and (f) focusing attention on interests rather than positions, that is, considering what competing alternatives have to offer, as opposed to becoming wedded to an initial preference (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Far too often, individuals interacting in a conflict situation fail to move past what they want to accomplish to a consideration of what may be in their best interests and, as a consequence, unnecessarily and unfavorably prolong the process (Bazerman, 1998). Unfreezing this tendency can make a big difference in how well one ultimately succeeds in managing conflicts that may be interfering with a group’s ability to make good decisions.

Implementing these suggestions can help the members of a group manage, if not fully resolve, conflicts by either precluding the emergence of a hostile climate or

converting such a climate into one characterized by cooperation and serious effort to overcome the roadblocks that conflicts of various sorts pose. When this sort of condition prevails, better decision making is likely to be the result (Harnack, 1951; Walton & McKersie, 1965, 1966).

## PROCEDURAL SKILLS

Whereas task-related skills reflect the abilities one has to satisfy the substantive requirements of a decision-making task, and relational skills pertain to the management of interpersonal difficulties posed by the members of groups, procedural skills concern how the members go about performing the task. In short, procedural skills are ones that come into play in those instances in which groups have to undertake actions in some sensible sequence to progress from a starting point (typically a discussion question or issue) to a destination (decision or choice). How well they succeed often depends on the sensitivity members display in recognizing what is necessary to progress along their goal path and in selecting communicative interventions that have the effect of sustaining such movement (Gouran, 1982).

Although procedural skills—or at least some aspects of them—are not ordinarily thought of in communicative terms, abilities representing this category, as in the case of some of those included under the headings of task-related and relational skills, surface and become evident in one's interactions with others. For instance, even planning, which some individuals might not regard as having any communicative significance, is an activity Helmut Jungermann (1986) considered to be an aspect of decision making that often does, and properly should, take place in discussion. He strongly opposed conceiving of planning as merely a covert cognitive activity one performs outside the group and about which he or she later informs the other members. This view is consistent in certain respects with the views of Charles Berger (1997), who attached considerable importance to planning strategic interaction for the accomplishment communicative goals in general.

Process enactment, a second feature of group decision making requiring procedural skills, entails efforts to determine whether the mechanisms in place for moving a group forward are, in fact, contributing to the furtherance of a decision-making task and, if not, making the necessary adaptations to ensure that they do. Hence, communication is clearly and necessarily implicated in one's demonstration of this category of procedural skill. In this section, I consider the two subcategories of planning and process enactment and how they relate to the performance of decision-making groups.

### Planning

Planning in the context of decision making is the process by which one or more members of a group determine how to complete its task and what otherwise to achieve a desired goal. Specifically, planning entails a set of actions with the aim of identifying and ordering the means by which a group will attempt to move from an issue to be resolved to a conclusion concerning its resolution, as well as creating the conditions that are necessary for such movement. In this sense, planning is itself a form of decision making (more properly meta-decision making) concerning how to make other kinds of decisions (Jungermann, 1986).

March and Simon (1958) many years back noted the importance of planning and also that ineffective groups tend to ignore it. Shure, Rogers, Larsen, and Tassone (1962), in offering similar observations, suggested that surprisingly large numbers of

groups do not take planning seriously. Backing this claim is more current research by Monge, McSween, and Wyer (1989) showing that more than 30% of the meetings in the 40 organizations they studied did not have agendas; of those that did, a large percentage were not circulated in advance. This kind of disregard for planning is unfortunate, for as Hackman and Kaplan (1974) pointed out on the basis of research they cited, even a limited amount of planning can improve group performance significantly. Zander (1982) went so far as to attach a specific figure to the gain planning ostensibly makes possible. In his estimation, it can improve group performance by as much as 35%.

Whether planning has such precise impact as Zander stated is difficult to affirm; however, Shure et al. (1962) uncovered strong evidence for the view that planning has a substantial measurable impact on group performance. Providing task groups with no opportunity to plan, to plan in advance of the performance of a task, or to plan at set intervals during the execution of a task, Shure et al. determined that those permitted to plan in advance surpassed the other two types in a number of respects. These included efficiency, coordination of effort, retention of a task focus, and level of organizational development. Moreover, it appeared that the groups permitted to plan at fixed intervals simply did not take advantage of the opportunities they had. Hence, the conditions under which planning occurs appear to represent an aspect of the process to which one needs to be attuned and prepared to monitor.

The contention that planning is an important aspect of group decision making continues to draw support. Poole (1991) cited evidence showing that skill in planning, especially in respect to the use of technological innovations, such as computer-mediated communication and group decision support systems, improves group performance. Seibold and Krikorian (1997) chronicled even more recent evidence of a positive relationship between planning and the enhanced performance of decision-making groups.

An impressive basis for taking planning seriously, particularly in regard to procedures to be followed, resides in a study by Burleson, Levine, and Samter (1984). Burleson et al. had four-person groups deal with the National Aeronautical and Space Administration Moon Survival Problem (which has an objective best outcome) under three conditions: a "statisticized decision procedure," a "nominal decision procedure," and an "interacting decision procedure." The groups in the "interacting decision procedure" condition reached significantly better decisions concerning how to rank order 15 survival items in order of importance and value.

Burleson et al.'s (1984) study suggested that the procedure a group adopts can have significant consequences for the quality of decision it reaches. Therefore, groups that pay attention to how they are going to perform decision-making tasks may better their chances for being effective. The volume of research concerning the relationship of procedures to decision-making effectiveness that Sunwolf and Seibold (1999) summarized gives considerable added support to this line of thought.

As the study by Shure et al. (1962) clearly implied, the act of planning, in and of itself, is not the source of increased effectiveness of decision-making groups. Rather, it is the quality of planning, as well as the capability planners exhibit, both in the selection of procedures to follow and in communicating to others that following them is worthwhile in respect to the outcomes, that makes the difference. Several considerations pertinent to the question of quality and what may enhance it in the context of planning for decision-making discussions follow.

As part of the planning process, one needs to be clear in identifying goals and stating objectives (Volkema, 1983) because, as in the case of framing discussed earlier,

the particular ways in which groups articulate goals and objectives can influence other aspects of the decision-making process (e.g., selection of the criteria and identification of alternatives group members consider). One should also make an effort in advance of discussion to achieve concurrence with the goals and objectives as stated, but be willing to modify them in the face of nonconcurrence. In this way, the planner avoids initial confusion and limits the prospects for later conflicts. Such activities are consonant with what Berger (1997) viewed as planning to meet contingencies and has recommended as a result of the research program in which he has been engaged for a good many years.

In making plans for group decision making, a person needs to be sensitive to what approaches and rules are best suited for the specific task the group is to perform (Collins & Guetzkow, 1964). For instance, one needs to be aware of whether unanimity, as opposed to majority rule, is appropriate for a given task. Majority rule enables groups to take action, but there is no assurance that the majority will have fulfilled task requirements in the manner effective decision making presumes (Wood, 1984). Instead, majority rule could simply enable those with superior numbers to impose a decision. Hence, what in certain respects is an asset could also prove to be a liability.

Consensus, in some instances, may make it more difficult for a group to reach a decision, but the rule may also increase the likelihood that the group will have given careful thought to task requirements. On the other hand, requiring consensus may only serve to prolong discussion and eventually lead to a decision that represents not the best possible choice, but instead the lowest common denominator, that is, the only alternative all members are willing to endorse (Falk, 1981). In deciding by consensus, group members also have to be careful not to fall victim to the "consensus-implies-correctness heuristic" (p. 78), about which De Dreu and De Vries (1997) cautioned. An individual skilled in planning will be alert to such possibilities and convey as adroitly as possible the associated risks to other members of a decision-making group.

As another example, were a decision-making group to be in need of a good deal of idea-generation for identifying criteria and alternatives, an important aspect of the planning process would be the form to be followed. Would conventional brainstorming or nominal group technique be preferable? More critical, and in light of the evidence suggesting that no one approach to idea generation is universally superior with respect to the volume and quality of ideas produced (Gustafson, Shukla, Delbecq & Walster, 1973; Nutt, 1976) or in its relationship to the quality of decisions reached (Jarboe, 1988), would one be more likely than the other to produce a desired result in the specific situation at hand?

Such considerations and related findings of researchers (e.g., Maier & Thurber, 1969; Wood, 1989) remind us of the need to recognize the limitations in procedures available to decision makers, to use that awareness in the planning process, and to communicate clearly how those limitations have influenced choices concerning which procedures to employ and which not to employ. Failure to do so can result in poor planning and serve to reinforce the already too prevalent feeling that planning is a waste of time.

## Process Enactment

As important as planning is, perhaps the strongest evidence of procedural skill arises in the enactment of the process of group decision making. However well motivated the members of a group may be to operate within agreed-on plans and approaches to

performing their task, decision-making discussions seldom go completely according to plan. Often, they deviate substantially. In part, this occurs because of unforeseen developments that arise in the course of performing a task (Mintzberg, 1994). It can also occur, according to Greene (2000), because individuals experience difficulty in enacting plans in the abstract. This condition, however, does not preclude the possibilities for a group's moving forward in an efficient and effective manner; rather, it requires a different level of procedural skill. Under such circumstances, members who are high in procedural sensitivity, as well as who take steps to address process disruptions resulting from procedural problems, can prove to be invaluable.

Although some scholars (e.g., Janis & Mann, 1977) have posited a direct relationship between the quality of procedures decision-making groups employ and the quality of their decisions, people vary in the significance they attach to procedural concerns (Hirokawa, Ice, & Cook, 1988; Putnam, 1979). This is understandable in light of the fact that empirical evidence establishing the relationship of procedures to outcomes, until relatively recently, did not exist on a large scale and provided little guidance concerning how to behave in a procedural sense. One should not, however, draw from these facts the conclusion that any order in which the members of a group perform a decision-making task is conducive to reaching a desirable outcome or that one need not be concerned about how such a group goes about performing its task. The material that follows, I trust, will help to dispel such notions. I hope also that it will make clear why it is important to develop skill in being able to restore a decision-making group's movement along a goal-path known to improve the odds for achieving desired outcomes when the members have deviated from that path.

Until the 1980s, investigations of procedural skill, as manifested in group members' communicative behavior, focused on consensus as the outcome of interest. Starting in the late 1960s, a line of research initiated by Gouran (1969) revealed rather consistently that a global variable called *orientation* (i.e., efforts by members of decision-making groups to keep movement centered on their goal paths) bears a positive relationship to consensus (Kline, 1972; Kline & Hullinger, 1973; Knutson, 1972; Knutson & Holdridge, 1975; Knutson & Kowitz, 1977; Marr, 1974).

Later research provided evidence of a relationship between procedurally oriented behavior of the kind encompassed by the concept of orientation and related factors. Gouran, Brown, and Henry (1978) reported positive correlations for both orientation and goal-directed behavior to perceptions of the quality of group decisions. Hirokawa (1980, 1982, 1983, 1985) uncovered partial support for the view that following the sort of agenda suggested by acknowledged requirements of decision-making tasks increases the probability of reaching sound decisions. On balance, it appears that the exact order in which group members address requirements is less critical than efforts to make certain that the requirements receive attention. From Hirokawa's research, ensuring that the issue to be addressed is clearly understood and that weaknesses associated with decision options are fully discussed appears to be particularly important. Finally, Herek, Janis, and Huth (1987), using two independent measures of quality of outcomes (protection of U.S. interests and impact on international conflict) and quality of process (number of manifest decision-making defects), uncovered more than moderate correlations (above .60) between the two variables. These scholars stated that their data clearly suggested that procedures have a connection to, as well as bearing on, how well the members of decision-making groups perform.

Because the study by Herek, Janis, and Huth was much more precise than the others mentioned in its estimates of the degree of relationship between the enactment of quality procedures and outcomes, and because it drew on historically significant

cases of foreign policy decisions having important social consequences, it deserves a bit more scrutiny. Following is an abbreviated version.

Herek et al. had two foreign policy experts judge how well five U.S. presidents and their advisors managed 19 international crises that occurred over a 30-year period in terms of protection of U.S. interests and impact on international conflict. Positive assessments received a plus and unfavorable assessments a minus, which in combination allowed for three levels of quality on each criterion. Independent of these assessments, trained coders examined exhaustive expert accounts of the proceedings in which the relevant decision makers discussed the crises and determined how to respond to them. From these accounts, the coders assessed the number of seven possible defects, derived from Janis's (1982) work on groupthink, that were evident in each situation. The investigators then correlated the two sets of data and obtained the values mentioned above.

Herek et al. established that, in general, the more vigilant those involved in the process were, the better their decisions. Vigilance represents the attention decision makers display to the requirements of their task. The more vigilant they are, the fewer the symptoms of defective decision making they are apt to exhibit, and the more likely they are to make good decisions. What can be done to increase the likelihood that decision-making groups will be vigilant was the subject of a more recent study by Schultz, Ketrow, and Urban (1995), the details of which follow.

Schultz, Ketrow, and Urban created four kinds of decision-making groups that varied along two dimensions: (a) training versus no-training of the participants in rational approaches to group decision making and (b) the presence versus the absence of a member designated to play the role of "reminder." A reminder in this study was an individual having the responsibility to indicate when members of a group were exhibiting the sort of defects Janis (1982) had identified and that Herek and colleagues (1987) used to infer the level of vigilance being displayed in the groups they investigated. In the process, and in line with Janis and Mann's (1977) specification of the characteristics of vigilance, they were also to note what the appropriate ways to address issues and to function were.

Four evaluators assigned ratings of quality to the decisions the groups reached. The decisions concerned what to do in a case involving a teenage pregnancy in which the father refused to provide economic support and the mother's foster parents were urging her to have an abortion, but the mother opted to carry the fetus to term. As expected, ratings that could range from 1 to 8 concerning how well recommended actions satisfied seven criteria by external evaluators for trained groups surpassed those for untrained groups. In addition, and importantly, trained groups having a designated "reminder" produced even higher quality decisions than trained groups without such a member.

Especially noteworthy about this particular study was that those playing the role of reminder had undergone coaching concerning how to enact the role that lasted for only 1 hour. During that period, they learned about the sorts of signs to which they should be alert, the circumstances in which to intervene, and the manner in which it might be best to express themselves. The skill necessary to have measurable impact in redirecting a group's activities in productive directions, then, does not appear to require an extraordinary level of development; rather, it is within fairly easy reach of anyone who has a reasonable understanding of the requirements a decision-making group must fulfill to be effective.

In light of the more recent evidence, procedure clearly seems to matter, and individuals who take steps to see that the process by which groups attempt to arrive

at decisions is enacted appropriately and in accordance with practices based on acknowledged principles of sound decision making play a critical role. At the very least, they help to minimize the prospects that inappropriate decisions will be the product of behavior that, in most instances, should be reasonably easy to alter once those involved become aware of it.

## SUMMARY

Being an effective contributor to group decision-making discussions requires a variety of skills that one exhibits by means of his or her communicative behavior. For purposes of this chapter, I have grouped such skills in three categories: task-related, relational, and procedural. For each category, I have further identified the specific subtypes that scholarly inquiry has shown to have impact on how well the members of decision-making groups perform.

Among the skills that fit the category “task-related” are problem-recognition and framing, inference-drawing, idea-generation, and argument. Participants in decision-making discussions who (a) accurately understand and articulate what the task requires of their group, (b) draw and clearly express the conclusions that proper analysis of relevant information warrants, (c) think creatively and imaginatively in identifying possible means for resolving issues under consideration, and (d) convincingly present and advance positions related to the issues contribute substantially more to the group’s effectiveness than those lacking such skill or who fail to exhibit them.

The relational skills addressed in this chapter are leadership, climate-building, and conflict management. Individuals skilled in leadership use communication to counteract negative sources of influence stemming from constraints posed by the task, relationships among group members, and the motivations of particular individuals. In addition to needing members who able to counteract the sorts of negative influences noted above, decision-making groups’ chances for performing effectively increase when one or more of the participants communicates in ways that enhance the climate of interaction. A positive climate is one in which interaction exhibits such qualities as friendliness, mutual respect, low levels of dominance, openness to ideas, and willingness to cooperate. Finally, the interests of effective decision making are advanced when group members, via their communicative behavior, are able to (a) confront rather than avoid conflict, (b) engage in it at a substantive level, (c) recognize the situations in which it may function constructively, and (d) adopt integrative, as opposed to distributive, approaches in attempting to manage it.

As important as task-related and relational skills are to the success of decision-making groups, unless they are accompanied by well-developed procedural skills, such groups can still perform poorly. Procedural skills exist at two levels: planning and process enactment. Planning entails not only such routine activities as setting goals, forming an agenda, selecting the procedures to be followed, scheduling, arranging for necessary equipment or materials, and ensuring a comfortable physical environment, but also giving thought to probable occurrences in discussion and how to deal with them, should they arise. No matter how careful the planning for a decision-making discussion is, the performance of a task can go awry. Averting that possibility requires that participants be able to deal with procedural problems as they arise. Providing orientation or direction, noting situations in which task requirements are receiving inadequate attention, enacting the role of “reminder” when participants lose sight of the procedures they have agreed to follow, and generally

maintaining a high level of vigilance throughout a decision-making are all indicative of an individual who is skilled in process enactment.

Having members who possess and use the skills identified throughout this chapter provides no guarantee that a decision-making group will make the best possible choices in its deliberations. The material covered, however, makes clear that the exhibition of such skills substantially improves prospects for a group's doing so. It also make clear that the absence of these skills restricts communication to being little more a medium of exchange. In contrast, having and employing the sorts of skills noted contributes to its being a valuable instrument of informed choice.

## POST SCRIPT

In this chapter, I have not attempted to offer, in any direct way, specific suggestions for how to develop the skills identified and discussed, nor have I discussed the precise mechanisms by which skills existing at a cognitive level are manifested in the production of messages having the sorts of characteristics described. Both are beyond the purpose and scope of the document. For those interested in these matters, however, the recently published edited collection concerning message production by Greene (1997b), his essay in it (Greene, 1997a), in particular, as well as his chapter in this volume, should prove to be instructive.

My intention was to identify the types of skills that one may need to bring into play to be an effective contributor in the variety of group decision-making situations that he or she may encounter. In addition, I reviewed pertinent scholarly literature that provides the bases for concluding that interaction in groups is more likely to result in good decisions when members possess and are able to use such skills than when they either do not possess them or fail to use the ones they have to good advantage.

Cultivation of the skills considered comes with experience and opportunity to take part in group decision making (see Greene, this volume). What seems to be more important at an initial stage, however, is the knowledge I trust this chapter has provided of what those skills are and how they relate to the outcomes members of decision-making groups achieve. To this end, I hope that the topics I have introduced and the material I have covered can be of help to anyone who aspires to see the decision-making groups in which he or she may participate, if not excel, at least function reasonably well. Groups are capable of extraordinary accomplishment, but such accomplishment depends heavily on the capabilities of the members. If this chapter has contributed to making clear what those capabilities are in the context of decision-making discussions and how they relate to the outcomes that decision-making groups achieve, then it will have served a useful purpose.

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CHAPTER

# 22

## SKILLFULLY INSTRUCTING LEARNERS: HOW COMMUNICATORS EFFECTIVELY CONVEY MESSAGES

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In teaching, one of the most important communicative challenges people face is to effectively convey their messages to others in clear and memorable ways. What does it take to effectively communicate an idea so that learners fully grasp and remember that idea? Are there ways to enhance the clarity of instructional messages? How do listeners' feelings about the person communicating a message affect their grasp and recall of what they hear?

In this chapter, we review research that addresses these sorts of questions. Our basic assumption is that this research provides an understanding of the skills required of communicators to effectively convey their messages. Our emphasis will be on the skills involved in teaching, although most of the studies summarized in this chapter apply far beyond instructional settings. Indeed, much of communication is, in some way, instructional in nature. In relationships, people teach one another constantly; in families, parents are teachers (as are children); in the workplace, a substantial percentage of communication revolves around offering and receiving sometimes explicit, and often, implicit instructions.

We structure this chapter by initially looking at some basic theories of learning. These theories frame key communication skills involved in the acquisition and retention of information. Then we propose that the skillful communication of clear and impactful instructional messages requires the accomplishment of two interrelated tasks: First, communicators must ensure that listeners comprehend what has been said. Second, communicators must generate enthusiasm and affinity so that others listen to their messages. These two tasks (clear communication and building affinity) organize the majority of this chapter.

## THE NATURE OF LEARNING

Communicating involves much more than having listeners attend to, and remember, what speakers say. Rather, skillful communication aims to enhance comprehension. The depth of understanding people have about material lies on a continuum ranging from uninformed thought to wisdom. Fundamental to this continuum is a distinction between *acquiring information* and *learning*. Although this distinction is a matter of degree, it is important to understand that just because people gain information about some topic or issue does not necessarily mean that they actually learned anything. Perhaps the ultimate test of learning is whether individuals can do something with the knowledge they have acquired. Acquiring knowledge can be idiosyncratic and even random. The ability to connect acquired knowledge to other ideas and concepts as well as action is key to learning. In this chapter, we focus primarily on research related to learning as opposed to the simple acquisition of information. Consequently, numerous excellent studies on topics such as rote recall and serial learning are ignored.

Learning sometimes leads to expertise (Sternberg, 1995). Polanyi (1964) suggests that when people possess expertise they know the rules, know why the rules are applied, can apply the rules, and, most important, can change the rules when necessary. Expertise can turn to *wisdom*, in which individuals possess both explicit and tacit knowledge of a phenomenon, have an intuitive savvy when dealing with issues, are introspective, and indeed, are deeply enlightened. Although there is a plethora of work on expertise (some of which will be reviewed in this chapter; see also Greene, this volume), surprisingly little attention has been paid to wisdom (cf. Sternberg, 1990).

The move from uninformed thought to wisdom is but one conceptual framework for understanding the nature of learning. There are many others. For instance, in their model of domain learning, Alexander and her colleagues (Alexander, Jetton, & Kulikowich, 1995) suggest three stages: (a) acclimation, marked by fragmented and incohesive knowledge; (b) competency, characterized by the ability of the learner to recognize and attend to important subject-relevant material based on an understanding of fundamental principles; and (c) proficiency-expertise, which is reflected in extensive and highly integrated bodies of domain knowledge. Alternatively, Bloom (1956) offered five levels of learning ranging from lowest to highest: knowledge (acquiring information), comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis. In addition to hierarchical models such as these, there are conceptual models of the learning process. Gagné (1985), for instance, suggested that learning incorporates nine instructional events corresponding to different cognitive processes:

- Gaining attention (reception)
- Informing learners of the objective (expectancy)
- Stimulating recall of prior learning (retrieval)
- Presenting the stimulus (selective perception)
- Providing learning guidance (semantic encoding)
- Eliciting performance (responding)
- Providing feedback (reinforcement)
- Assessing performance (retrieval)
- Enhancing retention and transfer (generalization)

What models like these suggest is that people have many possible goals when communicating informative messages to others. Sometimes speakers seek deep learning, perhaps trying to create expertise; sometimes they seek synthesis or generalization. Interestingly, there is virtually no research that links various sorts of communicative messages to specific learning goals. For example, scholars know little about what kinds of messages are optimal to create expertise. By contrast, researchers have examined message strategies that enhance some of the different steps summarized by Gagné (1985). We cover these studies in this chapter.

Underlying most models of learning are theories about how people learn. Although one could easily write a chapter summarizing different models of learning (e.g., Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996; see also Greene, this volume), space limitations and relevance preclude this. Instead, we highlight only some of the major historical themes of learning theory as they relate to communicating informative messages.

One basic group of learning theories falls under the rubric of *behaviorism*. Although most associate this term with scholars such as Pavlov and Skinner, its early roots can be traced to Aristotle, who highlighted the value of associations in memory. Key to behaviorism is a belief that although we can observe stimuli and outcomes, the mediating processes within the brain are essentially unknowable or unimportant. Pavlovian conditioning introduced the concept of psychological associations at the beginning of the 20th century. Pavlov demonstrated that by continually pairing a conditioned stimulus with an unconditioned one, the conditioned stimulus eventually becomes associated in the learner's mind with the same response elicited by the unconditioned stimulus. In the United States, Watson was the first major proponent of what he termed behaviorism. His conditioning of a young child named Albert to avoid a rat, and later to avoid other small animals, was the germinal study in this area. Thorndike (1911) expanded on early conceptualizations of behaviorism with his laws of effect, exercise, and readiness.

By midcentury, Skinner (1957) became the voice of behaviorism. Different from previous scholars interested in classical conditioning, Skinner's interest was in operant or instrumental conditioning. He distinguished positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and punishment and argued that intermittent reinforcement may be a more successful strategy for maintaining behavior than continuous reinforcement. The general assumption was that positively reinforced behavior will continue. In communicating information, for example, the theory, would suggest that concepts be presented in small chunks so that responses might be reinforced or shaped. The skillful communicator ought to be conscious of the place of verbal reinforcement (both positive and negative) as well as punishment when imparting information.

Almost as soon as behaviorism became a focus of academic study, questions emerged. People noticed that learners often would model a behavior that had not ever been reinforced. Other behaviors that had been reinforced were not always enacted. Observations of these sorts led to a variety of other approaches to understanding learning. For instance, Bandura (1971) elaborated Miller and Dollard's (1941) work to create social learning theory. He proposed that learning is mostly observational and that it incorporates four processes: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Learning can and does occur through observation. Modeling explanations for the acquisition of communication skills have been noted in the past (Van Kleeck & Daly, 1982).

Scholars also were uncomfortable with the limited role attributed to cognition in behaviorism. The dominant conceptual reaction to this discomfort was constructivism. The idea underlying constructivism is that learners construct their own reality,

or interpret it, based on perceptions of experiences (Spivey, 1997). Knowledge is a function of prior experiences, mental structures, and beliefs that people use to interpret events, ideas, and objects. Although there are many different variants of constructivism, the basic themes include notions that there is a presumed active negotiation between learners and the material they encounter, that knowledge is constructed from experience and that learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience, negotiation, and sharing of multiple perspectives (Applegate, 1980; Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982). The constructivist approach probably is the primary model of learning today. Individuals do not deliver messages that are directly, accurately, and completely comprehended by listeners; instead, listeners make sense of what is being said, taking into account context, prior experiences, attitudes, and a host of other variables. Thus, skilled communicators face a bevy of tasks when attempting to convey their ideas to others. Successful communication of an idea requires the cooperation of both speaker and listener.

Other cognitive models of learning have received significant attention as well. Most revolve around problem solving. For instance, case-based planning theories suggest people store episodes in memory for future use in solving problems (e.g., Hammond, 1989), and search-based models emphasize the importance of chunking (Rosenbloom, Laird, & Newell, 1991). ACT-R models (Anderson, 1993) highlight analogic interpretative processes, and construction–integration theories (Kintsch, 1998) presuppose associational links between long-term memory and new information that is to be learned.

Concurrent with discussions of how people learn, there have been arguments about the place of individual differences in learning. The assumption of these debates is that people vary in both their capacity for and proclivity toward learning. For instance, there have been vicious arguments about whether there is a universal factor of intelligence. In the early part of the 20th century there were many proponents of a single underlying dimension of intelligence (for an interesting summary, see Gould, 1981). In recent years, there has been a move away from the notion of a solitary dimension in favor of multiple factors. Sternberg (1985) argued for a triarchic theory, whereas Gardner (1999) proposed even more forms of intelligence (e.g., linguistic, musical, logical–mathematical, intrapersonal, interpersonal).

There also have been numerous projects trying to identify various styles of learning. Different from theories emphasizing alternative intelligences or abilities, the notion here is that there are distinctive ways people prefer to learn. The most commonly examined cognitive style variable may be field independence–dependence, although many other style-related variables have been identified (e.g., scanning, leveling vs. sharpening, reflection vs. impulsivity, differentiation; Witkins & Goodenough, 1981). One popular model was introduced by Kolb (1984) who suggested that there were four modes of learning: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE). Underlying these are two continua—one ranging from active to reflective, the other from concrete to abstract. People who prefer learning in the modes of concrete experience and active experimentation are called accommodators, those with a preference for abstract conceptualization and reflection are assimilators, individuals who desire concrete experience and reflection are divergers, and those who enjoy abstract conceptualization and active experimentation are referred to as convergers.

A focus on individual differences suggests that because people differ in the way they prefer to learn, instruction ought to be adaptive. This idea is commonly seen in projects that fall under the label of aptitude–treatment interactions (ATI; Cronbach &

Snow, 1977). ATI research proposes, for example, that instruction can vary in its level of structure and completeness. Students with low ability prosper in highly structured environments, whereas those with stronger ability often do not do as well as they might otherwise in such settings. Anxious students prefer highly structured settings, whereas nonanxious ones do better in environments with less structure. Related to the claim that different learning conditions are necessary for different people is Gagne's (1985) conditions of learning theory. The theory suggests that there are five major categories of learning: verbal information, intellectual skill, cognitive strategies, motor skills, and attitudes. For each, different conditions are critical. To learn attitudes, Gagne argued, learners must be exposed to credible role models or persuasive arguments. To grasp a cognitive strategy, there must be opportunities to practice arriving at new solutions to problems. The similarity with ATI is obvious: Different instructional strategies are necessary for different learning outcomes. Nonetheless, although learner differences are of obvious importance, they seldom have been incorporated within the research traditions reviewed for this chapter. Why this is so represents an interesting question. One explanation may be that scholars feel individual differences are relatively unimportant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, individual differences may offer little explanatory value. Practically, few people communicating with others are able to immediately and accurately grasp others' propensities and traits. Insofar as these things hold true, what is important to study are skillful communication behaviors that can be understood independently of individual differences.

Theories and models of learning shape the research that is reviewed in the next section. Given the enormous amount of work that is relevant to this chapter, it is useful to organize the material into two broad categories: comprehension and affinity. As we noted at the start of this chapter, skillful communicators face two interrelated challenges when imparting information. First, their listeners must comprehend and recall what was said. Second, listeners must have positive regard for the communicator.

## ENHANCING COMPREHENSION

What does it take to ensure that listeners comprehend what a speaker said? What makes some texts more understandable and memorable than others? Literally thousands of studies have probed these kinds of questions. Rather than summarizing study after study, we highlight important conclusions in the research as practical propositions—statements summarizing what communicators ought to consider when trying to construct and deliver an understandable, impactful, and memorable message. Our underlying assumption is that there are specific moves communicators can enact to ensure that their messages have a “sticky” quality.

Early investigations in classrooms prefigured what this chapter reviews. Rosenshine and Furst (1973) usefully summarized this research when they examined a number of observational studies on what it takes to effectively instruct others. They suggest that nine variables were relevant to learning: (a) clarity, (b) variability and flexibility, (c) enthusiasm, (d) task orientation, (e) the absence of strong criticism, (f) verbal indirectness, (g) opportunities for learners to be exposed to learning material, (h) use of structured comments, and (i) multiple levels of questions. Newer research, reviewed in this chapter, nicely reflects the conclusions of these earlier studies.

Two preliminary notes: First, surprisingly little research has been conducted on questions of this sort within the field of communication. The vast majority of studies,

instead, are found in work on learning. In reviewing that literature, it quickly becomes apparent that most of the scholarship on comprehension uses written text for stimuli rather than orally delivered messages. Although this certainly limits the conclusions that might be drawn, in most cases, one would not suspect significantly different findings were the channel to be different. Indeed, a useful exercise for the reader is to try to reformulate each finding described in this chapter in terms of what a skillful communicator might do were she or he placed in the position of orally communicating the relevant message. Certainly, exploring whether oral delivery yields outcomes similar to those associated with written text remains an empirical question open to future scholarship. Second, much of what is covered in this chapter initially will seem obvious. “Of course,” readers might say, “we know it is important that messages need to be interesting and relevant. What’s the big deal?” We believe that, indeed, it is a big deal when research validates some of the basic assumptions people make. It is even more important when naïve beliefs are challenged by systematic investigation. Folk wisdom oftentimes is not empirically justified. In addition to supporting some commonplace notions, the research reviewed in this chapter deepens and enriches our understanding of the “whys” that lay behind many of our naïve beliefs about what it takes to skillfully create understanding and memorable messages.

## Make Your Message Interesting

Interesting messages aid comprehension (Schraw, Bruning, & Svoboda, 1995). They encourage engagement (Mitchell, 1993), sustain motivation (Schiefele, 1991), and push learners to more effectively use prior knowledge (Alexander & Jetton, 1996). Clearly, there is a positive relationship between interest and achievement in a content area (Schiefele, Krapp, & Winteler, 1992), as well as greater positive affect for, and more engagement with, interesting material (Schiefele, 1992). People who are more interested in a topic area tend to have more elaborated associative cognitive structures and, perhaps as a consequence, greater comprehension (Pintrich & Schruben, 1992) of material presented to them on that topic.

What makes a message interesting? To answer this question it is important to understand that interest represents an interaction between person and object (Schiefele, Krapp, & Winteler, 1992). Parenthetically, interest is not the same as liking. As Iran-Nejad (1987) suggested, one can find a snake interesting but not like it and like a soft drink but not find it interesting. Additionally, there is an important distinction between factors that “catch” one’s interest and those that “hold” one’s interest (Harachiewicz, Barron, Elliott, Tauer, & Carter, 2000; Hidi & Baird, 1986; Mitchell, 1993). Striking visuals, humor, and speaker animation may achieve the former; content that is substantively relevant and valued may generate the latter (Malone & Lepper, 1987; Rathunde, 1993). Krapp, Hidi, and Renninger (1992) distinguished between personal, or topical, interest (associated with increased knowledge about and positive affect toward the issue) and situational interest that is generated by others through the manipulation of text (e.g., novelty, intensity). Personal interest is an individual difference in the sense that there are enduring dispositional differences among people in their interests—some people, for instance, are simply more interested in geography than others. Situational interest, by contrast, can be manipulated in the messages communicators create. What contributes to making a text situationally interesting includes unexpected main events (Iran-Nejad, 1987), physical involvement (Zahorik, 1996) emotionally charged and provocative information (Goetz et al., 1992), coherent text (Wade, 1992), the ability of readers or listeners to

identify with the characters (Anderson, Shirey, Wilson, & Fielding, 1987), suspense (Jose & Brewer, 1984), topic relevance to the goals of readers (Shirey, 1992), concrete and imaginable text (Sadoski, Goetz, & Fritz, 1993), and a narrative style (Fernald, 1987; Hidi, Baird, & Hildyard, 1982). Schraw (1997), via factor analysis, found six dimensions underlying people's interest in narrative: (a) coherence—the clarity, flow, and organization of the story; (b) vividness—the inclusion of imaginable and memorable descriptions; (c) thematic complexity—the degree to which the text offers multiple interpretations especially below the surface; (d) topic familiarity—how familiar readers are with the story or similar ones; (e) informational completeness—whether the informational content is sufficient; and (f) suspense—whether the story is suspenseful and evokes feelings of mystery. Although only three of these dimensions were significantly and positively associated with interest in the study (coherence, suspense, and thematic complexity), the six features provide practical guidelines for creating and communicating interesting messages.

## Make Your Message Relevant to Your Listener

Although seemingly obvious, this proposition has received little attention from researchers. Parker and Lepper (1992) found that when instructional materials were embellished visually in ways that increased their pertinence, learning also was enhanced. Learning was bolstered even more when the material being presented was customized to be personally relevant to individual learners (Cordova & Lepper, 1996). Newby (1991) found that the more novice teachers made their materials relevant to learners, the greater the amount of time learners spent on task. Whereas these studies highlight the more cognitive consequences of relevancy, other investigations have focused on motivational correlates. Frymier and Shulman (1995), for instance, discovered that perceptions of teachers' relevance (e.g., use of relevant examples, application of materials to student interests) were positively correlated with student motivation. (More recently, Frymier and Houser (1998) found no effect for text relevance on learning or motivation. The relevance manipulation in this latter study, however, was quite modest and may have confounded relevancy with vividness.)

How, then, might relevance be enhanced? Some scholarship suggests that relevancy arises when material either arouses interest or is adapted to learners' already established interests. One way of creating relevance is through questions. Readers devote more attention to material related to inserted questions that presumably increase relevancy (Reynolds, Shepard, Lapan, Kreek, & Goetz, 1990). Questions require learners to engage in elaboration (something we discuss later in this chapter). Another way of enhancing relevance is to understand where the learner is "coming from." Learners spend more time on material that is palpably associated with the perspectives they are taking (Hyona, Kaakinen, & Keenan, 1997). When communicating to a group of educators, using classroom examples would enhance the relevancy of a message; employing the same examples with a group of engineers might be less useful. Using questions and showing the personal relevance of material are only two ways of increasing the relevancy of text. Another is to include interesting illustrations and supporting materials that are related to the subject matter being presented. Illustrations that are relevant to the material being presented improve comprehension (Levin & Mayer, 1993; Mayer, 1993).

One needs to be cautious, however, for if illustrations, examples, and other supporting material are not directly related to the topic under consideration, they may have no impact on comprehension of material (Levie & Lentz, 1982) and actually

may impede comprehension and transfer of learning (Harp & Mayer, 1997, 1998). Indeed, some studies have shown that the addition of “seductive details” or highly interesting and vivid yet irrelevant, material to the text can diminish learners’ recall of important material (Garner, Brown, Sanders, & Menke, 1992; Wade, 1992, but see Schraw, 1998). Harp and Mayer (1998) probed the deleterious effects of seductive details in a series of studies. Comparing three explanations—distraction, disruption, and diversion—Harp and Mayer found that only the last explanation, diversion, explains the effect of seductive details. Seductive details appear to confuse learners about what the text really is about. The details activate irrelevant prior knowledge that the learner then uses to understand the text. Schraw (1998) distinguished between context-dependent and context-independent details. He found that context-dependent details (those that are less interesting when read in isolation) take more processing time even though, in his project, they had no deleterious effect on recall of the major points of the text. Context-independent details (those that are equally interesting in context or isolation) detract from learning. In line with this finding is Moreno and Mayer’s (2000a) demonstration that entertaining but irrelevant “bells and whistles” (e.g., background music and sound) can detrimentally affect retention of information presented verbally and visually.

To fully understand the place of seductive details, it is important to recall Kintsch’s (1980) distinction between emotional interest and cognitive interest (Harp & Mayer, 1997). Foundationally, emotional interest should engage learners so they pay greater attention to the material and consequently, learn more. Learners who enjoy the material will retain more of it. Cognitively interesting material is based on the assumption that understanding encourages engagement. What the literature suggests is that emotionally interesting material may be distracting and may, in the end, detract from learning. By contrast, cognitive interest, aroused by summaries, explanatory illustrations, and cohesiveness may enhance learning (Harp & Mayer, 1998). As Harp and Mayer (1997) noted “the best way to help students enjoy a passage is to help them understand it. “This is not a new discovery. Dewey (1913) made a similar argument when he suggested that ‘when things have to be made interesting, it is because interest itself is waning’ ” (p. 100).

## Have People Elaborate

Closely tied to the notion of relevance is the idea that learning is enhanced either when individuals receive “elaborated” materials or when they actively engage in elaboration. Early research found that when learners were exposed to elaborated information that offered an explanation for an event, they were better able to recall the information (Stein & Brandsford, 1979). Elaboration comes in a variety of forms. One involves providing individuals with additional information (e.g., Stein & Brandsford, 1979). Another is using visuals, as Lapadat and Martin (1994) did when they found that students better remembered information from lectures that had been elaborated with a variety of visual images. Practically, the notion of added information that is presented both orally and visually might be exemplified in communication that uses multiple examples set in different contexts. In communicating the principle of levers, for instance, a speaker might show listeners both a picture of a lever being used on a farm to hoist bales of hay and a photo of a teeter-totter or seesaw on a playground. Were the speaker to simply show the farm instance, listeners might infer that a lever is really only a farm implement. By showing both instantiations, listeners come to grasp the underlying physical concept of the lever.

Both of these methods—offering more information and using visuals to accompany verbal material—involve the communicator offering elaborated stimuli to learners. In recent years, however, the trend has been to place the primary burden on learners—to have them engage in their own elaboration. A particular form of elaboration is to have learners tie new material to older material they already know. Research consistently has demonstrated that individuals with prior knowledge about some topic are better able to comprehend and remember new material related to that knowledge. Indeed, when readers are prompted to use their prior knowledge, their performance in reading and understanding new text improves (McCormick, 1989; Recht & Leslie, 1988). Furthermore, teaching learners how to activate prior knowledge through scaffolding techniques (encouraging learners to make spontaneous connections between their personal knowledge and informational texts) enhances their comprehension of text (Spires & Donley, 1998).

Another way to encourage learners to elaborate stimuli is to ask them to encode material in ways that are different, but related to, the manner in which the material was originally presented. A number of investigations suggest that new information can be made more memorable if learners create meaningful elaborations (Stein, Morris, & Bransford, 1978) either visually (e.g., imagery) or verbally (e.g., answering questions). When learners use visual (imagery) strategies, they form mental pictures of words or situations (Paivio, 1971). Doing this facilitates recall, perhaps because it makes concrete what otherwise might be abstract (Willoughby, Wood, & Khan, 1994). Learners build relations and have to make distinctions (Marschark, Richman, Yuille, & Hunt, 1987) when doing this sort of elaboration.

When the goal is to enhance verbal elaboration, the typical approach is to have learners engage in elaborative interrogation—answering, for example, “why” questions for each fact that has been presented (Pressley, Symons, McDaniel, Synder, & Turnure, 1988; Seifert, 1994). Doing this requires learners to link prior knowledge to new information, thus facilitating later recall of the new material (Martin & Pressley, 1991, but see Woloshyn, Pressley, & Schneider, 1992). Elaborative interrogation encourages learners to generate mental representations of the situation being described, resulting in enhanced inferencing (McDaniel & Donnelly, 1996). Whatever the underlying explanation, many studies have found verbal elaboration significantly improves comprehension. Siefert (1993), for instance, discovered that adolescents were better able to learn the main points of a text when the learning process included elaborative interrogations. McDaniel and Donnelly (1996) also found that elaborative interrogations facilitated the recall of facts as well as inferential learning with college students.

Other forms of verbal elaboration have yielded similar positive effects. For instance, generative summarizing, in which learners reformulate material they have been exposed to, bolsters text comprehension (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987). Integrative elaborations, in which learners must explain information and relate that information to prior knowledge, also enhance learning (O'Reilly, Symons, & MacLatchy-Gaudet, 1998).

Although verbal elaboration seems to positively influence learning and comprehension, the type of elaboration learners engage in may be important. When researchers asked students to generate argumentative texts, the students produced qualitatively different sorts of essays than when they were asked to offer narrative summaries—the argumentative writers gained a better understanding of the text than did summary writers. Argumentative tasks are knowledge transforming (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987) rather than knowledge telling (Wiley & Voss, 1999).

Composing argumentative texts, in all likelihood, is more involving than creating narrative texts. Involvement yields deeper cognitive processing. Hamilton (1997) compared three sorts of verbal elaborations—creating personal examples, responding to why questions, and contrasting (operationalized as identifying similarities and differences). Likely because of the greater involvement it required, the last type of elaboration was the most effective in aiding comprehension.

When verbal elaborations are compared with visual elaborations and what is being presented is highly familiar, the two forms are equally effective; however, imagery is more effective than elaborative verbal interrogation when the material being presented is drawn from an area for which learners have a limited knowledge base. This bias for imagery may occur because imagery generally requires learners to draw both associations and distinctions leading to unique images (Willoughby, Wood, Desmarrias, Sims, & Kalra, 1997). For unfamiliar material, noting commonalities and differences enhances comprehension.

A construct related to elaboration is generative learning (Wittrock, 1990). The basic assumption of generative learning is that people comprehend and remember information when they generate relations among various components of the material that are presented as well as between the material and both their semantic (knowledge base) memory and episodic (experience) memory. Studies have shown that when learners generate relations among cues, there is greater comprehension and retention. For example, when people summarize or draw analogies about what they have read, they learn more than when they simply read the material (Wittrock & Alesandrini, 1990). Teaching individuals how to generate relations between new material and their knowledge base increases comprehension. This type of instruction requires that one understand the learners' current state (e.g., knowledge, beliefs, interests), and then direct the learners to construct relationships among the concepts to be learned, as well as between those concepts and learners' own knowledge or experience. How all of this might be used practically can be seen in a study by Kourilsky and Wittrock (1992), in which cooperative learning (discussed elsewhere in this chapter) and generative learning were integrated. Students were told of the importance of attending to four factors that involved their own and other students' (a) preconceptions, knowledge, and perceptions; (b) motivation; (c) attention; and (d) generation. The four factors were operationalized using 10 instructions:

- Relate subject matter presented in class to the learners' prior knowledge (preconceptions)
- Relate subject matter to the learners' beliefs, preconceptions, and real-world experiences (preconceptions)
- Use visual as well as verbal examples (generation)
- Take others' learning style into account (preconceptions, generation)
- Ask questions that direct other's attention to the major content to be learned (attention)
- Ask each other high level questions, not recall questions (attention)
- Have high expectation levels for everyone in the group (motivation)
- Have everyone in the group periodically make summaries in their own words (generation)

- Make sure everyone in the group is actively involved in the learning (motivation, generation)
- Remind each other that each person is ultimately responsible for his or her own learning (motivation)

Having students engage in these 10 activities and, implicitly, attend to the four factors resulted in significantly higher and more accurate comprehension rates of detailed economic ideas than when students were not given instructions that encouraged them to engage in generative learning.

Perhaps the ultimate form of elaboration is teaching others what has been learned. There is a maxim that suggests that people really do not understand a concept or process until they have to teach it to others. Research on tutoring offers support for this maxim. When tutors simply tell a learner an answer, the learner grasps no more than was previously known; however, when tutors offer explanations that clarify a concept to a learner, the learner actually experiences greater understanding (Fuchs et al., 1996).

## Use Narrative

Narrative is a powerful way of communicating. The research on narrative is immense. When people are asked to evaluate a well-designed story (i.e., one that is seen as complete, plausible, and consistent), it affects them far more than when the same information is presented in a more listlike structure, issue by issue (Pennington & Hastie, 1992). In a brief summary, Narvaez, van den Broek, and Ruiz (1999) suggested why this might be: Narratives, they argued, (a) elicit more interest, promoting more explanations and predictions, than expository texts; (b) produce increased inferencing, resulting, for example, in readers making 9 times as many inferences when exposed to narratives as they made when exposed to expository material; (c) offer readers early and extensive practice in making inferences because storylike texts are used when learning to read and because everyday life is constructed much like a story; (d) have structures that are less variable than expository texts; (e) activate schema and script structures that support inference generation; and (f) rely more on familiar forms of causality than do expository texts, thus prompting more explanations and more predictive inferences. The use of narrative appears to be a hallmark of effective teaching. Nussbaum, Comadena, and Holladay (1987) studied three award-winning professors and discovered that all of them used narrative as a way of instructing. The narratives the professors used were factual and helped clarify course materials. They were not personal stories unrelated to the topic at hand; instead they were tied to course content.

The construction of a narrative is important. Shank and Abelson (1995) Suggested that basic to a story is a story skeleton. Stories are built around these abstract skeletons that provide the glue for narratives. Skeletons aid people in recalling narratives perhaps because when information is presented in a thematic fashion (e.g., by chunking or clustering), it is more memorable (Ostrom, Lingle, Pryor, & Geva, 1980). Reflecting this are findings that people are better able to remember narrative information that is involved in a “progressive chain”—a sequence in which the action moves forward to a conclusion—than they are in recalling statements that are “dead-end”—those that seem to lead to no obvious conclusion (van den Brock & Lorch, 1993). Narratives are easier to remember, in part, because they increase

listeners' use of imagery which, in line with Paivio's (1990) dual-coding model, enhances both comprehension and recall (Brewer, 1988; Long, Winograd, & Bridge, 1989; Sadoski, Goetz, & Rodriguez, 2000). In addition, narratives' tight causal structure marked by transitions bolsters their memorability: The nature of narratives requires a structure that makes memory for them easier. Recall of narrative is enhanced even more when text material is closely tied to prior knowledge (Einstein, McDaniel, Owen, & Cote, 1990).

## **Offer People Feedback**

Learners are more effective when they attend to externally provided feedback (see Greene, this volume). The type of feedback that learners receive influences how they process information. For instance, one can distinguish between outcome-oriented feedback (that focuses solely on the achievement of a task) and what Balzer, Doherty, and O'Connor (1989) labeled as validity-related feedback, including (a) task validity (presenting the person information about the relations in the environment), (b) cognitive validity (presenting the person information about relations perceived by the person), and (c) functional validity (presenting information about relations between the environment and the person's perceptions of the environment). Validity-related feedback, because of its tendency to allow elaboration, aids learners in monitoring their achievement. In their review of the literature, Balzer et al. discovered that any of the validity-related feedback types were more effective than outcome feedback alone although the major impact was due to task validity information. Indeed, optimal feedback has the characteristic of cueing mindful processing of information (Bangert-Downs, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991). The timing of feedback also is critical. Kulik and Kulik (1988) explored the relative merits of immediate and delayed feedback finding that both, under different experimental circumstances, had value. When actual classroom quizzes and real learning materials were used in studies, immediate rather than delayed feedback was found to be more effective. Alternatively, in experimental studies of acquisition of test content, delayed feedback was more effective than immediate feedback.

## **Offer People Learning Aids**

Learning is enhanced when accompanied by a variety of learning aids. For instance, there is strong evidence that teaching people to use mnemonics (i.e., memory devices that involve linking items or events to images or keywords) aids in recall, especially when the recall is straightforward (Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996). Similarly, offering learners outlines before a presentation enhances learning from that presentation (Glynn, Britton, & Muth, 1985; Hartley, 1976). Mnemonics and outlines represent but two of a wide assortment of learning aids that have been studied.

A third learning aid—one that helps learners encode material they have heard or read and offers them a way of storing information—is note taking. When listening to substantive information, it is typical to take notes. Yet the notes that most individuals take are relatively incomplete and poorly organized (Kiewra, Benton, Kim, Risch, & Christensen, 1995). One means of improving comprehension and learning, then, is to present material in ways that assist learners in creating organized notes. Research also shows that there are better and worse ways to take notes. For instance, having learners take detailed notes (Slotte & Lonke, 1999) or summarize what they have heard or read after exposure to the material, rather than simply outline or underline, enhances

comprehension (Lahtinen, Lonke, & Lindblom-Ylanne, 1997) as does allowing learners to review their notes after they have been composed (Kiewra et al., 1991; Slotte & Lonke, 1999). Notes that are done in a spatial fashion such as knowledge maps, concept maps, or graphic organizers also help students encode information more effectively (Katayama & Robinson, 2000).

One of the most commonly investigated learning aids is multimedia illustrations. Levin, Anglin and Carney (1987), suggested that illustrations can serve as (a) decorations (e.g., pictures not directly relevant to the material), (b) representations (e.g., illustrations portraying one or more items mentioned in the text or presentation), (c) organizations (e.g., illustrations showing relations among elements), (d) interpretations (e.g., explanatory illustrations), and (e) transformations (e.g., imagery mnemonics for remembering items). Alternatively, Levie and Lentz (1982) identified four functions of illustration: attention-generating, affective, cognitive, and compensatory. Perhaps because of the multiplicity of functions illustrations offer, they can serve as powerful adjuncts to text. In studies that have compared two conditions, text alone versus text plus relevant illustrations, the findings are clear: Illustrations add significantly to the effectiveness with which the material is communicated (Griffin & Robinson, 2000; Mayer, Bove, Bryman, Mars, & Tapangco, 1996; Reder & Anderson, 1980).

We also know that when people are presented with information using different sensory modes simultaneously, retention improves. Mousavi, Low, and Sweller (1995) found that individuals learned more when presentations included both auditory narration and visual aids. The study compared dual modalities with presentations that were entirely visual (i.e., printed texts and diagrams). Mayer and Moreno (1998) extended this result finding that greater learning was associated with pictorial information accompanied by verbal information that was presented aloud rather than visually (also see Kalyuga, Chandler, & Sweller 2000). These findings fit nicely with dual processing models of working memory (e.g., Paivio, 1990) that suggest enhanced learning when information is presented in different modalities simultaneously. People are able to hold information separately in both auditory and visual working memory, thus increasing storage capacity and allowing learners to build connections between the different kinds of memories. Learners, in short, represent verbal and visual material separately leading to greater elaboration and easier retrieval. What this means practically is that the best presentations are delivered orally with accompanying visuals.

One of the biggest changes in presentations in the last decade has been the proliferation of technologically enhanced visual aids. The assumption is that slides, overheads, and other sorts of multimedia displays will improve learning. Research supports this assumption. For instance, in a recent project by Portland State University researchers, students were exposed to informational (understanding the “greenhouse” effect), persuasive (choosing among competing financial institutions), and procedural (using a photocopier) messages that used text only, overheads, or multimedia (computer-assisted slides, e.g., PowerPoint). Across messages, the results were similar: Multimedia presentations yielded greater recall, understanding and were more influential than other sorts of delivery methods. In addition, presentations that used multimedia were seen as more professional, reliable, and credible than other types of presentations (Simons, 2000).

Of course, not all visuals are created equal—a closer look at the research suggests that some are more effective than others and that some sorts of presentations are enhanced more by visuals than others. For instance, adding graphic organizers

(e.g., tree diagrams, matrices, flow charts) to textual material improves recall of what is presented (Guri-Rosenblit, 1989), although when the information is brief, there appears to be little need for these organizers (Holley & Dansereau, 1984). Robinson and Kiewra (1995) compared material presented only as a text, as a text accompanied by an outline, or as a text accompanied by a graphical organizer that visually demonstrated relationships. Learners who were provided text along with a graphic organizer were better at learning relationships among the concepts than were those receiving just the text or the text and outline. Robinson and Kiewra also found that it was important to allow learners additional time to examine graphic organizers. Graphic organizers are of special assistance when the material being presented is confusing or disorganized (Alvermann, 1986) and ought to be used for comparing rather than sorting data because graphic displays make relationships and contrasts far clearer (as cited by Robinson & Kiewra, 1995). When using graphic or spatial displays, the goal ought to be to present the information in a way that allows the viewer to use the least amount of mental effort to understand the relationship among the concepts presented (Winn & Holliday, 1982). One strategy is to present the graphic display first, followed by text (Verdi, Kulhavy, Stock, Rittschof, & Johnson, 1996), because the visual material can frame what learners read.

There are many different forms of graphic organizers. One of the more commonly examined is the knowledge map. Knowledge maps plot the interrelationships among concepts being examined. A learner might take one concept and then link it to another. A third concept is then connected to the first two, and so on until the ties among concepts are clearly mapped. Work has demonstrated that knowledge maps significantly enhance learners' acquisition of information (Hall, Dansereau, & Skaggs, 1992). Research indicates that these maps are especially helpful when they are well-organized (Wiegman, Dansereau, McCagg, Rewey, & Pitre, 1992), structured in ways that cluster items that are similar together (Wallace, West, Ware, & Dansereau, 1998), and presented in color (Hall & Sidio-Hall, 1994).

Diagrams usually are more concise than equivalent textual statements, and essential information tends to be perceptually clearer (Levin & Mayer, 1993). Diagrams, if well designed, make information more explicit than is often possible in textual sources. They reduce search behaviors as well as irrelevant inferencing (Larkin & Simons, 1987). They also allow the learner to process all information simultaneously. In a meta-analysis of the role of diagrams in comprehension, Levin, Anglin, and Carney (1987) found that effective diagrams organize events into coherent structures, clarify complex and abstract concepts, and assist learners in recalling important information. Marcus, Cooper, and Sweller (1996) found that diagrams improved the speed with which learners were able to accomplish tasks when compared with learners given the same information in textual form.

There also is strong evidence that illustrations can improve the understandability of text passages (Schnottz & Kulhavy, 1994), assuming they are not decorative (Mayer, 1993). A considerable amount of work has found that text alone, pictures alone, or text and pictures presented sequentially are less effective than text presented simultaneously with pictures, whether the information is presented in computer displays or printed forms (Hall, Bailey, & Tillman, 1997; Mayer & Moreno, 1998). Studies also have found that the best illustrations are focused and clear. One project revealed that it was better to use line drawings than photographs in explaining how the human circulatory system works (Dwyer, 1968) because of the inherent complexity of photographs. Line drawings can focus on essential information. In the realm of science, Mayer, Bove, Bryman, Mars, and Tapangco (1996) have demonstrated the value of annotated illustrations as an adjunct to text passages because they focus learners'

attention on the key concepts illustrated. Mayer's work on a cognitive theory of multimedia is of special relevance here. He suggested that there are three essential features of an explanatory illustration: conciseness (few illustrations and sentences are presented), coherence (images and sentences are presented in cause-and-effect sequence), and coordination (images are presented contiguously with their corresponding sentences, i.e., each illustration has a caption). Explanatory illustrations fail when they (a) do not depict systematic material (i.e., how materials are related), (b) fail to include relevant components or state changes, or (c) present information in ways that are not understandable (Mayer, 1993).

The value of multimedia presentations may depend on who is being exposed to the message. Studies have shown that illustrations are more effective with normally achieving children (vs. disabled children; Harber, 1983), more successful learners (vs. less able students; Reid & Beveridge, 1990), higher ability students (vs. lower ability students; Hannus & Hyönä, 1999), students with low reasoning abilities (vs. those with high reasoning abilities because illustrations may clarify relationships that would be immediately clear to individuals with abilities; Koran & Koran, 1980), adults with higher prior learning (vs. ones with little familiarity; Mayer & Gallini, 1990), and more successful adult learners (vs. adults who have difficulty learning; Schnotz, Picard, & Hron, 1993).

Other studies have revealed that activities that go above and beyond what is delivered in a typical expository presentation bolster learning as well as subsequent behavior. Hall and colleagues (1997) discovered that when learners drew pictures to match written instructions, their understanding of what they were learning was enhanced. Mazzuca and colleagues (1990) examined the degree to which medical staff modified their treatment protocols for diabetes as a function of the sort of information to which they were exposed. In one clinic, medical personnel only received a 3.5-hour seminar. In other clinics, staff members received, in addition to the seminar, various support materials that were facilitative with respect to care practices proposed in the seminar (e.g., reminders, clinical materials). In these latter clinics, there was better utilization of proposed procedures. The theme here is that the greater the involvement of listeners, the better their comprehension. Well-done and highly relevant visuals increase involvement as do exercises that engage learners.

## More Use of Questions

Considerable evidence suggests that learners are more apt to improve their comprehension of material both when they ask, and respond, to questions. Theoretically, when people compose questions, they are playing an active role in the learning process. They are engaging in elaborative processing of the material. Consequently, comprehension and recall of information is improved (King, 1994). In most learning settings, however, students tend to ask few questions. They do not ask questions because of barriers at three levels: (a) they have difficulty grasping their own knowledge deficits, (b) they engage in social editing (they are concerned about interrupting and changing the topic being discussed by teachers), and (c) they lack good questioning skills (Graesser & Person, 1994). The vast majority of questions that are uttered in classrooms are by teachers (Graesser & Person, 1994). Most of these questions are not higher order ones—they typically are cast at low cognitive levels (Carlsen, 1997) and of the sort that generate only short answers (Dillon, 1984). When teachers ask the majority of questions, there is a decrease in active participation by students in classrooms (Aulls, 1998). But quantity is not everything, for there is little systematic relationship between the sheer number of questions people ask and

their comprehension of material (Graesser & Person, 1994; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996). What is more important is the sort of question that is asked. Asking more penetrating questions—ones that tap into higher levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy—is associated with higher achievement on tests (Graesser & Person, 1994; Samson, Strykowski, Weinstein, & Wallberg, 1987) perhaps because posing such questions engenders greater engagement on the part of learners (Stodolsky, 1988).

Because of the low rate with which learners ask questions and the importance of questioning, scholars have spent a good deal of time trying to encourage learners to ask more and better questions. The results are impressive: They demonstrate that improvements in comprehension, learning, and memory of technical materials can be achieved by training students to ask good questions (Davey & McBride, 1986; Gavelek & Raphael, 1985). When students are taught to ask themselves questions while reading, their comprehension of the passages read improves significantly (Rosenshine et al., 1996). The sorts of prompts for questions that generate better comprehension include ones that use (a) signal words (e.g., "who," "where," "why," and "how"); (b) generic question stems ("another example of . . . was . . . ?" "what details develop the main idea?"); and (c) story grammar categories that help the learner generate questions focusing on the four elements of a story (setting, main characters, main character's goal, obstacles encountered by main character).

King (1992) taught high school students to use generic question stems under the rubric of guided questioning. Guided cooperative questioning occurs when students use a set of thought-provoking question stems such as, "What are the strengths and weaknesses of . . . ?" and "What would happen if . . . ?" These questions presumably encourage learners to generate their own specific questions about the material. Then, in pairs or small groups, learners pose their questions to each other and answer each other's questions. This process yields higher comprehension than either simply discussing the materials or engaging in unguided cooperative questioning (King, 1989). In his study, King found that students who learned these stems showed better recall and comprehension of lecture content than students in the unguided or independent review conditions. When people are taught to ask higher level questions, they comprehend information at a deeper level. By contrast, if individuals are taught simply to ask factual questions, they comprehend information at lower levels (King, 1994).

One aspect of questioning, wait time, has been the focus of some work. The general conclusion of this research is that learning is enhanced when question askers wait for a relatively long period before assuming the potential respondent is not going to answer. By extending the wait time after asking a question to 3 seconds or longer, teachers are able to increase learner achievement when higher level cognitive outcomes are measured in both mathematics and language arts (Tobin, 1987; but see Duell, 1994).

Questioning can be placed within the larger construct of help seeking. It often is important for people to seek assistance when they fail to grasp a notion. Despite the potential importance of this activity, few individuals in learning environments readily seek help (Newman, 1990; Newman & Goldin, 1990; van der Meij, 1988). In exploring self-reported reasons for not seeking help, Butler (1998) discovered three factors: ability focused (e.g., people don't want to look stupid), autonomous (e.g., individuals will feel good if they work it out themselves), and expediency (e.g., people think it will take them even longer if the teacher helps). Those who strongly endorsed the ability-focused dimension were less likely to seek help. This finding suggests the importance of face saving when encouraging people to ask for aid. Other studies show that individuals who feel highly competent about their knowledge are

more comfortable seeking aid than those who are less confident (Newman, 1990). When individuals see personal benefits in seeking help and perceive few negative reactions from teachers or peers because of their request, they are more likely to ask for aid (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Furthermore, in asking for help, people are more likely to start with a small request and, if they need additional help, move to a larger request (Newman, 1998). Help seeking is also less frequent in environments where learners perceive that self-improvement is stressed as opposed to settings where the emphasis is on effort and understanding (Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). Finally, although the reasons for this finding are unclear, Butler (1998) found that female learners are more likely to seek help than their male counterparts.

## Be Clear

The ability to understand material is a function of two variables: (a) the inherent complexity of the information and (b) the manner in which the information is presented (Marcus et al., 1996). The latter variable is directly related to communication skills and, more specifically, clarity. There is substantial evidence that teacher clarity is associated with higher learner achievement (Hines, Cruickshank, & Kennedy, 1985; Land & Smith, 1979). Moreover, when learners perceive that materials are presented in a clear fashion, they report greater satisfaction with the instruction.

The claim that clarity is important is a seemingly obvious proposition. What is not as obvious is what it takes to make a clear presentation. For individuals involved in instruction, Hines and colleagues (1985) identified three types of clarity skills: (a) highlighting the important aspects of content, (b) explaining content through examples, and (c) assessing and responding to perceived difficulties in understanding content. Underlying these dimensions were a number of behaviors identified by Cruickshank (1985): orienting the learner to upcoming materials, providing relevant illustrations and examples, using a variety of different teaching materials, reviewing material, answering student questions, asking questions, repeating and stressing information when it was seen as not being understood, offering material in a logical fashion and, when appropriate, giving step-by-step explanations, allowing time for practice as well as for thinking, and supplying objectives for units. Teachers who engaged in these behaviors had learners who achieved more. Other definitions of clarity include behaviors such as offering multiple examples, repeating difficult ideas, showing learners outlines, using the rule-example-rule pattern, and signaling transitions to new ideas (Civikly, 1992), as well as recognizing and proactively dealing with unclear materials.

Powell and Harville (1990) suggested that behaviors that reduce clarity include ambiguity, vague references, hedging, insufficient examples, and mazes (false starts, redundant words). Book and McCaleb (1985) saw clarity being equivalent to comprehensibility. Comprehensible teachers were those who (a) defined major concepts, (b) offered accurate examples, (c) offered sufficient examples, (d) explicated concepts sufficiently, (e) checked student understanding of concepts, (f) used coherent and cohesive discourse, and (g) used specific language. Bush, Kennedy, and Cruickshank (1977) found that five behaviors distinguished clear from unclear teachers. Clear teachers (a) offered learners individual aid, (b) discussed a concept and then allowed time for learners to think about that concept, (c) explained work to be done as well as how to do it, (d) repeated questions and explanations when learners did not understand, and (e) asked learners about their level of understanding prior to beginning work. Many other scholars have created checklists of clarity behaviors

(e.g., Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998; Civikly, 1992; Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997; Simonds, 1997; Wlodkowski, 1985). In the following sections, we highlight some of more interesting findings related to clarity—things that people can do to ensure that a message is clearly understood and, it is hoped, remembered.

***Offer Organizing Cues to Structure Materials for Learning.*** Organization matters. Coherent texts are better recalled than incoherent ones (Hyona et al., 1997, as cited in Hannus & Hyönä, 1999). Significant attention has been paid to how texts need to be organized to obtain optimal impact. One of the major strands of work in this area is by Ausubel (1963) on advanced organizers. Advanced organizers introduce, at a general or abstract level, materials that follow. Their presence enhances learning (Alexander, Frankiewicz, & Williams, 1979; Kardash & Noel, 2000). More broadly, in learning new materials, there is value in presenting organizing cues—information that alerts learners to upcoming material (Dixon & Glover, 1990). For instance, recall is improved when learners are signaled that upcoming information is significant (Lorch, Lorch, & Inman, 1993), although the effect may be limited to problem-solving tasks (Spyridakis & Standal, 1987) and tasks of some complexity (Lorch & Lorch, 1996). When signals are included in an oral presentation, listeners take more notes and recall more than when no signals are offered (Rickards, Fajen, Sullivan, & Gillespie, 1997). This latter study is particularly interesting for communication scholars because it is the only one probing the role of signals such as those discussed in this chapter that uses oral presentations of information.

Effective overviews of a text's topical structure, one form of signaling, helps to speed reading of subsequent text (Lorch, Lorch, & Matthews, 1985). Overviews also facilitate recall of material that is difficult to understand (McGlaughlin-Cook, 1981) or that is presented in a disorganized fashion much more than they help recall of material presented in an organized, logical manner (Lorch & Lorch, 1985). Overviews need to summarize subsequent information perhaps by listing upcoming topics, but they do not need to offer information concerning the order in which material is presented (Murray & McGlone, 1997). Compared with texts without headings, those with headings yield better memory for main points and encourage readers to compose more thorough summaries and more complete outlines (Brooks, Dansereau, Spurlin, & Holley, 1983; Spyridakis & Standal, 1987). Summaries offer similar benefits. They reduce the cognitive load on learners, allowing them to process critically important information. Mayer et al. (1996) as well as Reder and Anderson (1980) demonstrated that a summary that includes both text and illustrations is more effective than either a summary without illustrations or an extended passage that contains lengthy verbal explanations. When the relative effectiveness of headings, summaries, and topical overviews is examined, there does not appear to be a difference among the three in the amount people gain from material. All three, however, are more effective than no cues (Lorch & Lorch, 1995).

Other studies have shown that understanding the context of material aids learners in comprehending information contained in the text. Consequently, when learners are provided with information about a topic before viewing a passage on that topic, they find the passage more comprehensible and are able to recall more from the passage (Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Mannes & Hoyes, 1996). The information presented primes the learner. Sometimes this priming is accomplished by giving learners questions that guide their task (in this case, reading). These questions often take the form of learning objectives and aid learners in focusing their energy on material relevant to learning goals (Rothkopf, 1966; Sagaria & DiVesta, 1978).

Organizational cues not only affect how much people recall, but also what is remembered. With signals, Lorch and Lorch (1996) have found that readers recall material related to the signals as well as the structure of the material. Signaling (i.e., offering organizing cues such as topical overviews, headings, and topical summaries) provides learners with a superordinate structure for organizing new information as it is encountered. It offers individuals a coherent and salient framework for understanding and remembering materials. Offering signals about the rhetorical structure of an upcoming text increases the tendency of learners to recall that structure (Meyer & Rice, 1989). Theoretically, signals direct learners' attention so that they encode material differently.

**Use Examples, Metaphors, and Analogies.** Examples are quite powerful as means of ensuring clear understanding. Chi, Bassock, Lewis, Reimann, and Glaser (1989) showed that successful problem solvers use examples in learning and solving word problems. People also prefer examples, especially when they are just beginning to learn a particular domain of knowledge (Pirolli & Anderson, 1985). Indeed, when examples and typical instructions conflict, individuals tend to follow examples (LeFevre & Dixon, 1986). Conceptually, examples aid learners in constructing a sophisticated representation of the issue being discussed particularly when they highlight structural characteristics of problems rather than simply focus on the surface features of the problems (Quilici & Mayer, 1996). To synthesize the structural features, people may need experience with several examples couched in different surface features (Gick & Holyoak, 1983). The best examples are highly variable ones—examples that do not, on their surface, seem similar (Paas & Van Merriënboer, 1994). The dissimilarity forces learners to integrate diverse information into a representation of the idea being presented (Schwartz & Bransford, 1998). According to theories of analogical reasoning, when people are confronted with new problems, they search their memories for a similar problem to guide their solution of the new one. The search for a similar problem may be based on surface features (e.g., a specific story line in the problem) or on structural features (e.g., an underlying procedure or principle). Inexperienced learners tend to focus on surface features even though successful analogical transfer and schema formation depend on recognizing structural similarities among problems (Chi, Feltovich, & Glaser, 1981).

A variety of rich examples aid learners in going beyond surface features. Optimal examples include both the examples themselves as well as elaborations about the examples (e.g., labels) that provide a schematic representation of the problem being addressed (Catrambone, 1995). Without such elaborations, there is little transfer from one example to other novel ones. Rowan (1995) further proposed that when speakers are faced with conveying a difficult concept, they should (a) present a typical exemplar of the concept, (b) offer a definition that lists the concept's essential features, (c) present an array of varied examples and nonexamples (the latter being instances that might be mistaken for examples), and (d) offer learners opportunities to practice distinguishing between examples and nonexamples by identifying essential features.

Analogies (i.e., X is like Y) are equally powerful. The use of analogies aids learners by encouraging relational processing. In this way, learners come to better understand the principle under consideration. Thinking by analogy involves three processes: recognition, in which a problem solver finds a source problem that is similar to a target problem; mapping, in which a problem solver applies the solution method or principle to the target problem; and abstraction, in which a problem solver abstracts a solution method or principle from the source problem (Mayer, 1992). In a study

by Donnelly and McDaniel (1993), learners were presented with scientific concepts that were described through analogy or stated literally. Learners then were quizzed for both recall of facts about the concepts and their ability to make appropriate inferences that could be drawn from the concepts. Individuals who had been exposed to analogical descriptions scored higher on the inference assessment but more poorly in factual recall than did those who had been presented with literal information. McDaniel and Donnelly (1996) discovered that when learners were given analogical descriptions along with the highlighted key words, both factual learning and inferential learning were enhanced.

**Offer Integrative Information.** How information is presented is also important. For example, when disparate information is integrated in a text, learning improves (Chandler & Sweller, 1992) especially compared with times when disparate information is presented separately. Thus, if communicators want learners to deeply understand the nature of, say, theories of persuasion, they would be wise not to present relevant material sequentially and separately but simultaneously and comparatively (Rukavina & Daneman, 1996). This recommendation reflects research on the ways in which experts in an area learn new information. Ferguson-Hessler and de Jong (1990), for instance, found that the primary difference between good problem solvers and poor problem solvers who studied a physics text was that good problem solvers engaged in significantly more integrated study behavior. They imposed a structure on the subject matter presented, emphasized relations given in the text, drew logical conclusions, made procedures explicit, and so on.

**Use Clear and Concrete Language.** Smith and Land (1981), in their review, found that the presence of vague terms reduced student achievement. Walker and Hulme (1999) similarly discovered that people remembered concrete words better than abstract ones in processing language (see also Begg, 1972; Sadoski, Goetz, & Rodriguez, 2000; Wharton, 1980). Other studies have revealed that when problems are presented in familiar concrete ways, learning is enhanced. For example, learners can better solve problems about fractions when the problems are presented in the form of a dilemma about how to divide pizzas among friends than when presented with abstract questions about sectioning circles (Ross, 1983).

## Consider Alternative Delivery Methods

More than three quarters of a century ago, Bane (1925) contrasted lecture and group discussion methods for learning. He found no differences in immediate recall but did discover differences favoring group discussion for delayed recall. Other studies have found no differences at all (Garside, 1996). Research on such issues continues to this day. For instance, in a meta-analysis comparing tutoring with traditional classroom instruction, Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik, (1982) found that tutoring raised the performance of students far more than conventional classroom teaching. Greenwood, Carta, and Hall (1988) found that peer tutoring produces academic gains equal to, and sometimes even greater than, conventional instruction. This is true regardless of the achievement level of students (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997).

Perhaps the biggest issue relevant to delivery in recent years has involved the rush to explore alternative delivery systems using new technologies. Technology, in various forms, changes the skill sets required of people whose aim is to effectively communicate knowledge to others (Daly, 1999). For instance, collaborative

interactions (Brandon & Hollingshead, 1999) in computer-supported group work demand different skills than traditional classroom lecturing or even classroom group activities. In videotaped courses, Guerrero and Miller (1998) discovered that instructors' perceived levels of nonverbal expressiveness, involvement, fluency, gaze, and articulation were positively linked to judgments of teacher competence. Althaus (1997) found that when students participated in both face-to-face discussions (traditional learning) and computer-mediated discussions, they felt that they learned more and, indeed, received higher grades than when they participated solely in face-to-face exchanges. Much of traditional instruction is instructor dominated. This contrasts with computer-mediated exchanges in which instructor-centered interactions are far fewer (Harasim, 1989; Hiltz, 1993). Interestingly, delivery systems that are entirely computer based (e.g., hypermedia) tend to have no significant advantages over traditional paper presentations in terms of comprehension and learning (Dillon & Gabbard, 1998). This, of course, may be because the technology is so new.

In addition to the focus on new technologies, there have been discussions in the literature about alternative instructional methods within more traditional models of instruction. For instance, some attention has been paid to the notion of "cooperative learning" or "collaborative learning" in which students work together using structured, systematic instructional strategies in small groups. Students are asked to create learning communities where all participate. The evidence suggests this is a useful method for encouraging learning (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1984; Slavin, 1995, 1996; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1999; Whicker, Bol, & Nunnery, 1997) as well as for enhancing people's self-esteem and attitudes toward learning (Springer et al., 1999). Cooperative learning groups typically are structured to include a common goal, rewards for achieving a group goal and interrelated and complementary roles. Group members are to hold each learner accountable for his or her learning, offer team-building instruction, and discuss methods for better accomplishing tasks (Springer et al., 1999). The students who prosper most in this setting are those who engage in elaboration and cognitive restructuring (Slavin, 1995). The nature of the communication in these groups is critical. For instance, Swing and Peterson (1982) found that giving and receiving explanations related positively to the achievement of low-ability students while simply providing directions did not relate to achievement at any ability level. Webb (1991) demonstrated that whereas giving explanations was beneficial to (math) achievement, giving information without explanations was not.

The challenge for those who endorse cooperative learning is that most peer exchanges are not filled with the sorts of elaboration prescribed by the method. Students need to be taught how to interact so learning might occur (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bentz, Phillips, & Hamlett, 1994; King, 1992; Kohler & Greenwood, 1990). In addition, collaborative learning has some distinct disadvantages. For instance, some work has suggested that certain participants may become exceedingly passive (Mulryan, 1992).<sup>1</sup>

So far we have examined research related to comprehension—what effective communicators do to ensure that others comprehend their instructional messages.

<sup>1</sup>Some communication scholars have conceptualized collaborative learning differently than the definition used in the vast majority of education literature. To these communication scholars, a collaborative learning environment is one in which the teacher's classroom management style is student centered and decisions are made jointly among students and teachers. Chory and McCroskey (1999) found that there was a positive correlation between students' reports of their "affective learning" (liking for the subject matter) and their perceptions that their teacher's classroom management style was one that was more open and inviting to participation by all.

Impactful communicators make their messages interesting and relevant, offering their listeners the opportunity to elaborate on what they have heard or read. They use narrative, offer feedback as well as learning aids such as visuals, ask and encourage questions, and work hard to ensure that their messages are clear. Clarity is achieved by offering learners organizing cues, examples, analogies, and integrative information, all in clear, concise language. Finally, we highlighted some of the interesting scholarship on alternative delivery methods—a wide variety of ways are available to teach others. Although this information offers tools for effectively conveying messages, it is not much help if people do not want to listen to the communicator. In the section that follows, we look at research related to how communicators build affinity within learning environments.

## CREATING AFFINITY FOR LEARNING

Although research on comprehension falls mostly within the realm of inquiry of education and psychology, concerns for how a learning environment might be made more positive fall primarily within the field of communication. In this section, we review research on the nature and role of learners' affective reactions to speakers. We limit the review to work that focuses on learning or learning-related variables, recognizing that there is a plethora of scholarship on person perception that could easily have been included (see Wyer and Adavai, this volume).

The basic assumption of affective-oriented research is that feelings about topics, people, and context mediate the relationship between the presentation of an idea and its comprehension and recall. In other words, when I like someone, I am prone to attend to, understand, and recall what that person says. Skillful communicators who are disliked will be far less successful imparting their ideas than those who are liked by listeners. Early research found that listeners' perceptions of speakers counted when it came to learning. For instance, Wheless (1975) noted that the perceived competence of a source affected immediate recall of information, and Andersen (1973) discovered that people learned more from speakers they perceived to have higher levels of credibility.

Bell and Daly (1984) proposed 25 strategies communicators use to generate and maintain affinity in personal relationships (see also, Daly & Krieser, 1994). Subsequent research by a number of scholars generalized the Bell and Daly framework to the instructional setting (Daly & Krieser, 1992). Richmond (1990), for instance, demonstrated that teacher affinity strategies were positively correlated with students' motivation to study as well as with perceived learning, affect toward teacher and course, and intention to take future courses from the teacher. Roach (1991) and Thompson and Frymier (1991) found similar positive relationships between perceived teacher affinity and classroom outcomes. The challenge with the affinity construct is that it is composed of 25 behaviors, and there is no composite or unidimensional construct that can easily be used by scholars to tap into the notion. An alternative strand of research, under the rubric of immediacy, does not suffer from that problem.

### Be Immediate

The predominant line of research in this arena is scholarship on the concept of immediacy—perceptions of physical and psychological closeness (Plax & Kearney, 1999) that result in a tendency for people to move toward those they regard favorably and away from those they evaluate negatively (Mehrabian, 1971). Findings

of a number of studies link the perception of teacher immediacy to a variety of positive classroom outcomes such as affect toward teacher and subject matter as well as various sorts of learning. The construct typically is measured through perceptual reports. Individuals often are asked to evaluate a teacher on a questionnaire (e.g., the Nonverbal Immediacy measure (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) that asks about specific verbal and nonverbal manifestations of immediacy (e.g., Christophel, 1990; Menzel & Carrell, 1999).<sup>2</sup>

In defining immediacy, researchers have focused on verbal and nonverbal indicators of the construct. Verbally, immediacy is associated with a sense of humor, a willingness to engage in conversations with students, self-disclosure, using language that incorporates the student (e.g., "us" and "we"), offering feedback, seeking student input, and openness to meeting with students (Gorham, 1988). Nonverbally, higher teacher immediacy is marked by closer physical distance, smiling, increased gaze, direct body orientation, body movement and gestures, touching, a relaxed posture and vocal expressiveness, among other behaviors (Anderson, 1979). These sorts of verbal and nonverbal behaviors are positively related to affect toward teachers and courses, as well as increased student motivation (Andersen, 1979; Christophel, 1990).

Perceptually, the construct of immediacy is linked to students' sense of similarity with their instructors, more positive evaluations of instructors (Moore, Masterson, Christophel, & Shea, 1996), and feelings that their teachers are more credible (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998), less verbally aggressive (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999), and more positive (Comstock, Rowell, & Bowers, 1995). Students who perceive their teachers to be highly immediate tend to be more willing to talk (Menzel & Carrell, 1999) and demonstrate more positive motivation (Christophel & Gorham, 1995).

In terms of learning outcomes, perceptions of immediacy have been correlated many times with different measures of learning (Christophel, 1990; Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985; Kelley & Gorham, 1988; Menzel & Carrell, 1999; Richmond et al., 1987). The vast majority of research that assesses learning has used perceptual evaluations—how much students believe they have learned from a teacher. There are notable exceptions. Andersen (1979) used scores on a standardized test; Comstock et al. (1995), Frymier and Houser (1998), Wright and Scholl (1999), and Kelley and Gorham (1988) focused on short-term recall (see also the justification for using self-reports of learning in McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, Richmond, & Barraclough, 1996). There also are many studies examining individual behaviors that may be representative of the immediacy construct. These studies have found positive links with learning. For instance, Moreno and Mayer (2000b) found positive relationships between the

<sup>2</sup>This "perceptual" method, although common, limits the validity of much of the research in this area. First, authors in this line of research seldom enunciate the perceptual nature of the construct. Statements such as "teachers who are more immediate . . ." dot the literature. More accurately, these statements should read "teachers who are perceived as more immediate." Second, because responses to the questionnaire often are correlated with other perceptual judgments, there is the strong possibility of an artifact due to common testing method. In fact, in some studies, the dependent measures used almost perfectly reflect the definitional qualities of the immediacy construct. For example, Gorham's (1988) description of immediacy construct includes the notion of meeting with students outside of classroom settings. In a recent investigation by Jaasma and Koper (1999) one finds Gorham's measure correlated with out-of-classroom meetings. Similarly, Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found that student perceptions of teachers' humor tendencies are positively correlated with student perceptions of their teachers' immediacy. Given that humor often is considered a form of immediacy, this positive correlation is not surprising. Third, there is some conceptual confusion using this method: Researchers in this line of scholarship generally see immediacy as a trait, yet it is typically assessed as a perceptual construct.

use of first- and second-person pronouns (vs. third-person, more neutral pronouns) in the instructions given to learners and the learners' retention of information, as well as in their ability to transfer their learning.

Some theoretical work has explored the underlying reasons teacher immediacy affects important learning outcomes. Rodriguez, Plax, and Kearney (1996) examined different explanations and found support for a model suggesting that the link between immediacy and self-perceived cognitive learning is mediated by what they label as affective learning. Teachers who are immediate generate in their students an appreciation or value of learning the materials. This, in turn, leads students either to learn more or feel that they have learned more. Given the breadth of the construct of immediacy, it is useful to look more closely at some specific behaviors related to affinity generation and maintenance in learning environments. These specific behaviors include dynamism and humor.

**Dynamism and Enthusiasm Matter.** Before the immediacy concept being introduced, scholars examined many different variables that have since been tied to immediacy. For instance, Bettencourt, Gillett, Gall, and Hull (1983) found that instructors who were particularly enthusiastic had students who engaged in more on-task behaviors than instructors who were less enthusiastic (e.g., engaged in less vocal enthusiasm, gazing behavior, and animation). Coats and Smidchens (1966) discovered that listeners performed better on recall tests when material was presented in a dynamic manner. Perry (1985) and Ware and Williams (1975) found similar results—enthusiastic teachers were more effective. In a meta-analysis, Abrami, Leventhal, and Perry (1982) found a strong effect for teacher expressiveness on evaluations of teachers by students, as well as some effect on student achievement. Since then, other research has linked constructs such as powerful–powerless language to the effectiveness of people in teaching roles. For instance, Haleta (1996) found that instructors whose speech was marked by significant hesitations were seen as less dynamic and of lower status and credibility. In this study, in which individuals listened to audiotapes of people role playing teachers with and without hesitant speech, those who were exposed to the hesitant form of speaking also reported greater uncertainty.

**Humor Counts.** Studies of the use of humor as an adjunct to helping people learn have a long and complex history. Much of the research done a number of years ago found either no relationship or an inverse relationship between humor and learning outcomes (Gruner, 1970; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Zillman & Bryant, 1983). More recent evidence suggests that humor has a positive impact on students' feelings about their teachers (Bryant, Crane, Cominsky, & Zillman, 1980), attitudes toward their classroom experiences (Neuliep, 1991), motivation, and learning (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). Theoretically, humor is seen as way of generating attention (Ziv, 1988). The attention humor generates may last long enough to help students learn things they would have otherwise missed. Zillman, Williams, Bryant, Boynton, and Wolf (1980) found that among young children, even irrelevant humor had a positive impact on learning. In an excellent review, Neuliep (1991) summarized ways in which humor is categorized in instructional settings. He found that humor is used frequently, in many different ways, and more often by experienced college teachers and that it is used less by award-winning teachers. This last finding, that award-winning teachers appear to use humor less than average instructors, is drawn from a study by Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum (1988) who found that although all teachers used humor in their classrooms, instructors who had been recognized for excellence in teaching

used slightly less humor. This finding led Downs et al. to propose that teachers can use too much humor.

Some recent research has approached humor as a dispositional construct, that is as a stable individual difference (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). In instructional settings, Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found a positive relationship between students' perceptions of teachers' humor orientation and the students' sense that they had learned material in those teachers' classes.

## What Interferes With Learning

Some research has taken an alternative approach to studying the affective behaviors that encourage comprehension. Under the rubric of teacher misbehavior, scholars have looked at the activities in which teachers engage that might interfere with learning. The assumption here is that teacher misbehavior will invoke negative feelings on the part of learners. This negative affect, in turn, presumably leads to less learning. Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) found that most teacher misbehaviors fell into three clusters: incompetence (e.g., boring or confusing lectures, unfair testing, accents), offensiveness (e.g., sarcasm, harassment, prejudice), and indolence (e.g., absence, tardiness, disorganization). Dolin (1995) (as summarized by Thweatt & McCroskey, 1999) related these dimensions to perceived learning and found that when teachers were perceived to misbehave, students felt they learned less. Wanzer and McCroskey (1998) discovered inverse relationships between perceived teacher misbehavior and affect of students toward the courses those teachers taught. Teacher negativity (e.g., sarcasm, verbal abuse, sexual harassment) and verbal aggressiveness (Rocca & McCroskey, 1999) have deleterious effects on self-perceived learning (Kearney et al., 1991). Perceived verbal aggressiveness on the part of teachers is inversely related to students' feelings about both teacher and course (Myers & Knox, 1999).

In this section, we have briefly reviewed research on what generates and maintains affinity in learning environments. The idea guiding much of this literature is that positive feelings engender greater learning. The bulk of communication scholarship on this topic falls under the rubric of immediacy. Immediate communicators are typically more effective teachers than less immediate ones. Humor (under certain conditions), dynamism, and enthusiasm also contribute to positive affect which, in turn, bolsters comprehension and retention.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we briefly reviewed research and theory that revolves around the question of what individuals can do to help listeners grasp and recall messages. When put in the role of teaching others, what should skillful communicators consider? The chapter was organized by first examining major theoretical approaches to learning. Each approach highlights some important considerations people should make when instructing others. For example, behaviorism introduces the idea of systematically using reinforcements when teaching; constructivism reminds the skilled communicator that meaning is socially created. Empirical research on the topic of instruction and communication falls into two major interrelated categories of scholarly inquiry. The first examines what enhances comprehension of messages. Numerous findings offer advice to the skillful communicator. Some of them include the following:

- Create interesting messages
- Ensure your messages are relevant to listeners
- Beware of “seductive details,” that, although interesting, distract listeners
- Encourage listeners to elaborate
- Reference prior relevant knowledge when introducing new material
- Have listeners engage in self-questioning about the material
- Ask listeners to reformulate material in their own words
- Use narrative to communicate ideas
- Offer learners immediate and consistent feedback
- Provide learning aids that enhance comprehension
- Encourage note taking
- Use visual aids
- Encourage the use of diagrams, mapping, and illustrations
- Let listeners ask questions
- Engage in and encourage higher level questioning
- Be clear by focusing on critical ideas, offering examples, and attending to misunderstanding
- Offer listeners multiple, diverse examples of any important phenomenon, along with contrasting nonexamples
- Use memorable analogies and metaphors
- Provide organizing cues such as advanced organizers and overviews, transitions, and summaries
- Offer integrative materials that provide learners structures for organizing material
- Use concrete language

The second strand of research reviewed in this chapter emphasizes the importance of affinity—liking, by the learner, for the speaker. This literature suggests that skillful communicators act in an immediate manner. Their presentations typically are enthusiastic and, in some cases, may include humor. Importantly, speakers should not engage in behaviors that discourage learning.

We would be remiss to suggest that readers should take these conclusions, and the material summarized in this chapter and immediately modify their approach to communicating new information to learners. There are innumerable limitations to the various studies included in the chapter. A careful reading of the individual investigations is warranted. For example, we have not discussed scope conditions such as the demographic profiles of participants and the nature of the settings in which investigations were conducted. Furthermore, the vast majority of the work reviewed, especially that related to comprehension, used written stimuli. Few of the studies made use of orally communicated messages. Although we can argue on conceptual grounds that many of the conclusions apply directly to oral interactions, empirical evidence for this claim is absent. Indeed, the fact that there has been so little attention paid to what one can do to ensure comprehension and recall of oral instructions offers the discipline of communication a bevy of opportunities.

Instruction is omnipresent. Certainly, it occurs in the classroom. But it also happens everyday in almost every context—among strangers and within families, at

work and at play, among young and old, in public and in private. It happens consciously and unconsciously. And, at its core, successful instruction requires a myriad of communication skills. These skills, like those examined in this chapter—clarity and affinity—are critical to effective learning and are themselves, learnable communication skills.

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CHAPTER

# 23

## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN HEALTH CARE CONTEXTS

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The study of communication in medical consultations has enjoyed a rich history of research and theory development. Much of this work reflects a “process–outcome” perspective as investigators try to identify factors affecting the way health care providers and patients communicate with one another and the outcomes (e.g., clinician and patient satisfaction with the encounter, patient adherence to physicians’ recommendations, improved health) associated with these patterns of exchange (for reviews, see Kaplan, Greenfield, & Ware, 1989; Ong, De Haes, Hoos, & Lammes, 1995; Rotter & Hall, 1993; Street, 2001). Inherent in this research is the idea that the success of the medical consultation and the quality of medical care delivery in large part depend on the clinician’s and patient’s skills as communicators (Kurtz, Silverman, & Draper, 1998).

The purpose of this essay is to examine essential features of effective communication in health care settings and how health care providers and patients acquire and produce competent communicative responses. First, I describe the kinds of communicative skills clinicians and patients need to accomplish the tasks of the medical consultation. Second, I provide a conceptual framework for understanding competent communication and factors affecting communicative performance. The framework offers a unique perspective relative to other approaches to the study and teaching of clinical communication skills because it focuses on basic processes related to the production of communicative behavior. Finally, I provide guidelines, based on communication theory and previous research in medical and patient education, for designing communication skills programs to help health care providers and patients improve the quality of their interactions.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS

A growing body of research indicates that the way in which clinicians and patients communicate with one another can have a significant effect on the quality of care the

patient receives and on outcomes following the consultation. Quality of care is distinguished from outcome of care in that the former is tied to the process of providing care such as how the consultation is conducted, the manner in which medical decisions are made, what procedures are recommended, the interactants' understanding of one another's perspectives, and their satisfaction with the encounter (Roter & Hall, 1993). Outcomes of care, on the other hand, include a variety of measures related to the participants' actions and experiences following the consultation. For the patient, these might include adherence to a treatment regimen, a healthier lifestyle, eradication of disease, emotional well-being, and improved quality of life, to name a few (Kaplan et al., 1989; Ong et al., 1995). Although much less studied, postconsultation outcomes experienced by clinicians are also important and include professional satisfaction (Kassirer, 1998), attitudes toward patients (Levinson, Stiles, Inui, & Engle, 1993), likelihood of being sued (Levinson, Roter, Mullooly, Dull, & Frankel, 1997), and professional advancement.

## Clinicians' Communication, Quality of Care, and Health Outcomes

Research on the effect of health care providers' communication on quality of care and health outcomes generally falls within two categories. First, some studies examine patients' perceptions of clinicians' behavior (e.g., to what extent was the doctor informative? caring? domineering?) and then relate these perceptions to outcomes of interest (see, for example, Buller & Buller, 1987; Lerman et al., 1990; Street, 1991a). Other studies analyze the actual talk that occurs in the consultation (e.g., from audio recordings and transcripts) and then code the clinicians' utterances into categories of interest (e.g., giving information, partnership building, directives). Quantitative measures of communication, usually in the form of frequencies or proportions, are then used to predict outcomes (see, e.g., Mead & Bower, 2000; Roter & Hall, 1993; Street et al., 1993). Whether perceptual or behavioral indices of communication are used, studies consistently show that the clinician's communicative actions have a significant impact on both quality and outcomes of health care.

One of the most important resources health care providers can give patients is information that adequately addresses the patient's health, informational, and emotional needs. Thus, it is not surprising that providers who spend time giving information (e.g., findings, explanations, instructions) that patients understand and perceive as relevant to their needs usually have patients who are satisfied with care, have a better understanding of their health conditions and options for treatment, are committed to treatment regimens, and experience better health following the consultation (e.g., Hall, Rotor, & Katz, 1988; Kaplan et al., 1989; Lerman et al., 1990; Stiles, Putnam, James, & Wolf, 1979; Street, 1991a). Patients also greatly appreciate clinicians who verbally and nonverbally show care and concern for their clients, encourage the patient's participation in the consultation, respect the patient's perspective on health, and try to adapt treatment recommendations to the patient's individual needs and life circumstances (Bertakis et al., 1998; Cooper-Patrick et al., 1999; DiMatteo, Hays, & Prince, 1986; Henbest & Stewart, 1990; Kaplan, Gandek, Greenfield, Rogers, & Ware, 1995; Street, 1991a).

Conversely, patients express frustration and dissatisfaction when doctors dominate the consultation (e.g., by frequently interrupting, doing most of the talking, and issuing numerous directives), ask mostly close-ended questions focused solely on biomedical topics (e.g., questions about bodily symptoms), spend little time educating the patient about the problem and therapeutic options, and who show little

regard for the patient's concerns about health (Buller & Buller, 1987; Cecil & Killeen, 1997; Roter, Stewart, Putnam, Lipkin, Stiles, & Inui, 1997; Weinberger, Greene, & Mamlin, 1981). Not only are these patients less happy with their care, they also are less likely to understand and follow treatment recommendations and to have better health or symptom relief following the consultation (Heszen-Klemens & Lapinska, 1984; Kaplan et al., 1989; Street et al., 1993).

## **Patients' Communication and Outcomes of Health Care**

Until recently, research on communication in medical encounters primarily focused on the health care provider (Sharf & Street, 1997) and generally ignored the patient's communicative contributions during the interaction (see, for example, Hall et al., 1988; Korsch, Gozzi, & Francis, 1968; Ley, 1988). Such an approach assumes that the clinician is the participant of importance whose communicative abilities will determine the success or failure of the consultation (Street, 2001). Certainly most clinicians assume, and are generally granted, greater power and control of the consultation, and thus their communicative style will play a powerful role in what happens during and following the consultation; however, the provider-centric bias in previous research has had an unintended consequence of minimizing the patient's role in the interaction. In reality, patients need not be, and often are not, powerless or passive. As are other communicative events, the medical consultation is dynamic and socially constructed. Because the interactants must cooperate and coordinate their responses to create a coherent, smooth exchange, the patient's communicative actions can influence those of the clinician and play an important role in determining the success or failure of the consultation.

Research on the patient's communication during medical consultations typically predicts outcomes of interest by using either patients' self-reported participation in the encounter (e.g., did they freely express their concerns? Were they active in the decision-making process; Brody et al., 1989; Lerman et al., 1990; Street, Voigt, Geyer, Manning, & Swanson, 1995) or quantitative measures of the degree to which patients produced certain responses (e.g., asked questions, made recommendations, introduced topics for discussion) (Kaplan et al., 1989; Roter & Hall, 1993; Street, 1992b). Generally speaking, patients contribute to better health care when they are more communicatively active in their consultations. For example, compared with more passive patients, those who take the initiative to raise issues of concern, gather information from doctors, and freely discuss their health experiences and preferences not only tend to be more satisfied with care and committed to treatment regimens (Heszen-Klemens & Lapinska, 1984; Rost, Carter, & Inui, 1989; Winefield & Murrell, 1991), they also tend to have better improvement in health following the visit (Kaplan et al., 1989; Orth, Stiles, Scherwitz, Hennrikus, & Vallbona, 1987).

## **COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN MEDICAL ENCOUNTERS**

### **Conceptualizing Communication Skill**

The evidence reviewed thus far indicates that the health care provider's and patient's communicative actions can have a significant impact on the quality of care the patient receives and on health outcomes following the consultation; however, the research does not directly indicate why these relationships exist. Certain communication

behaviors (e.g., giving information, checking for understanding, sharing opinions) can contribute directly to better care because they help accomplish the important tasks of the consultation (e.g., information exchange, problem solving, decision making) and strengthen the provider–patient relationship (e.g., establish rapport, build trust). In some instances, however, the communication may simply be a response to, and not a determinant of, current health states and behaviors. For example, a correlation between a clinician’s controlling behaviors (e.g., recommendations, directives, interruptions) and the patient’s nonadherence or poor health may simply reflect the clinician’s reaction to these preexisting problems (see, e.g., Stiles, 1993). Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to support the claim that the communicative dynamics within medical consultations indeed “make a difference” and that clinicians and patients will benefit from understanding what constitutes effective communication and how these skills are acquired and used.

The success of the medical consultation will depend on the communicative skills of both the health care provider and patient. In this chapter, interpersonal communication skill refers to the participants’ ability to produce communicative responses that enhance both the quality and outcome of medical consultations. As indicated in the review in the first section, a plethora of health care provider and patient behaviors have correlated with outcomes. These communicative resources essentially tap into two distinctive skill domains, the provider’s ability to produce *patient-centered communication* and the patient’s propensity for *active participation in care*.

## **The Communicative Challenge for Health Care Providers: Patient-Centered Communication**

Although generally satisfied with their health care, patients do have recurring complaints about the communicative styles of some health care providers. Specifically, patients react negatively to clinicians perceived to be overly domineering, uninformatiive, difficult to understand, uncaring, and insensitive (Ong et al., 1995; Roter & Hall, 1993; Street, 1991a). Most of the problems relate to the physician’s overreliance on “clinician-centered” medical interviewing at the expense of a more “patient-centered” approach to the consultation (Campbell, 1998; Levenstein et al., 1989).

When using a clinician-centered style, the health care provider exerts considerable control over the consultation by asking closed-ended questions, interrupting the patient to stay on biomedical topics, doing most of the talking, and frequently issuing directives, opinions, and recommendations. Most clinicians are well intentioned when using this style and believe it is the most effective way of getting the information needed to accurately diagnose the patient’s problem, formulate an appropriate therapeutic plan, and, importantly, do both in a time-efficient manner (Roter & Hall, 1993). A patient-centered consultation, on the other hand, emphasizes the patient’s perspective on health including his or her perceived needs, concerns, preferences, and beliefs. In this type of encounter, the clinician facilitates the patient’s participation in the interaction (e.g., using open-ended questions, soliciting the patient’s opinion), provides information and counseling related to the patient’s needs, and involves the patient in the decision-making process (Smith & Hoppe, 1991).

In Western medicine, both patients and health care providers expect the clinician to be an active and influential participant in the encounter. Moreover, the provider historically has been the more dominant communicator who talks for longer periods, asks more questions, and is more assertive and directive than are patients (Roter et al.,

1988; Street, 1992b). For these reasons, clinician-centered communication comes easily to most health care professionals; however, recent trends in consumerism, patient advocacy, and medical ethics have popularized the notion that patients should be actively involved in their health care (Cahill, 1996; Lambert, Street, Cegala, Smith, Kurtz, & Schofield, 1997). As a result, patients increasingly are expecting health care providers to show greater interest in the patient's health experiences, competently provide educational and explanatory information, and recommend treatment that takes into account the patient's preferences and life circumstances. Research on doctor–patient communication suggests that clinicians can more effectively satisfy patients' expectations for care, as well as improve their clinical competence (Colliver, Swartz, Robbs, & Cohen 1999), by developing communication skills in the areas of information giving, interpersonal sensitivity, and partnership building.

**Information Giving.** Generally speaking, patients want to be fully informed about their health condition and possible medical procedures (Blanchard, Labrecque, Ruckdeschel, & Blanchard, 1988; Cassileth, Zupkis, Sutton-Smith, & March, 1980; Ende, Kazis, Ash, & Moskowitz, 1989). Clinicians, however, often fail to meet the patient's informational needs because they underestimate how much information patients want, overestimate how much information they provide, or use language (e.g., technical jargon) that patients have difficulty understanding (Beisecker & Beisecker, 1990; Roter & Hall, 1993; Waitzkin, 1985). The benefits of a health care provider's skill in information giving has been demonstrated in numerous studies. More informative clinicians typically have patients who are more satisfied with their health care (Ong et al., 1995; Street, 1991b), have a better understanding of health issues (Ley, 1988), are more adherent to treatment regimens (Hall et al., 1988; Stewart, 1984), are less likely to sue (Levinson et al., 1997), and even experience better health improvement following the consultation (Kaplan et al., 1989; Orth et al., 1987) than do patients of less informative providers.

Because of the value patients place on useful health information, an important question to address concerns what clinicians can do to ensure that they are sufficiently informative. Simply making a point to give as much information as possible appears not to be the answer. For example, a recent study reported that how much information physicians gave patients was not related to patients' perceptions of a doctor's informativeness (Street, 1992a). In other words, information per se may be of little value to patients if it is difficult to understand, too much to comprehend, or redundant with what they already know.

Health care providers can use several strategies to become better information givers. First, and perhaps most important, clinicians can periodically ask if the patient understands or needs clarification on the information provided. By so doing, the health care provider will have a better idea about what the patient knows and believes and thus be better able to tailor the information to the patient's needs. Second, when describing or explaining health-related processes, clinicians should avoid excessive use of technical jargon. Although this may seem like common sense, many clinicians may find it difficult to discuss health issues without relying on medical terminology (see, e.g., Street, Wheeler, & McGaughan, 2000). For example, a patient's "hemoglobin A1c," a technical term, is an indicator of long-term glycemic control, but it is not synonymous with the lay notion of "blood sugar." In such cases, the clinician may need to educate patients about the meaning of relevant terms so that patients can understand what the clinician is saying and use the lexicon when discussing their health issues with clinicians (see, for example, Street et al., 1995).

**Interpersonal Sensitivity.** Interpersonal sensitivity refers to the degree to which the clinician communicates care, concern, and interest in the patient as a person (Street, 1991b). Others have referred to this aspect of the provider's communication as affective behavior (Ben-Sira, 1980), positive socioemotional behavior (Roter & Hall, 1993), clinician humanism (Hauck, Zyzanski, & Alemagno, 1990), and affiliation (Buller & Buller, 1987). Perceptions of interpersonal sensitivity are a function of both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Verbally, clinicians can use words of encouragement, support, praise, reassurance, and empathy to show interest in and respect for a patient's feelings, concerns, and health experiences (Roter & Hall, 1993; Smith & Hoppe, 1991). Nonverbal indicators of involvement include gaze, direct body orientation, facial expressiveness, smiling, and attentive listening (DiMatteo et al., 1986; Street & Buller, 1987).

The health care provider's interpersonal sensitivity appears most directly related to affective outcomes such as the patient's satisfaction with care (DiMatteo et al., 1986; Hauck et al., 1990; Street, 1991a) and reduction in emotional distress (Roter et al., 1995); however, a clinician's interpersonal sensitivity can indirectly contribute to other behavioral and health outcomes. For example, patients happier with their health care may be more motivated to follow a therapeutic plan that in turn can lead to improved health (Golin, DiMatteo, & Gelberg, 1996; Speedling & Rose, 1987). Finally, a clinician's insensitivity (e.g., appearing uncaring, having a poor bedside manner) is one of several reasons patients change doctors (Kasteler, Kane, Olsen, & Thetford, 1976) or sue their physicians (see, for example, Levinson et al., 1997).

**Partnership Building.** Partnership building represents the clinician's efforts to encourage and legitimize the patient's participation in the consultation (Roter & Hall, 1993; Street, 1992b). Verbal responses that accomplish partnership building include asking for the patient's opinions and ideas, requesting questions, involving the patient in the decision-making process, avoiding interruption, and acknowledging or accommodating the patient's preferences and requests (Roter & Hall, 1993; Smith & Hoppe, 1991).

Although patients generally appreciate caring and informative health care providers, the relationship between health outcomes and partnership building is rather complex. For example, although most patients appreciate the opportunity to discuss health issues with health care providers (Roter, Roter, & Fienstein, 1984; Sharp, Strauss, & Lorch, 1992; Street, 1991b), they vary considerably in their desires to be involved in medical decision making. Some patients, particularly those who are middle-aged, college educated, less seriously ill, and wealthier, often want to take an active role in the decision-making process (Blanchard et al., 1988; Strull, Lo, & Charles, 1984; Cassileth et al., 1980; Ende et al., 1989). Other patients expect and even prefer that the clinician unilaterally make medical decisions (Davison, Degner, & Morgan, 1995; Degner & Sloan, 1992).

One of the advantages of the skillful use of partnership building is that it usually leads to greater patient participation in the consultation (Cox, 1989; Street, 1991a, 1992b; Street et al., 1995; Wissow, Roter, & Wilson, 1994), which in turn can provide insight into the patient's expectations for care, including the role the patient wants to take in the decision-making process. Moreover, by facilitating patient involvement, health care providers are indirectly contributing to higher quality care and a number of other beneficial outcomes, an issue discussed next.

## The Communicative Challenge for Patients: Active Participation in Care

If clinicians are to provide patient-focused care, patients must be able to talk about their health needs, beliefs, experiences, and expectations. Patient participation in the medical consultation is more than just a quantitative feature of communicative performance, however. It also must be understood with respect to the types of speech acts that interject the patient's perspective in the consultation and that have the potential to favorably influence the quality of care the patient receives.

**Communicative Characteristics of Patient Participation.** The ability to effectively ask questions, express concerns, be assertive, and tell one's health "story" (i.e., narratives about health) are four essential elements of patient participation in health care contexts (Street, 2001). *Asking questions* is the most direct way by which patients gather information and get clarification on health issues (Beisecker & Beisecker, 1990; McGee & Cegala, 1998; Roter, 1977; Street, 1991a). *Expressions of concern* include utterances in which the patient expresses worry, anger, fear, anxiety, and other negative emotions (Kaplan et al., 1989; Roter & Hall, 1993; Street, 1992a). Expressions of concern may be marked linguistically by such words as "concern," "worry," "afraid," or "frustrated" or vocally by tone of voice (Roter & Hall, 1993; Street & Millay, 2001). According to Infante and Rancer (1995), *assertiveness* includes verbal actions that express one's rights, feelings, beliefs, and interests. In a medical consultation, a patient is being assertive when stating expectations for care, making suggestions for treatment, disagreeing with the clinician, and offering opinions (e.g., the cause of an illness, the ineffectiveness of a particular medication; Street, 1992b; Kaplan et al., 1989).

Finally, *health narratives* are stories that describe the patient's health as it relates to everyday activities (work, exercise), relationships (family, friends), situations (e.g., traveling), and to the chronological unfolding of health events (e.g., when the symptoms started, episodes of pain; Kleinman, 1988; Sharf, 1990). Health narratives are an important component of participation in care because they reveal important contextual information about the patient's health behavior, beliefs, and perceptions of well-being (Kleinman, 1988; Smith & Hoppe, 1991).

**Outcomes of Patient Participation in Care.** Patients who actively participate in the medical encounters often gain a number of benefits, both during and after the consultation. This is because the patient's conversational contributions are both a resource for and a constraint on the clinician's subsequent response. By asking questions, expressing concerns, voicing opinions, and discussing their health experiences, patients are presenting valuable information that the clinician can use to better address the patient's concerns, offer emotional support and reassurance in a timely manner, and tailor therapeutic recommendations to the patient's unique circumstances and preferences (Henbest & Stewart, 1990; Street, 2001). Moreover, by actively participating, the patient is imposing normative constraints on the clinician's response. For example, conversational norms require "answers" to follow "questions" (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Thus, even if reluctant to discuss a particular issue, the clinician may feel compelled to do so because the patient asked a question on the topic. Similarly, because conversational responses are expected to be topically connected, clinicians may feel obligated to discuss a health matter because the patient raised the issue in a previous conversational turn (Street, 1991a).

For these reasons, patients who are more active communicators in medical encounters often receive more patient-centered care and experience better post-consultation outcomes than do more passive patients. Specifically, research to date indicates that patients who ask questions and freely discuss their health concerns, opinions, and experiences generally receive more information from health care providers (Greenfield, Kaplan, & Ware, 1985; Street, 1991a, 1992b), are more satisfied with their health care (Brody et al., 1989; Lerman et al., 1990), have a better understanding of health issues (Heszen-Klemens & Lapinska, 1984; Carter, Inui, Kukull, & Haigh, 1982), have a stronger commitment to treatment recommendations (Rost, Carter, & Inui, 1989; Young & Klingle, 1996), believe they had some control over medical decisions (Street & Voigt, 1997), and achieve more effective disease management (Greenfield, Kaplan, Ware, Yano, & Frank, 1988; Kaplan et al., 1989; Orth et al., 1987).

The chapter thus far has identified types of health care provider and patient communication behaviors that contribute to the success of medical consultations. The next section provides a conceptual framework for understanding the nature of effective communication in health care settings and, importantly, how these communicative skills are produced and acquired.

## COMMUNICATING COMPETENTLY

### A Conceptual Framework

Communication competence has been conceptualized in two ways, as an *outcome* of a communicative event and as the *process* of effective communication. As an outcome, communication competence is the *perception* of a communicator's success in specific situations (Wiemann, 1977). Moreover, these perceptions can come from multiple perspectives—oneself (i.e., perception of one's own competence), conversational partners, and third-party observers—not all of which are necessarily consistent with one another. For example, it is not uncommon in medical consultations for the physician to believe his or her performance was quite effective (e.g., made an accurate diagnosis, managed time efficiently, the patient agreed to the treatment recommendations), whereas the patient is dissatisfied with the encounter because the doctor was overly domineering and did not let the patient fully discuss his or her concerns. Also, passive observers of interactions (e.g., those watching a videotape) tend to evaluate communicators more harshly than the participants evaluate each other, in large part because conversational partners usually are working cooperatively to have a successful interaction whereas observers are making evaluative judgments based on broader stereotypic and social knowledge (Parks, 1994; Street, 1985; Street, Mulac, & Wiemann, 1988).

As a result, definitions of communication competence typically acknowledge the collaborative nature of effective communication. According to most theorists, the competent communicator is one who (a) has a flexible and ample repertoire of communicative behaviors, (b) is able to adapt to the communicative environment, and (c) is able to accomplish personal and relational goals in ways compatible with a partner's goals and needs (Parks, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977). Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) identified three basic requirements for communicating competently: motivation (the desire to communicate effectively and appropriately), knowledge (understanding what is required to communicate effectively), and skills (the ability to produce effective communication behaviors). Consider again the previous example of the dominating and insensitive physician (here, I assume the

doctor is a man). The physician's behavior during the consultation could have been due to a motivational factors (i.e., he did not want to communicate any differently), a lack of knowledge (e.g., he was not aware that his communicative style was bothering the patient), or a lack of behavioral resources (e.g., this is the only way he knows for interacting with patients).

Although the framework describes the attributes of communication competence, it does not explain the process of communicating competently. That is, how do communicators produce competent communication behaviors and acquire these skills? For example, there are several aspects of being a competent communicator that are difficult to explain. For one thing, competent communication often goes against the conventional wisdom that "to be better communicators, we need to be more aware of how we are communicating with others." Competent communication often unfolds automatically and effortlessly as though the communicator has some innate ability to perform well. Conversely, we also have encountered individuals who are very deliberate in their communication (e.g., slow-paced, carefully choose their words, exaggerated hand movements), yet come off as awkward, socially unskilled, or insincere.

Second, why do some people communicate effectively with a variety of partners (e.g., the physician who is liked by all patients), whereas others seem to perform well in only certain situations (e.g., the physician who appeals to only certain types of patients)? Finally, as Greene and Geddes (1993) have observed, many of us have experienced situations in which what we wanted to say in a conversation comes to us long after the conversation was concluded. This is often the case with patients who, following their consultations, wish they would have asked the doctor a particular question or mentioned a symptom of concern (Roter & Hall, 1993). In these situations, patients were motivated, knowledgeable, and had the appropriate response in their communicative repertoire. Why did they not think of it during the encounter itself? Understanding why events like these occur is important if we are to help health care providers and patients improve their ability to effectively communicate with one another.

Greene's (1984, 1989; Greene & Geddes, 1993) action assembly model provides a useful framework for addressing these issues. Action assembly theory explains verbal and nonverbal behavior in terms of cognitive structures and processes underlying the production of these actions. Although more detailed accounts of the theory are presented elsewhere, I highlight features of the model that are particularly applicable to a discussion of communication skill development in health care settings.

## The Production of Communicative Behavior

According to action assembly theory, the basic structural units for producing communication behavior are "procedural records." These are modular memory structures that contain three types of information—behavioral specifications, outcomes associated with these behaviors, and information about situations in which these behaviors and outcomes are relevant (Greene & Geddes, 1993). Procedural records exist in varying degrees of abstraction and are hierarchically networked such that higher order cognitive processes, such as one's goals for the encounter and perception of situational events, can activate the lower order commands that select and physically produce specific linguistic, kinesic, and vocal actions. In this way, very specific and minute communicative actions, of which the communicator may have little overt awareness (e.g., change in speech rate, standardizing accent, more

complex grammatical construction, head nodding), are nevertheless purposive and goal directed because of their intrasystemic links to the communicator's goals and perceptions (see also, Norman, 1981; Street & Giles, 1982).

According to the model, the production of communication behavior depends on two factors, the activation process and the assembly process (Greene, 1984; Greene & Geddes, 1993). As mentioned above, which procedural records are activated depend on their relevance to the communicator's goals and perceptions of the situation. The assembly process in turn takes the activated procedural records and integrates them to produce the stream of behavior that unfolds during the course of the interaction. Consider the following example of a medical encounter.

Suppose Mr. Smith is seeing Dr. Jones for a routine physical exam. Mr. Smith had been to the lab earlier for cardiac risk bloodwork. Just before she enters the examination room, Dr. Jones reviews the lab results and sees that they are quite normal with respect to cholesterol, muscle enzyme levels, and so on. Dr. Jones's cognitive representation of the interaction, talking to a presumably healthy Mr. Smith about normal lab results, contains relevant goals and strategies (e.g., be casual, friendly, reassuring, avoid lengthy discussion) that in turn activate behavioral routines associated with these intentions and this listener (e.g., smile, socialize briefly, explain the results, give praise, conduct the consultation quickly). Now suppose that, just as the consultation is concluding, Mr. Smith mentions that he does have one concern—he seems to be thirsty much of the time and has trouble sleeping at night because he wakes up frequently to urinate. Suddenly, Dr. Jones finds herself in a very different consultation, one in which the patient may be undiagnosed with a serious disease, diabetes. Dr. Jones's goals and objectives (pursue the problem, gather more information, convey her concern, extend the consultation) immediately activate a different set of responses as she now displays a serious facial expression, uses a more formal language style, informs the patient of a possibly serious problem, asks questions about related symptoms, and recommends additional medical tests.

As shown in this example, people have a large repertoire of procedural records in memory but only use a small number for any given interaction (Greene, 1984). Not surprisingly, then, the process of activating and assembling appropriate behaviors makes considerable demands on central processing capacity. The *speed* with which these records are activated and assembled depends on several factors such as how recently the behavior has been produced and how routinely a collection of records are grouped together into a particular behavioral output (Greene & Lindsey, 1989). Thus, communicative behaviors routinely performed in familiar and frequently occurring interactions (e.g., greeting rituals, small talk, visiting with friends) are assembled quickly and effortlessly, whereas responses in novel encounters (e.g., one's first job interview, comforting a friend on the death of a loved one) tend to be performed deliberately and perhaps awkwardly because of the lack of readily available behaviors and the impromptu nature of their assembly.

Although I have described the production process using a "top down" sequence from abstract goals to specific behaviors, the reverse may also occur. For example, events at the sensorimotor level of behavioral production (e.g., hand tremors) can also affect situational perceptions (e.g., I'm too nervous) and a change in goals (e.g., terminate the interaction). It is also important to reiterate that the activation and assembly process is dynamic and routinely incorporates emerging situational information (e.g., a listener's confused look) into reshaping goals and behavior (e.g., slowing speech, verbally checking for understanding; see, for example, Greene, 2000).

## Developing Communication Skills

These features of the communication production process have important implications for understanding how people develop and improve their communicative skills, particularly with respect to the motivation, knowledge, and skills components of communication competence.

**The Importance of Practice and Preparation.** As mentioned earlier, repeated performance of a collection of behaviors increases the likelihood and speed in which they will be reactivated and assembled in similar circumstances. Thus, communication skill will be enhanced significantly when the communicator has considerable practice with the behaviors in question (see Greene, this volume). Just as practice enables a guitar player to automatically play chords and melodies using finger actions that once were deliberate and painfully slow, so does repeated experience in specific social situations help communicators more readily select and produce relevant and appropriate communication behaviors. Moreover, if a communicator has to focus too much effort on formulating a response, he or she may miss key input or feedback from the other person (Greene & Geddes, 1993). As a result, action assembly theory helps explain why didactic instruction, such as listening to a lecture or reading an article on how to be a better communicator, does not improve performance to the degree that role playing and actual experience do. In health care settings, dyadic instruction may heighten awareness of what clinicians should do when talking to patients (e.g., use open-ended questions, avoid technical jargon), yet it is practice that will enhance the process of actually producing these actions during the interaction.

**The Importance of Feedback.** The ability to quickly and efficiently produce verbal and nonverbal behaviors is a necessary but not the sole requirement for competent communication. Many incompetent communicators are capable of producing long, fluent verbal responses. For example, the domineering physician mentioned earlier may believe his communication style with patients (e.g., doing most of the talking, giving advice and directions, unilaterally making treatment decisions) effectively manages the demands of the consultation and the needs of the patient. Moreover, if he has used this style frequently over the course of years, these responses have now become habituated and automatically evoked in routine medical consultations. What he lacks is an awareness of patients' perceptions of these behaviors or, perhaps more accurately, the types of patients who dislike this consultative style.

In the parlance of action assembly theory, one way to improve this health care provider's communicative skills is to add information into the behavioral records about the potential negative consequences of certain behaviors. One could gain this knowledge directly through feedback from patients, a colleague, reviewing a record of one's performance (e.g., on videotape) or, vicariously, from watching a skilled role model (Street, 1997). If the clinician considered the feedback salient and important, a conscious effort (e.g., a mental note) would be made to modify certain features of his or her style of communicating with patients. Although most of our cognitive energy is focused on higher order cognitive processes (e.g., our goals, developing the conversational topic), we are also capable of consciously attending to specific, low-level behaviors (e.g., finding the right word, slowing articulation to avoid stuttering; Greene & Geddes, 1993; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Furthermore, the production process is capable of incorporating top-down editing instructions so that undesirable

communicative habits and routines (e.g., chronically saying “you know;” constantly interrupting others) can at first be deliberately controlled (perhaps with only modest success) and later become automatically edited out of the assembled communicative actions (see, e.g., Motley, Baars, & Camden, 1983).

**The Role of Arousal.** Because the production of communication behavior links cognitive processes to the sensorimotor system, a communicator’s performance also will be influenced by physiological processes related to an individual’s experience of various forms of arousal (e.g., anxiety, anger, fear, excitement). On one hand, arousal has an activating effect on communication (Siegman, 1978) and can accelerate and facilitate the production process (e.g., faster speech, shorter response latency, greater verbosity, greater perceptual acuity; Siegman, 1979). On the other hand, arousal at very low or very high levels can have a disruptive effect on verbal performance (see, for example, Deshpande & Kawane, 1982; Koob, 1991).

Consider, first, problems associated with high levels of arousal. When nervous or anxious, people spend considerable cognitive energy worrying about the situation, their behavior, and others’ reactions (Greene, 1997; Greene & Geddes, 1993). This can have a distracting effect by directing attention away from where it normally is focused when communicating competently—one’s goals and objectives, formulating a response, interpreting the partner’s actions, and so on. The deleterious effects of high arousal may take one of two forms. First, when excited or nervous, a communicator may be very talkative and produce speech at a fast rate (e.g., “verbal diarrhea”) because adrenaline levels have increased the speed of the production process. Because the individual may have difficulty concentrating under these circumstances, however, his or her speech will most likely reflect frequently performed communicative habits or routines rather than responses adeptly adapted to the nuances of the situation. On the other hand, high levels of arousal, anxiety in particular, can disrupt the activation and assembly process altogether resulting in more verbal disfluencies, hesitations, false starts, and disruptions in the topical flow (Burleson & Planalp, 2000). Furthermore, if the interaction is threatening and the topic of the conversation is unfamiliar (e.g., a situation often experienced by patients when visiting with doctors), more anxious communicators may choose to remain silent because they lack immediate access to behaviors appropriate to the situation.

Communication production processes also may be hindered under low levels of arousal (e.g., boredom, fatigue) because of insufficient energy to drive the production process. In these cases, the communication may be slow, disfluent, and disjointed. Conversely, if the communicator has access to readily available communicative scripts and routines, he or she could be quite fluent and loquacious with little effort. In this case, the response may “sound” like competent communication but in fact may not be because the content of the talk has been produced mindlessly with little attention to the demands of the situation or the needs of the partner. This might occur when a physician, either out of fatigue or boredom, automatically goes through the routine of explaining a common ailment and its common remedy, yet puts little effort into adapting communication to the reactions, comments, and other unique characteristics of the patient.

**The Role of Motivation.** Motivation affects communication processes with respect to the interactant’s goals and commitment of effort to the production process. People who are highly motivated to accomplish a particular objective (e.g., make a favorable impression, win an argument) will direct more cognitive resources toward effectively

managing the situation. This in turn will enhance our perceptual acuity for relevant situational information as well as our ability to activate, integrate, and produce appropriate communicative responses (Greene & Geddes, 1993). People not so motivated will not monitor the situation as closely nor will they strive toward a higher standard of communicative performance.

## IMPROVING HEALTH CARE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### The Nature of the Problem

Although the communicative performance of both health care providers and patients will depend on motivational, knowledge, and behavioral factors, the production processes underlying undesirable communicative practices are quite different for clinicians and patients.

**Problems Experienced by Health Care Providers.** Health care providers face a number of barriers with respect to the acquisition and production of patient-centered communication. First, given their training in the biomedical model of medical care, clinicians may have little experience with patient-centered interviewing techniques (e.g., using open-ended questions, attentive listening, asking for the patient's opinion or beliefs) and thus will not have internalized these actions or routines within their communicative repertoire (Campbell, 1998). Instead, they will likely rely on more familiar "doctor-centered" responses such as close-ended questions, reporting diagnostic findings, making recommendations, controlling the interaction, and so forth. Furthermore, clinicians especially may have difficulty interacting with patients from sociocultural backgrounds (poor, elderly, Hispanic) different from their own. Because of their lack of knowledge and experience with the cultural values and practices of these patients, the clinician may not have the empathic skills needed to effectively relate the patient's unique needs and situation (Herselman, 1996).

Second, whereas patients view the medical encounter as an infrequent, serious, and possibly threatening event, clinicians often perceive it as mundane, routine, and (over the course of a day) stressful or tiring. With few exceptions, they repeatedly see the same kinds of conditions, make the same diagnoses, and make the same recommendations during the course of a work week. When fatigued, bored, or under stress (e.g., behind on the appointment schedule), a health care provider may rely on habituated "one size fits all" responses that can be activated and assembled quickly and efficiently. On the surface, the communication resembles competent behavior in that it appears relevant to the patient's health condition; however, the response will be less than adequate if the clinician disregards patient-specific events such as an expression of concern, a plea for reassurance, or a request for treatment, or if it overlooks subtle but important nonverbal information such as the patient's confused look, nervous fidgeting, and facial cues signaling a desire to speak.

Finally, interactants with greater power or status sometimes become complacent, if not arrogant, in their interactions with their less powerful interlocutors (Waitzkin, 1991). Health care providers often take for granted the appropriateness and effectiveness of the way they conduct the consultation, especially if there is no direct evidence to the contrary (e.g., a patient's complaint, a colleague's criticism). If clinicians have little motivation to change their style of interacting with patients, then it will be difficult to convince them of the need to critically evaluate their conduct and learn new behaviors.

**Problems Experienced by Patients.** The patient's communication difficulties in medical consultations are quite different from those experienced by health care providers. Specifically, the patient's challenge most often relates to his or her inability to be an active and effective participant in the interaction. Helping patients become more involved in medical consultations is more complicated than simply advising them to "speak up!" First, many patients accept the traditional role of the patient as the more passive participant who expects the health care provider to control the consultation and solve the patient's problem (Roter & Hall, 1993). By expecting or allowing the clinician to dominate the interaction, patients may have little opportunity to share their own personal experiences and perspectives on health, information that may be critical to an accurate diagnosis and personalized treatment recommendations (Henbest & Stewart, 1990; Street, 2001).

Second, compared with health care professionals, patients typically have much less experience interacting in medical consultations. As a result, most patients do not have an extensive repertoire of appropriate communicative actions that can be assembled quickly and efficiently when talking to health professionals about medical topics. For example, many patients are unsure about the kinds of information the clinician needs or find it difficult to pick the right words to describe their symptoms and concerns (Roter & Hall, 1993). These problems are compounded when patients are not familiar with the nature of health and disease or the medical terminology used to describe these processes (Street et al., 1995).

Finally, many patients enter medical consultations worried about their health and fearful of impending medical procedures. Research on the relationship between patient anxiety and participation in care have reported mixed results. As mentioned earlier, anxiety can have an activating effect on patients' communication, especially with respect to information seeking and expressing concerns (Street, 1992a; Wasserman, Inui, Barriatua, Carter, & Lippincott, 1983). Other studies, however, show that fearful patients may be nonverbally expressive (e.g., self-touching, fidgeting; Harrigan, 1985; Shreve, Harrigan, Kues, & Kagas, 1988) but verbally passive in the encounter (Gerdes & Guidi, 1987; Milgrom, Fiset, Melnick, & Weinstein, 1988). It appears that, in moderation, a patient's anxiety can facilitate the activation and assembly of verbal behaviors needed to participate in the consultation. On the other hand, highly anxious patients may be unable or find it difficult to discuss their needs or concerns because they are distracted by their fears.

**Summary.** In many ways, the communicative difficulties experienced by patients and health care providers are much like the difference between acute versus chronic health conditions. The patient's inability to be an active communicator is, in a sense, acute in nature in that it stems from uncertainty about the patient's role in the consultation, distractions related to health-related anxiety, and a lack of readily available resources for active participation in the encounter. In these cases, patients may need little more than a timely intervention that provides encouragement, information, and specific strategies and actions to help them ask questions, express concerns, and share their opinions (Cegala, McClure, Marinelli, & Post, 2000; Street et al., 1995; Street, 2001).

Conversely, a health care provider's communicative shortcomings tend to be chronic in nature. Behaviors needing change (e.g., interrupting, providing brief explanations, relying heavily on close-ended questions) often are well-established routines that are produced automatically and effortlessly. Patient-centered responses (e.g., open-ended questions, encouragement, partnership building) are novel to

many clinicians. The production of these behaviors will initially require considerable effort until they become a readily accessible part of the provider's communicative repertoire. Furthermore, if the clinician does not perceive any negative consequences to using the traditional, clinician-centered interviewing style, he or she will have little motivation to learn new behaviors. Hence, changing the way clinicians interact with patients will likely require either long term or intensive interventions (Kurtz et al., 1998; Roter & Hall, 1993).

## Guidelines for Program Development

***Improving Patients' Communication Skills.*** Patients vary greatly in the degree to which they are active communicators in medical consultations. For example, middle-aged and college-educated patients tend to be more expressive and assertive during medical encounters than are less educated and older patients (for a review, see Street, 2001). This variability can be attributed to a variety of predisposing and enabling influences. For one thing, middle-aged and college educated patients generally believe more strongly in the idea that the patient should take an active role in the consultation and participate in the decision-making process (Degner & Sloan, 1992; Haug & Lavin, 1981). These patients also tend to be more familiar with medical terminology (Spiro & Heidrich, 1983) and thus have linguistic resources that can be used when interacting with health care providers. Finally, in addition to these motivational and knowledge factors, health care providers tend to engage in partnership building more with middle-aged, college-educated, and White patients than they do with elderly, less educated, and minority patients (Kaplan et al., 1995; Street, 1992a).

Extrapolating from this research, we would expect that the most successful "patient activation" interventions would be those that (a) promote the legitimacy of the patient's participation in care, (b) provide information about the patient's health condition and treatment options, (c) provide specific communicative strategies and behaviors for patients to use in their interactions with clinicians, and (d) deliver the intervention in a timely fashion so that the patient has an opportunity to act on behavioral intentions resulting from the program. Research evaluating educational programs geared toward increasing patient involvement support the validity of these criteria.

For example, Thompson, Nanni, and Schwankowsky (1990) examined the effectiveness of two interventions, one advising obstetrics–gynecology patients to write down specific questions and take the list into the consultation and the other in which physicians simply encouraged patients to ask questions. Compared with a control group, patients in both experimental groups believed they had asked more of the questions they wanted to, felt more in control, and were more satisfied with the information they had received. McGee and Cegala (1998) tested a similar intervention in which patients were encouraged to be active information seekers and were advised to write down specific questions and concerns before their doctor visits. Patients who received the intervention asked significantly more questions and had better recall of the information provided by physicians than did patients not receiving the intervention.

Although patients' knowledge about their health condition and treatment options can be a useful resource, information alone may not significantly increase patient participation in medical consultations. For example, in Greenfield et al.'s (1985) study, patients who were only given information about their health conditions were less active participants than were patients who also received advice on how to express

themselves and how to overcome their embarrassment when talking to physicians. Similarly, Anderson, DeVellis, and DeVellis (1987) presented hypertensive patients with one of three patient education videotapes. One tape simply showed a patient educator providing information about hypertension and its treatment (the control condition), another additionally showed a patient interrupting occasionally to ask questions (the question-asking role model), and the third showed a patient who periodically initiated a discussion of his problems and concerns (the disclosure role model). Patients in the two modeling conditions asked more questions and disclosed more information about their health experiences than did control patients.

Davison and Degner (1997) examined the effectiveness of an empowerment intervention designed to help men newly diagnosed with prostate cancer gain more information about treatment and become more involved in the decision-making process. The investigators asked patients in the experimental group to think about the kind of information they might need, generate a list of questions to ask the doctor, and search for information pertinent to their questions in an information packet about prostate cancer. Compared with the control group (which only received the information packet), patients in the experimental group assumed a more active role in deciding treatment and reported less anxiety about their health 6 weeks later.

Finally, Rost, Flavin, Cole, and McGill (1991) assigned patients with diabetes either to standard diabetes education classes (the control group) or to a patient activation intervention that included a 45-minute individual session with a nurse who reviewed their medical histories and laboratory values, discussed strategies for managing diabetes, talked about common barriers to patient participation in care, and listed strategies to overcome these obstacles (e.g., write down questions and preferred decisions). The results indicated that, compared with the patients receiving standard diabetes education, experimental patients were more active information seekers during their doctor visits and achieved better metabolic control following the consultation.

Messages that encourage patients to share their thoughts and concerns, whether they come from a preconsultation intervention or from the clinician during the consultation, can facilitate patient involvement because such messages legitimize the patient's perspective in the encounter. As with health information, however, encouragement alone may not sufficiently help patients overcome barriers to participation. For example, Cegala et al. (2000) tested the effectiveness of a training booklet that asked patients to write down specific questions and list topics and information they wanted to discuss with the doctor. Patients receiving the booklet asked more questions and disclosed more information than did patients who received no intervention or who were simply encouraged to express their concerns and ask questions. These results are consistent with a study by Robinson and Whitfield (1985) reporting that patients who were given explicit instructions on how to ask questions and express their concerns produced significantly more questions and comments than did a group simply told that the doctor was interested in answering their questions.

In summary, these studies highlight the importance of practice and preparation in the development of patients' communication skills. Health information and encouragement also facilitate patient participation, but, to be most effective, patient activation interventions should provide resources to help patients select and enact specific communicative actions. Moreover, providing the education immediately before the consultation is particularly effective because patients can use these communicative strategies while they are salient and relevant. Finally, if well-designed, patient activation programs can be effective, using a variety of media including

pamphlets or booklets (Cegala et al., 2000; Robinson & Whitfield, 1985; Thompson et al., 1990), videotapes (Anderson, DeVellis, & DeVellis, 1987), multimedia programs (Street et al., 1995), and presentations by nurses and staff (Davison & Degner, 1997; Greenfield et al., 1985; Rost et al., 1991).

***Improving Clinicians' Communication Skills.*** Changing and improving the way health care providers interact with patients is complicated for several reasons. First, many clinicians have developed a style of communicating that they perceive to be effective and easy to use, especially if they have been practicing for a number of years. To diversify their communicative repertoire, clinicians must believe in the need for change, learn new responses (e.g., open-ended questions, attentive listening), and identify and refrain from problematic behaviors (e.g., frequently interrupting, being overly directive, Clark, Lipton, Grumman, & Sherry, 1999). Furthermore, because clinicians are trying to accomplish a number of objectives in the consultation (e.g., make a diagnosis, update medical charts, formulate a treatment plan, stay on schedule), they may believe they have little time for consciously assessing and adapting their communication to different patients.

Because of these factors, it is unlikely that a single, brief intervention will lead to significant improvement in a health care provider's communicative skills. For example, Street, Gold, and McDowell (1994) evaluated a program designed to help physicians discuss patients' concerns about health-related quality of life (e.g., emotional well-being, lack of vitality). Although physicians were encouraged to address these issues and a summary of the patient's concerns was included on the medical chart, there was little evidence this simple intervention increased the degree to which physicians discussed these issues. Research to date indicates that the most successful communication skill interventions will be those that are intensive and employ diverse pedagogical techniques including expert and patient feedback, role playing, modeling, practice, group discussion, and watching one's performance on videotape (Gask, Goldberg, Lesser, & Millar, 1988; Greene, this volume).

For example, Maguire, Fairbairn, and Fletcher (1989) designed a 4-week course on consultation skills for medical students that combined practice with simulated patients with feedback on their performance. Not only did students participating in the course score higher on a communication skills assessment immediately after the intervention, they also maintained superior communicative performance relative to a control group 4 to 6 years following the instruction. Similarly, Langewitz, Eich, Kiss, and Wossmer (1998) found that, compared with a control group receiving standard medical education, residents that additionally received 22 hours of communication training demonstrated more frequent use of a number of patient-centered responses. These results are consistent with Smith et al.'s (1998) finding that primary care residents who participated in a month-long program on patient-centered interviewing were rated as more skillful interviewers than were residents not receiving the training. Finally, one aspect of patient-centeredness, being able to communicate effectively with patients from different cultural backgrounds, also can be improved with intensive training. Culhane-Peras, Reif, Egli, Baker, and Kassekert (1997) evaluated a 3-year curriculum that included instruction in multicultural medicine. The program helped family practice residents significantly increase their cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills.

Although the studies described here focused on communications skills training for medical students and residents, other programs have had success improving the communication skills of experienced clinicians. As with medical students and residents,

the most successful programs show that experienced health care providers will acquire and use more patient-centered behaviors when the instruction addresses the motivation, knowledge, and skills needed to communicate competently with patients (Goldberg, Steele, Smith, & Spivey, 1980; Putnam, Stiles, Jacob, & James, 1988).

Consider, for example, Roter et al.'s (1995) interview skills training program that required physicians to participate in two separate 4-hour sessions. In Session 1, doctors listened to a presentation on the importance of communication with respect to psychosocial outcomes (the motivational component), participated in a round table discussion of these issues that was facilitated by a psychosocial expert (the knowledge component), and practiced with simulated patients followed by feedback on their performance (skills component). Before Session 2, physicians audiotaped some of their interactions with patients and brought these tapes to the second session for discussion and role-played reenactment. Physicians who participated in this program displayed significantly more problem-solving and emotion-handling skills when interacting with patients and scored higher in clinical proficiency and in the discovery of psychosocial problems than did physicians who did not receive this intervention.

With respect to processes underlying communication production, the success of Roter et al.'s (1995) study was largely due to clinicians having an opportunity to practice newly learned skills, receive feedback on their performance, and talk about their experiences; however, many practicing health care providers may not have the same opportunity for follow-up and supplemental learning sessions. Under these circumstances, the value of a single intervention will likely depend on how intensive it is. For example, in Joos, Hickam, Gordon, and Baker's (1996) study, physicians made only modest gains in their ability to adequately provide information and solicit patient concerns following a half-day workshop. Similarly, Levinson and Roter (1993) observed that physicians who only participated in a half-day program on communication skills did not subsequently increase their use of patient-centered responses. In contrast, physicians who attended the more intensive 2.5-day course did increase their use of open-ended questions, information giving, and partnership-building responses in consultations following the intervention.

Collectively, these studies highlight the value of integrating communication skill training into medical education, resident training, and continuing education programs; however, these programs will surely fail if they are one-shot interventions that simply use didactic instruction and handouts. The programs that have been most successful (a) are intensive and delivered over an extended period of time, (b) provide opportunities for practice and feedback on performance, (c) present role models, (d) provide follow-up assessments and review, and, importantly, (e) have institutional support and incentives promoting the value of effective communication with patients (Clark et al., 1999). Moreover, communication skills programs are particularly effective when they focus on young physicians and medical students who do not yet have intractable styles of interacting with patients. Readers are encouraged to review the University of Calgary program (Kurtz et al., 1998) to see how communication skill training can be an ongoing part of medical education and effectively integrated with other components of curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The health care provider-patient consultation is the cornerstone of medical care. The participants each bring to the encounter a diverse and complex array of health-related experiences, expertise, needs, and goals. These differences, coupled with

the task requirements to share information and reach a mutually acceptable decision about health care, make effective communication the sine qua non of a successful consultation. Thus, it is not surprising that the evidence reviewed in this chapter supports two broad-reaching claims. First, how health care providers and patients communicate with one another has a significant impact on the quality of care the patient receives and on postconsultation outcomes (e.g., the patient's satisfaction with care and improvement in health; the clinician's professional satisfaction and esteem). Second, effective communication between provider and patient does not come easily and, in fact, is often fraught with problems.

To address these issues, this chapter has presented a conceptual framework, action assembly theory, to help explain the communication difficulties experienced by health care providers and patients and to show how communication skills can be developed to overcome these barriers. The challenge for health care providers is to expand their communicative repertoires so that patient-centered responses (e.g., thorough and clear explanations, attentive listening, partnership building) can be produced quickly and efficiently during interactions with patients. This will not be a simple task. Because they visit with a number of patients on a daily basis, many health care providers have developed communicative styles and habits that are automatically deployed during the consultation. If a clinician has little practice with patient-centered communication and frequently uses clinician-centered behaviors (e.g., interruptions, close-ended questions), then intensive interventions will be needed to help the clinician adopt new responses and phase out the inappropriate use of habituated behavior. The most effective communication training programs are those that are of sufficient duration (e.g., require at least a half-day or more of instruction), have follow-up sessions, and use various pedagogical strategies including practice, feedback, self-assessment, role playing, and expert instruction. Furthermore, institutional endorsement, be it in the form of required communication competencies for medical students or quality improvement rewards for practicing clinicians, will help health care professionals realize that excellence as a clinician depends in part on their excellence as a communicator (Clark et al., 1999).

Patients also have power and responsibility as communicators in medical consultations. By taking a more active role in the interaction (e.g., asking questions, offering opinions, expressing concerns, describing their health experiences), patients make important contributions to quality health care because their communicative actions interject their perspective into the health care process, alert clinicians to their needs, improve the quality of information exchange, and often lead to treatment recommendations tailored to their preferences and expectations for care. Although some clinicians complain of "demanding" patients, most believe that patients who are actively involved in the consultation do a better job of communicating their needs and concerns (Frederiksson & Bull, 1995; Merkel, 1984). Moreover, in contrast to the intensive, multimethod programs needed to improve clinicians' communication skills, patients often need little more than a brief intervention that emphasizes the legitimacy of their involvement in care, provides some information about the health issue in question, and suggests useful communicative strategies and resources that the patient can use in the consultation. As indicated earlier, programs designed to activate patient participation are relatively simple to design, are effective, and can be conveniently delivered before the patient's visit with the doctor.

Finally, research opportunities abound for scholars interested in applying communication theory to the design and evaluation of programs for improving communication skills in health care settings. For example, given the difficulty in changing

clinicians' communicative practices, a valuable study would be one that examined the individual and collective effects of teaching strategies focusing on motivational, knowledge, and behavioral components of the production process in an effort to identify the most efficient but effective intervention for improving communication skill. Second, a common problem faced by health care providers and patients concerns how they manage and resolve conflicting goals and objectives. For example, a patient may be torn between asking questions for additional information yet trying not to monopolize the doctor's time. Relatedly, a health care provider may struggle with wanting to be supportive of a nonadherent patient, yet feel the need to criticize what is considered a destructive and irresponsible lifestyle. Addressing these issues are but some of the ways communication theory and research can make a significant contribution toward improving the quality of medical care.

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CHAPTER

# 24

## NEW DIRECTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: THE PROCESS MODEL

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Scholars have emphasized the necessity for improving intercultural competence and skills, given the continued expansion of the global marketplace and increases in the numbers of tourists and students in study abroad programs (e.g., Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Gallois & Callan, 1997). This necessity is further magnified by expanded conceptions of intercultural communication to embrace a wider variety of intergroup contexts, including communication with the elderly (e.g., Fox & Giles, 1993; Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995), between those of different sexual orientations (see Herek, 1991), or genders (e.g., Tannen, 1990) and with persons who are physically challenged (see Emry & Wiseman, 1987; Fox & Giles, 1996), such as the deaf (see Shearer, 1984), to name a few. Given these trends, this chapter is an attempt to enrich our understanding of intercultural communication competence, in part by systematically applying models derived from intergenerational communication. The resulting framework is a culture-general, theoretical alternative that may be successfully invoked to analyze communication between various social and cultural groups. The development of new intercultural communication theory is important given the view that theory in this area of inquiry is underdeveloped, leading a number of scholars to propound the need for more robust frameworks (e.g., Gudykunst & Nishida, 1989; Kim, 1988; Wiseman, 1995).

The chapter begins with a discussion of research relating to intra- and intercultural communication competence and skills. This includes a critique of the role of intercultural communication training in the skill/competence literature, and the presentation of intercultural communication theories that carry implications for communication competence. Next, two intergenerational communication models are applied to the intercultural communication context: the communication enhancement of aging model (Ryan, Meredith, MacLean, & Orange, 1995) and the communication predicament of aging model (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986). These, along with other sociopsychological and sociological variables, are amalgamated into

a new model of intercultural communication competence, the implications of which we discuss in our final section.

## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

This review of research in intercultural communication competence begins with a brief examination of interpersonal communication competence in intracultural settings. We afford specific attention to interpersonal communication literature in which intercultural contexts are evident, and subsequently offer a critique of the intercultural communication competence literature.

### Interpersonal Communication Competence

Although concrete definitions of the concept of competence have been elusive, it has been generally described as a “fitness or ability to perform” (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989, p. 6) and is “manifested in effective and/or appropriate behavior” (p. 7). Wiemann and Bradac (1989) suggested that the concept of competence generally implies adequacy, sufficiency, and suitability of communication. Nonetheless, it has been conceptualized in various ways. For example, although some authors have suggested that competence comprises motivation, knowledge, and skills (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989), it has also been thematically conceptualized in terms of the ability to control outcomes, adapt to different situations, and collaborate with others (Parks, 1994). The term *social skills* has often been used interchangeably with the term *competence*, but distinctions have been drawn between the two concepts that the terms represent. For example, communication competence has been regarded as social judgments about behavior, in contrast to the notion of communication “skills,” which refers to interlocutors’ specific verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors (Hammer, 1989). In other words, communication skills are the “specific components that make up or contribute to the manifestation or judgment of competence,” such as behavior codes and rules about what may be said in conversation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989, p. 8).

Competence does not reside simply in one’s communicative performance; rather, it is also an attribution about and evaluation of the performance by one or more other individuals (McFall, 1982). In light of this, some competence research focuses on how one perceives his or her own competence, or that of another, in a given situation (e.g., Gudykunst, 1994). Communication skills are important to judgments of competence in that they allow one to behave in ways that others will be more likely to perceive as competent (Wiemann & Bradac, 1989). Interpersonal researchers have examined the construct in a multitude of socially relevant contexts as it relates to a variety of psychological disturbances and disorders, including drug abuse, mental retardation, and developmental disorders in children (see Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989).

Wiemann and Kelly (1981) posited that skill alone does not make a person competent but that, from an interpersonal perspective, one must consider the relational context. Parks (1994) stated that some scholars define the overall concept of competence as occurring in a specific context with a particular audience. His definitional emphasis on relational context, together with the aforementioned themes of adaptation and collaboration, are key to an examination of intercultural communication competence. This is because communicating across cultural boundaries involves a degree of adaptation and collaboration and because one confronts unfamiliar social

behaviors and contexts during such encounters. It is surprising, then, that little research in interpersonal competence has not at least alluded to matters intercultural (see Lustig & Spitzberg, 1993, as an exception). It is also surprising that, although it is important to view competence as a relational phenomenon (e.g., Wiemann, 1977), others have noted that little scholarly effort has actually been devoted to understanding this perspective (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). This chapter proposes a theoretical model that takes into account the relational aspects of communication that may have implications not only for intercultural communication competence, but for interpersonal competence as well.

## Intercultural Communication Competence: The Concepts

Many intercultural contexts, in addition to those already noted, demand skilled communicators. These contexts vary in magnitude, and some are expanding, as evidenced by increasing numbers of international students and Peace Corps workers, more multicultural corporate work environments, record numbers of international refugees crossing national boundaries, and the development of transnational political entities, such as the European Economic Community. The following review explores the ways in which competence has been conceived and measured in different intercultural settings.

Culture may be defined in various ways. Lustig and Koester (1999, p. 30), for example, stated that culture is "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people." We generally consider communication to be "intercultural" to the extent that interlocutors perceive their group membership(s) to be salient in any given encounter (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986), but we also acknowledge, and adopt the view, that communication is "intercultural" when the group memberships involved pertain to relatively large groups of individuals (e.g., national or ethnic groups, with their unique histories, values, artifacts, customs, and communication patterns).

A number of scholars have examined intercultural communication competence, or effectiveness (e.g., Hammer, 1989; Lustig & Koester, 1999; Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999), and despite the difficulty of forming precise definitions of this concept, researchers have identified several indices of it. For example, Argyle (1982) suggested that intercultural effectiveness involves (a) subjective ratings of life satisfaction when living in other cultures or with its members, (b) perceptions of competence by members of the host culture, (c) perceptions of job performance by a work supervisor, and (d) whether an individual completes the full course of a planned sojourn or returns early. Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978) identified three dimensions of intercultural competence, including the ability to deal with psychological stress, communicate effectively, and establish personal relations. Kim (1995) suggested that intercultural effectiveness involves the ability to learn elements of the host culture (acculturation) as well as the ability to unlearn old cultural habits (deculturation).

Argyle (1982) suggested that competent intercultural performance can be regarded as a social skill, analogous to the skills of teaching or interviewing, for example. Similar to Kim's (1995) view, he stated that intercultural communication skills may involve the adoption of completely new skills (such as bargaining), or one may need to use familiar skills in a modified style (such as working under more authoritarian supervision or establishing more intimate relationships). Gudykunst (1994) suggested several skill areas for intercultural communication competence. These include the ability to (a) be mindful (i.e., aware and open to new information) (b) tolerate

ambiguity, (c) manage anxiety, (d) empathize, (e) adapt, and (f) develop accurate predictions and explanations. In contrast, Kleinjans (1972) offered the simple perspective that effective intercultural communicators see people first and representatives of cultures second—a view that carries significance for our theoretical alternative offered later.

Gallois and Callan (1997) identified a wide variety of arenas for the application of specific social skills to intercultural settings. These include using appropriate language skills in social or task settings (e.g., avoiding jargon or condescending “baby talk”) and skill in using appropriate nonverbal communication (e.g., using suitable gaze, facial expression, and physical distance from another, as well as acceptable vocal pitch, tone, and rate of speech). Additionally, intercultural communication skills can be used to express politeness and follow other social rules, including appropriate forms of address, proper face maintenance for self and the other, and proper ways to practice assertive communication in the intercultural context (Gallois & Callan, 1997).

Competence and skills may also need to be developed in cultures with different social values. Hofstede (1980, 1983) offered four dimensions of culture for consideration: (a) *individualism–collectivism*, referring to a culture’s focus on the individual as opposed to the social group or family; (b) *power distance*, referring to the degree to which deference is given to authority; (c) *uncertainty avoidance*, referring to the extent to which ambiguity and uncertainty are tolerated; and (d) *masculinity–femininity*, referring to the clarity of distinctions in gender roles in a given culture. Hofstede proposed that all cultures vary along these dimensions and that skilled communicators can navigate more effectively when armed with culture-specific knowledge of such dimensions.

Among the many benefits of high competence in intercultural communication is the avoidance of some of the pitfalls associated with misinterpreting others’ messages—an ever-present threat in intercultural communication contexts. This sentiment is reflected in Gudykunst’s (1994) view that effective communication requires the minimization of misunderstandings. Gumperz (1972) underscored the importance of mutual understanding with the suggestion that interlocutors must share at least one language, as well as rules governing basic communicative strategies, to properly decode messages. The consequences of low intercultural communication competence may range from the early returns of sojourners abroad to a lack of social support in foreign settings and loss of employment (Fontaine, 1996). Others may include the misdiagnosis of disease or unnecessary medical treatments (Haffner, 1992; Witte & Morrison, 1995), possible miscommunication during courtroom jury processes due to the use of multiple languages during deliberation (Sunwolf, 1998), or even the criminal conviction of courtroom trial defendants whose native language differs from that of the court (e.g., Naylor, 1979). All of these effects of low intercultural competence may be exacerbated by the experience of culture shock if one’s intercultural interaction involves travel to and prolonged stays in another culture (e.g., Adler, 1975; Furnham & Bochner, 1986), a phenomenon that may also strike sojourners as they reenter their home culture (see Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990; Martin, 1984).

Scholars seemingly vary as to whether they construe intercultural communication competence as a product or as a process. For example, Argyle’s (1982) indicators of competence, such as the completion of a sojourn and ratings of competence by a work supervisor, or Gallois and Callan’s (1997) suggestion that individuals use appropriate language in a given context, may be considered endpoints of competence. In contrast, Kleinjans’ (1972) suggestion that communicators see individuals first and members of groups second, or Kim’s (1995) prescriptions for appropriate

acculturation and deculturation, may constitute steps in the *process of realizing intercultural communication competence*. These issues come to the fore as our own theoretical alternative is ultimately proposed herein.

## Intercultural Communication Competence Studies

Given the flexibility of working definitions of competence from the interpersonal as well as intercultural literatures, it should not be surprising that intercultural scholars have faced the same challenges in their attempts to conduct empirical studies in this area of inquiry. Generally speaking, however, empirical research in this latter domain has been clustered into work on intercultural performance (e.g., Hammer, 1987; Martin, 1987) on one hand and intercultural adjustment on the other (e.g., Ady, 1995; Mahmoudi, 1992). Both research areas assume a positive correlation between levels of performance or adjustment and levels of competence. The following review of key studies, although certainly not exhaustive, is intended to be representative of research in these areas.

**Performance Studies.** Many studies have examined variables that may serve as predictors of effective performance in intercultural settings (e.g., Cui & Van Den Berg, 1991; Dinges & Lieberman, 1989; Hammer, 1987; Kealey, 1989; Martin, 1987; Martin & Hammer, 1989; see Dinges & Baldwin, 1996, for a review). For instance, Cui and Van Den Berg (1991) attempted to test the construct validity of a measure of intercultural effectiveness through the analysis of self-report questionnaires of 257 American businesspeople in Shanghai and Beijing. They found cultural empathy, communication competence, and communication behavior to be suitable indicators of intercultural effectiveness. Similarly, Martin and Hammer (1989) attempted to determine behaviors associated with impressions of communication competence. They asked 602 Caucasian undergraduate students to describe communication competence for self and other, in intracultural and intercultural contexts. More specifically, the researchers asked participants to imagine encounters with another American and with a variety of foreign students to describe what they would do to be perceived by the other person as competent, and what they would expect the other person to do to create a favorable impression as well. Results were similar across intra- and intercultural contexts and for perceptions of competence for self and other. These behaviors included politeness, display of interest, friendliness, efforts to make the other person feel comfortable, speaking more slowly and more clearly, making sure one understands as well as is understood, and talking about cultural topics. The authors also found that the communicative functions of empathy, flexibility, and display of respect were related to perceived communication competency for self and other, in both intra- and intercultural contexts. In a separate study, Martin (1987) explored the effects of intercultural sojourns on intercultural communication competence among 175 college students with a range of experience in study abroad programs. She found that those with between 3 to 12 months of experience abroad (the maximum) rated their awareness of self and culture, and their ability to facilitate communication, higher than did those with no intercultural experience. This finding may not be surprising because of self-motivation and self-selection—processes that would result in many of the most competent individuals opting for study abroad. These studies are relevant to our discussion of intercultural communication skills, because the ability to enact the behavioral correlates of competence uncovered in these studies (e.g., displaying respect, politeness, etc.) may be considered to be intercultural communication skills.

**Adjustment Studies.** Ady (1995) recognized the difficulty of defining the concept of sojourner adjustment, but noted that it is both a task and a process faced by those studying or working abroad and that it generally involves becoming accustomed to new environments. In his extensive review of the literature on sojourner adjustment, Ady identified five general trends in researchers' operationalization of adjustment: general satisfaction, interactional satisfaction, psychopathology, adjustment to change, and competence. These trends may assist in providing a better understanding of intercultural communication competence in general due to the relatedness of sojourner adjustment to the performance studies outlined earlier (e.g., Dinges & Baldwin, 1996). Additionally, Ady explored the correlates of adjustment with his development of a "differential demand model" in which a sojourner's adjustment is not just indicated by how well he or she meets environmental demands, but also by how well the person perceives the environment to meet his or her needs in terms of different domains (e.g., home, work, health, etc.).

Other studies have explored correlates of intercultural adjustment. Black and Gregersen (1991) found that predeparture training and interaction with host nationals is positively related to adjustment. Additionally, Redmond and Bunyi (1991) proposed that intercultural stress is an important dimension of intercultural adjustment. They collected data from 644 international students in the United States and found that communication effectiveness, adaptation, and social integration were related to reported levels of stress. Specifically, heightened ability to communicate effectively, adapt to new environments, and integrate socially were associated with lower stress.

Finally, Ward and Kennedy (1992) explored psychological and sociocultural adjustment during intercultural interactions. Adjustment was examined in terms of perceptions of locus of control (the extent to which positive or negative events are consequences of one's own behavior or are under one's control), cultural distance (perceived differences between the host and native cultures), cultural identity (in terms of integration with, or separation from, the host culture), as well as social difficulty, personal relationship satisfaction, and host national contact. Results revealed psychological adjustment to be predicted by locus of control, social difficulty, personal relationship satisfaction, and host national contact. This finding suggests that enhanced psychological adjustment is related to an internal locus of control, low levels of social difficulty, high relationship satisfaction, and increased levels of contact with host nationals. The authors also found that sociocultural adaptation was predicted by cultural distance, cultural identity, and mood disturbance. In other words, sociocultural adaptation may be improved when sojourners perceive similarities between their native culture and the host culture, when they perceive aspects of their identity to fall in line with the prevailing identity of those in the host culture, and in the absence of forms of mood disturbance.

**The Role of Training in Intercultural Communication Competence.** Intercultural training programs are designed to help learners function effectively in intercultural settings and have been used widely to prepare individuals for sojourns into unfamiliar settings (e.g., Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Landis & Bhagat, 1996; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1986). Experiential training exercises frequently serve as a component of such programs because they presumably simulate aspects of intercultural experience. If selected, timed, and executed prudently within the framework of a training program, these exercises are potentially useful tools. As Cargile and Giles (1996) have suggested, however, the benefits of training can be limited, or ineffectual,

or even can boomerang and be harmful if not designed with consideration of several social-psychological variables that may influence training outcomes. For example, they suggest that training should address the intercultural communication context in which the trainees will be functioning, the intergroup identities of both sojourners and hosts, as well as other aspects of interactions in novel environments, such as differences in the use of time and heightened levels of anxiety (see also, Williams & Giles, 1992).

Intercultural training programs take various forms and often consist of an array of activities. Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) proposed two major dimensions along which to distinguish intercultural training practices: didactic versus experiential learning techniques and culture-general versus culture-specific approaches to training content. The didactic approach involves the use of lectures to provide information to trainees, whereas the experiential approach involves the behavioral participation of trainees in activities that foster learning. The culture-general approach to training program content entails the presentation of concepts and principles applicable across a variety of cultural contexts, whereas a culture-specific approach to training content encompasses only information pertinent to a specific culture.

Experiential, culture-general training activities include structured group discussions of intercultural issues or cross-cultural games and simulations in which participants are immersed in artificial, intercultural situations that presumably encourage feelings experienced in real-life situations in a variety of cultures (e.g., Batchelder & Warner, 1977; Shirts, 1973). Experiential, culture-specific training activities include role plays in which participants act out culture-driven roles, games, and simulations that target issues encountered in specific cultures or field trips that momentarily immerse trainees in an actual intercultural milieu (e.g., weekend homestays with host nationals, if the training occurs overseas). An example of the didactic, culture-general approach would be the adoption of a frequently used training tool called the culture general assimilator (Brislin, Cushner, Cherie, & Yong, 1986; Cushner & Brislin, 1996). This training method is a multiple choice, paper-and-pencil activity in which participants read a problematical incident occurring in another culture and select from among a host of choices the best behaviors to employ in handling it. Additionally, lectures and videotapes that inform trainees about general intercultural communication issues are often adopted into training programs. These approaches may be either culture-general or culture-specific (informing participants about issues specific to a particular culture).

Training programs that employ the methods outlined here have been designed in the interest of improving the intercultural communication competence of individuals before, or following, their arrival in a host culture. Evaluative research conducted over the past three decades concerning the effectiveness of the intercultural training methods reviewed here lends tentative support to the view that these programs are effective in reaching their immediate goals (see Cargile & Giles, 1996, for a review of intercultural training effectiveness). More specifically, this evaluative research provides limited evidence that these training methods and techniques contribute to the overall, long-term goal of establishing communication effectiveness, adjustment to new cultures, and effectiveness in task completion in trainees. There is stronger evidence, however, that training assists trainees to meet more immediate, posttraining goals, such as the development of awareness, behavioral skills, and knowledge (Cargile & Giles, 1996).

The preceding review of intercultural communication skills, including the correlates of skills and competence, provides some understanding of the manifestations

of these skills, whereas the review of intercultural training suggests how these skills can be instilled in sojourners. It is at this juncture that a menu of explanations are offered regarding how, and perhaps why, competence is achieved.

## The Current State of Intercultural Communication Theory

Several theories have been developed to explain different facets of intercultural communication (see Kim, 1988; Gudykunst, 1988; Wiseman, 1995). Some derive from other disciplines, whereas others have their roots in intracultural and interpersonal communication domains. What follows are brief descriptions of intercultural communication theories that have particular relevance to intercultural communication effectiveness or competence. The theories presented here are not intended to be representative of the numerous intercultural communication theories available; rather, theories have been selected that hold relevance to the integrative model we present in a later section.

Ting-Toomey (1993) proposed a theory of communicative resourcefulness that is useful for our purposes. In this theory, competence may contribute to, and result from, effective identity negotiation between interactants. Intercultural communication competence involves managing the dialectics of identity security–vulnerability and inclusion–differentiation from others. Ting-Toomey stated that the security–vulnerability dialectic is the primary dialectic of human existence—the notion of “security” referring to one’s security in his or her sense of self. According to the theory, too much security can lead to boredom, whereas lower than optimal levels of security can result in anxiety that may “exhaust the self-system” (p. 81). The inclusion–differentiation dialectic refers to an individual’s competing needs for inclusion and differentiation from others and, like the security–vulnerability dialectic, is regulated within the family and peer support system.

Ting-Toomey’s theory states that effective management of these identity dialectics can enhance one’s sense of identity coherence and sense of self-esteem, a state that enables a person to more effectively approach novel and unpredictable situations, thus allowing him or her to more easily apply and practice available communication resources. She noted that identity management does not actually create these resources; rather, an individual’s potential to tap them is ever present. Included in Ting-Toomey’s definition of learned resourcefulness is “cognitive knowledge, and the affective and behavioral predispositions to act appropriately, effectively, and creatively in any novel situation” (p. 90). Therefore, competence may be regarded as a result of the adequate mobilization of these resources.

Anxiety/uncertainty management theory (AUM) was developed by Gudykunst (1993) out of his previous work with uncertainty reduction in intercultural encounters (Gudykunst, 1985, 1988). According to the theory, individuals must experience optimal levels of anxiety and uncertainty to communicate effectively in intercultural situations. Anxiety is an affective state marked by feelings of uneasiness, whereas uncertainty is a cognitive state distinguished by the inability to predict and explain occurrences (see Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Although various environmental factors are proposed to influence one’s levels of anxiety and uncertainty, it is these latter experiences that determine intercultural effectiveness or competence. If anxiety and uncertainty are too high, a person is unable to function effectively; if the intensity of either of these experiences is too low, one lacks the motivation to fully engage in the encounter. Gudykunst claimed that anxiety and uncertainty are moderated by “mindfulness” (see Langer, 1989), a state of active awareness, of forming new

cognitive categories, and seeing things in new ways. For our purposes, the use of mindful thinking may be considered an intercultural communication skill.

Kim (1988, 1995) developed an integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation rooted in the metatheoretical perspective of general systems theory (e.g., Ford & Lerner, 1992; Ruesch & Bateson, 1951/1968). According to her framework, individuals learn to relate to the environment through communication; therefore, adaptation depends on one's ability to communicate with others in that environment. She also maintained that individuals engaging in intercultural interactions are faced with frustrations and miscommunication because of the novelty of such situations and that they increase their levels of communicative competence by two means. This process involves both acculturation (learning the host's ways) and deculturation (unlearning their habitual ways) to adapt. The more effectively one adapts to the host culture, the more competent his or her intercultural communication will be. Kim's theory posits five primary dimensions that affect the acculturation process: *host communication competence*, which refers to a sojourner's general competence in his or her communication with hosts; *host social communication*, which refers to the social skills of sojourners in communicating with their hosts (e.g., using appropriate language with hosts); *ethnic social communication*, which is the intracultural social communication in the foreign setting among sojourners from the same cultural group (e.g., U.S. citizens abroad meeting other U.S. expatriates at the "American club" for group activities); *the intercultural environment*, which is the degree of the receptivity and conformity pressure of the host population, as well as the strength of the sojourner's own ethnic group; and the *individual's predisposition*, including preparedness for change, personality, and openness to new information. For Kim, these dimensions constitute the structure of cross-cultural adaptation. Specifically, she maintained that host communication competence serves as the "engine" that pushes individuals along the acculturation process, and that an individual's predispositional factors, such as preparedness for change, influence his or her "intercultural transformation," which involves one's degree of functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity (Kim, 1995, p. 188). Kim suggested that the dimensions of her theory influence the adaptation process for temporary sojourners, refugees, and permanent immigrants alike. We, however, feel that these are qualitatively different kinds of intergroup contacts and, as such, we distinguish them in our own model that follows.

Each of the theories reviewed here involves the cognitive management of optimal states of consciousness or experience. For Ting-Toomey (1993), these include the dialectics of identity security–vulnerability and inclusion–differentiation. The mechanism at work according to Gudykunst's (1993) theory is an individual's management of his or her levels of anxiety/uncertainty. For Kim (1995), individuals must balance appropriate acculturation and deculturation. The management of optimal levels of experience is also relevant to the theoretical framework we propose.

## **CRITIQUE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE RESEARCH**

Having reviewed several major studies and theories in the area of intercultural communication competence that provide the foundation for a better understanding of our theoretical alternative, we now offer a critique of this body of research. This critique highlights limitations from our perspective that include a lack of attention to cultural history and non-Western perspectives, as well as a paucity of concrete behaviors or states of consciousness that one can use to activate skillful behaviors.

Specifically, concerning the literature's lack of recourse to a sojourner's knowledge of the history and politics of a host culture, each individual engaged in intercultural communication brings to the interaction a cultural history that may include rivalry, interracial or interethnic conflict, social inequality, and prejudice (Cargile & Giles, 1996; Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995). Social power variables also affect communication (e.g., Hofstede, 1980) and may be related to cultural history; but it has been argued that "the professional socialization and educational training of many intercultural researchers leads to avoidance of . . . [these] social power variables" (Dinges & Baldwin, 1996, p. 122). We believe that intercultural communication competence should not be regarded merely as a matter of skills or personal traits, but rather as a combination of these elements and the knowledge of various features of the host culture—especially a host culture's history and particularly as that history interfaces with the history of one's own culture. Cushner and Brislin (1996) included some culture-specific information in the problem incidents of their culture assimilator, but this piecemeal information neither helps to inform one of a culture's history nor are the critical incidents even intended to inform in a culture-specific manner.

Although the empirical studies reviewed earlier provide useful descriptions of skills, traits, and behaviors that lead to impressions of intercultural competence, they do not stress how conceptions of competence may differ in non-Western cultures. In her review, Martin (1993) noted the Eurocentric tradition of interpersonal competence research, a view founded in the observation that most of the research conducted has involved the participation of the European American speech community (comprising mostly college-educated, middle-class individuals). She argued (pp. 18–19), for example, that the "centrality of goal attainment and individual control" in the Western perspective may not be generalizable to cultures that define communication competence more in terms of the achievement of relational harmony, rather than the achievement of individual communicative goals (see also Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Future research in intercultural communication competence might address the lack of non-Western perspectives (as well as differences in perspectives among Western cultures) and take into consideration the challenge that Western researchers may face as they attempt to interpret non-Western conceptions of competence into terms they can understand.

Additionally, although the skills-related literature reviewed here identifies correlates of competence, there are few suggestions concerning concrete behaviors or cognitive states that can be used to activate skillful behaviors. That is, few scholars address the processes that bring individuals from relative incompetence to competence over the course of a sojourn. Kim (1995) included "openness" in her adaptation theory only as a personality trait that individuals may or may not possess. Additionally (in their book chapter on intercultural communication skills), Gallois and Callan (1997) discussed concrete behaviors in which an individual can engage to minimize miscommunication, including the act of treating the other person as an individual, rather than as a group representative; listening and observing carefully; and using other sources of information to test assumptions, such as books or mass media. (The latter of these behaviors may also provide access to important historical information.) As they stand, the behaviors noted here are variable-analytic, examining seemingly isolated concepts, and are not theory driven. As an exception to this limitation, included in Gudykunst's (1995) AUM theory, is the moderating role of "mindfulness," a conscious activity in which one can engage to become more competent. Included also is the importance of the skill of "perception checking," or verifying information, as well as effective listening (Gudykunst, 1993, p. 129).

Given these concerns, future research needs to extend beyond the trend of labeling components of competence in different cultures and to attempt to explain—in theoretical terms—what occurs and what can be done communicatively to enhance competence when contact occurs between people from different cultural groups. The following section offers a theoretical alternative that addresses some of the concerns raised here.

## A THEORETICAL ALTERNATIVE

Consonant with our opening statements, we argue that new theoretical models for traditional intercultural communication can emerge from applying theories from communication contexts only recently considered to be “intercultural,” such as intergenerational communication (Giles, Coupland, Coupland, Williams, & Nussbaum, 1991–1992). The model to be proposed here integrates two models from the intergenerational communication literature, as well as concepts from the recently developed interactive acculturation model (Bourhis, Moise, Perrault, & Senecal, 1997) and other frameworks. The presentation of the new model follows descriptions of the key theoretical concepts borrowed from other models and communication contexts.

### **Intergenerational Communication: The Communication Enhancement of Aging and Predicament of Aging Models**

The communication predicament of aging model (CPA) was originally developed in an attempt to explain situations in which “undesirable discrepancies occur between the actual communicative competence of an elderly person and the negative perception of his/her *competence*” (our emphasis; Ryan et al., 1986, p. 6). The framework draws on communication accommodation theory (e.g., Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) in that it describes the predicament that arises as people make (sometimes) well-intentioned changes to their communication to meet the needs of older people. The predicament occurs when younger individuals converge to the older person in terms of stereotyped expectations of interaction with older people and the older person, in turn, responds by accommodating to the communication partner’s group-based expectation. The younger person’s modification of communication style may reflect stereotypes more than sensitivity to the older person’s actual individual characteristics. According to Edwards and Giles (1998), the risk for miscommunication between age groups is higher when the gap between an elderly person’s abilities and an interlocutor’s stereotyped expectations are greatest. Thus, there follows the need to narrow this gap and reduce the risk for miscommunication.

The communication enhancement of aging model (CEA) was developed by Ryan and colleagues (1995) and provides insight into how to address the aforementioned need for the reduction of miscommunication because it focuses on personalized intergenerational relations as opposed to the stereotyped expectations described in the CPA model. According to the theory, those who communicate competently with older people begin with a better understanding of the normal aging process and are therefore prepared to communicate on a more participatory and consultative basis. This increased understanding, in conjunction with educational programs about the aging process, develops more positive expectations and stereotypes of the elderly, and interlocutors are therefore better prepared to recognize the elderly person’s individual characteristics that may influence communication processes. Attention to

individual characteristics of the elderly communication partner will foster appropriate communication strategies, and increased communication competence may result.

Although the CPA and CEA models were originally published years apart, the communication predicaments and enhancements they describe may be considered to reside at opposite ends of one dimension. In other words, these two models describe different driving mechanisms behind communication behaviors at either end of a continuum, anchored at one end by more generalized, automatic, and unconscious attention to others (the CPA model) and at the other end by more individualized, thoughtful, and conscious attention to others (the CEA model).

## **Skill Concepts With Features Similar to the Communication Enhancement Model: Applications to Intercultural Communication**

Research in communication and social psychology has revealed cognitive skills and states of consciousness that are arguably useful in intercultural communication settings. The skills and states of consciousness reviewed here share similarities with the CEA model insofar as they all prescribe or promote the importance of individualized, thoughtful, and conscious attention in intercultural encounters.

**Mindfulness.** Langer (1989) defined mindfulness as a “state of being” that is characterized by (a) an openness to new information, (b) an awareness of more than one perspective, and (c) the creation of new categories that aid in one’s perception of the world. According to Langer, one experiences the world by creating categories and by making distinctions among them. Categorization refers to the cognitive process of labeling phenomena, and using these labels to make sense of the world. “When we make new categories in a mindful way, we pay attention to the situation and the context” (p. 65). Langer suggested that while experiencing a novel situation, one tends to make use of previously established categories from past experiences to make sense of it. This can include the conscious, or even automatic, activation of stereotypes (e.g., Devine, 1989). The automatic activation of stereotypes may cause the outcomes of an intercultural communication episode to fall in line with the CPA model because reliance on stereotypes may prevent an individual from seeking new ways to perceive surroundings that are likely to be quite novel indeed. In fact, Langer’s belief that an individual should create new categories rather than rely on old ones, for different and changing situations, may be considered a skill that would closely resemble activity proposed by the CEA model. This may be due to the potentially positive relationship between the mindful act of creating new cognitive categories (mindfulness) and the mindful act of paying close attention to the individual characteristics of an individual in an intercultural encounter (as in the CEA model). These ideas are also similar to the approaches suggested by Kim’s (1988, 1995) cross-cultural adaptation theory and Gudykunst’s (1993) AUM theory. In particular, Kim argued for the importance of “openness to new information” to the adaptation process, and like Langer, Gudykunst promoted the importance of mindfulness in intercultural interactions.

**A Sense of Presence.** Somewhat related to mindfulness is a state of consciousness referred to as a “sense of presence” (Fontaine, 1993), distinguished by a quality of realness, vividness, immediacy, and feelings of total participation and involvement in one’s environment. It is a state of being in which a person is psychologically present in the immediate task situation and is aware of a broad range of contextual

characteristics, as opposed to focusing narrowly on a few contextual cues or to events occurring in other times or places. Fontaine noted that in intracultural situations, one is not required to be completely present; however, the novelty of intercultural settings requires attention to a broad range of ecological characteristics. Fontaine referred to the use of a sense of presence as an intercultural skill, and it is suggested here that the skill of approaching intercultural communication encounters with a sense of presence is similar to the skill of communicating according to the recommendations of the CEA model described above. The use of a sense of presence in an intercultural encounter may allow communicators to select features of the communication context that are key to accomplishing communicative goals in novel settings.

**Situational Awareness.** The final construct described here derives from cognitive psychology and has implications for effective intercultural communication. Van Patten (1992) described a phenomenon called “situational awareness” as it relates to experiences common to pilots of military jet aircraft. Van Patten regarded the pilot’s experience of an aircraft’s flight as a situation in which the pilot must be aware of the various motions of the plane, the weather, gravity, and the plane’s controls. The lack of situational awareness results from the channelization of conscious attention and has been shown to contribute to spatial disorientation in pilots, which is a common cause of aircraft accidents. Regarding spatial disorientation, Van Patten (1992) stated the following:

The pilot’s subconscious is flying the aircraft while his conscious attention is elsewhere. In one such case, bombing demonstrations were being performed for a military audience. The first aircraft into the target missed it. The pilot of the second aircraft in the strike became so fixated on the target and so determined to outdo his predecessor that he flew his aircraft straight into the ground. . . . He died because his conscious mind was not thinking about flying. (p. 82)

Whereas maintaining situational awareness is essential to successful flying, mindfulness, or conscious presence in the immediate intercultural communication context, can help to avoid “accidents” or miscommunications that may occur in novel situations when one relies on stereotyped expectations, as discussed in the description of the CPA model.

The example of pilot error is not included to suggest that typical intercultural encounters carry life and death consequences (although some do), but rather, it can be regarded as a metaphor to alert the reader to potential predicaments that may arise when narrowly focused attention, or habitual behavioral patterns, are applied to situations as novel as those in many intercultural communication contexts. Through the adoption of communicative behaviors prescribed in the CEA approach (i.e., being aware of communicators’ unique characteristics), individuals may prevent some difficulties that may arise from reliance on habitual ways of thinking. Fontaine has noted similarities between his sense of presence concept and both situational awareness and mindfulness, and it is suggested here that when applied to communicative encounters, all three states of consciousness, or types of experiences, involve heightened attention to individual interlocutor characteristics in novel intercultural encounters. Such heightened attention to features of communication is imperative in intercultural settings because one must attempt to be prepared for unpredictable behaviors on the part of the self and others, as well as adapt to new ways of completing work-related or everyday tasks.

## Cultural Ideologies and Orientations That Predict Intercultural Communication: The Interactive Acculturation Model

The interactive acculturation model (Bourhis et al., 1997) predicts the success of acculturative attempts by immigrant ethnic communities into a host community through the analysis of macrolevel variables such as public policy changes, community ideologies, and acculturation orientations. Regarding state policy, the theory distinguishes between immigration (i.e., how many immigrants are allowed into a certain community) and integration (i.e., programs designed to assist immigrants in their immigration) and suggests that these policies affect immigrant acculturation. The theory also includes four community ideologies that impact the implementation of the policies. The four ideologies—pluralism, civic, assimilation, and ethnist—all include the notion that immigrants will adopt public values of the host culture, but they each differ in the treatment of private values. For example, pluralist communities support (both financially and socially) the private values of minority groups and avoid the regulation of these values. Communities employing a civic ideology are non interventionist regarding private values but funnel their financial resources into programs that encourage the integration of minority immigrants into the host community and institute antidiscrimination laws to discourage segregation. Communities that possess an assimilation ideology encourage immigrants to abandon their private values in favor of the host community's values. And finally, ethnist communities either expect immigrants to reject their actual ethnocultural identities and self-categorizations (much as in the assimilation ideology), or they reject immigrants regardless of their efforts to integrate into the host community.

The theory also discusses acculturation orientations on the part of both the host community and the immigrant community. From an immigrant perspective, there may exist concerns surrounding the adoption of host values or maintenance of one's own values. Responses to these issues lead to immigrants' feelings of integration, assimilation, separation, anomie, and individualism. Host community members have similar concerns. For example, they must negotiate the acceptability of immigrants maintaining their culture and the acceptability of immigrants adopting their values. Acculturation orientations are brought about by these issues and suggest the following series of strategies: integration (adopt some host values and maintain key features of immigrant identity), assimilation (abandonment of immigrant identity), segregation (host culture–immigrant separation, but immigrants are allowed to maintain identity), exclusion (immigrants are neither allowed to adopt host identity nor to maintain their own), and individualism (hosts define themselves and immigrants as individuals, not group members).

The interactive acculturation model is relevant to this analysis of intercultural communication competence because of the probable effect of these larger, macrolevel, sociological variables on individual communicative orientations and behaviors (in the realm of communicating with persons with disabilities, see also Fox, Giles, Orbe, & Bourhis, 2000). In other words, these larger sociological variables "frame" individuals' intercultural interactions and can influence their perception of history, laws, and customs, for instance. We argue, for example, that the macrolevel variable "state policy" (e.g., how many immigrants are allowed into a certain community, or what programs are designed to assist immigrants in their immigration) colors, or frames, individual citizens' way of perceiving individual immigrants. In particular, the existence of these social policies may influence several individual-based communicative orientations and behaviors, such as knowledge of the history, politics, and legal system of an immigrant's native culture or an understanding of an individual's motivation for

immigration. Similarly, cultural orientations (such as state policy, community ideology, and acculturation orientation) may influence one's understanding of his or her own motivations and attitudes that become salient during an intercultural encounter. The nature of these perceptions may either limit or enhance one's ability to communicate effectively in some intercultural contexts.

## The Process Model of Intercultural Communication Competence

The preceding descriptions of theoretical concepts and models leads to a new model of intercultural communication competence that represents, in part, an amalgamation of many of the aforementioned concepts. This process model of intercultural communication competence is applicable across a wide range of communication contexts. Several of the states of consciousness and theoretical mechanisms described in this chapter function well in conjunction with one another and may benefit from the elaboration that an amalgamation can provide. The process model of communication competence is discussed here and presented schematically in Fig. 24.1.

The types of interactants, cognitive preparedness, and cultural orientations constitute the basis for subsequent facets of the model and are described here. First, the *types of interactants* may be short-term or long-term sojourners, long-term immigrants, or individuals native to a region (involved in interethnic relations with others). These distinctions are drawn because temporary sojourners and permanent immigrants usually possess very different inclinations regarding the adoption of a host culture's values. Also, these interactants are varied by nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, or a combination of these factors. Second, *cultural orientation* comprises community ideology and acculturation orientation as well as Hofstede's (1980, 1983) cultural dimensions of individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. According to the process model proposed here, individual group members' ideologies and orientations may differ depending on the intergroup context salient at any given time and the degree to which these variables influence intercultural communication processes varies. It is also suggested that although an individual's values in terms of Hofstede's dimensions may not vary by context as readily as the orientations proposed by Bourhis and his colleagues, they nonetheless influence the subsequent stages of the model. Third, *cognitive preparedness* influences one's ability or inclination to attune to outgroup characteristics and involves self-monitoring in terms of openness to change, as well as the aforementioned cognitive states of a sense of presence, mindfulness, and situational awareness.

Following the model (see Fig. 24.1) from left to right, the types of interactants, cultural orientations, and cognitive preparedness function to influence individuals' conscious and unconscious *learning and development*. The latter involves an increased awareness of cultural history and associated political issues, laws, and customs, as well as an understanding of one's own motivation for communication and attitudes toward outgroup member(s). Learning and development are also manifested in the potential acquisition of a new language (e.g., Gardner & Clement, 1990; Noels, Pon, & Clement, 1996). In other words, the model predicts that a person entering an intercultural encounter with an openness to change, a sense of presence, or enhanced mindfulness will be better prepared to learn, comprehend, or understand the influence of ingroup and outgroup history, politics, laws, customs, and language because these influence subsequent communicative processes and outcomes. Similarly, individuals will be better prepared to tolerate and appreciate characteristics of the outgroup (see Hecht & Baldwin, 1998).

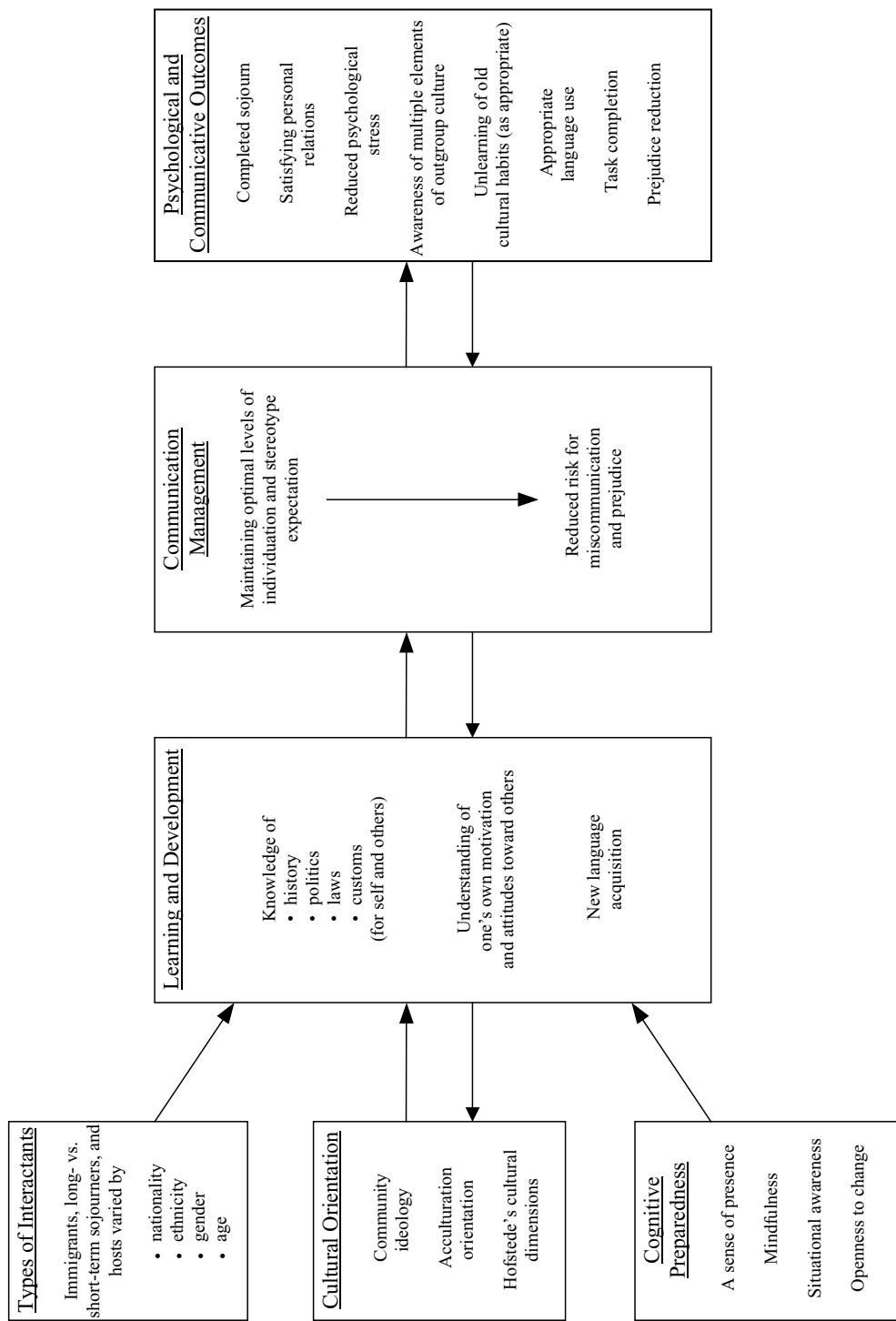
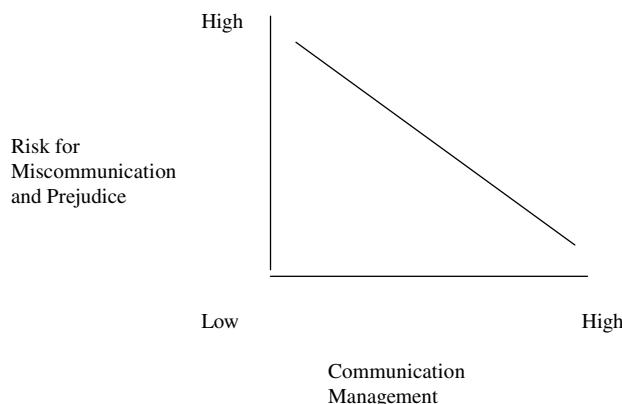


FIG. 24.1. The process model of intercultural communication competence.

Next, the model suggests that the previously discussed variables combine to influence *communication management*. Specifically, the schematic representation of the model contains an arrow to indicate the proposed link between learning and development and communication management (see Fig. 24.1). This link can be stated such that one's knowledge of ingroup and outgroup history, politics, laws, and customs and the understanding of one's own motivation and attitudes facilitates communication management.

Communication management, according to the model, is defined as the maintenance of optimal levels of individuation versus stereotypic expectations in one's perceptions of particular outgroup members, and maintaining this balance may regulate the relative risk for miscommunication and intergroup prejudice. The driving mechanism behind the model's communication management component is illustrated in Fig. 24.2. The combined features of the CPA and CEA models are presented in the form of an "individuation"—"stereotype expectation" continuum. The two dimensions illustrated were suggested by Edwards and Giles (1998) and include "the relative risk for miscommunication within a given situation, ranging from low to high risk" and "the degree of communication management required or used" (p. 4). A diagonal line crossing the chart indicates that as communication management increases, risk for miscommunication and intergroup prejudice decreases. Optimal communication management, in light of the CEA model, would involve high levels of individuation between or among interlocutors. Integrating once again the concepts of a sense of presence, mindfulness, and situational awareness, the more an individual exercises these states of consciousness, the less risk exists for miscommunication and intergroup prejudice. These cognitive states are especially important to our model because, as previously discussed, they can aid the sojourner in the development of knowledge and promote greater finesse in dealing with important sociohistorical and sociopolitical variables of the host culture that affect communication management and subsequent communicative outcomes.

According to the model, the preceding variables function cumulatively to enhance individuals' *psychological and communicative outcomes*. Competence may be evident in the psychological and communicative behaviors discussed in the review of the literature, such as completing the full course of one's sojourn, dealing



**FIG. 24.2. Communication management and risk for miscommunication as a function of high or low levels of attention to individual interlocutor characteristics, as opposed to reliance on stereotype expectations.**

effectively with psychological stress, establishing personal relations, learning elements of the host culture, and unlearning old cultural habits. Other examples of competent behaviors that may be predicted by the model include the use of appropriate language (e.g., Gardner & Clement, 1990), appropriate use of nonverbal cues, increased empathy for others, and flexibility.

In light of our model, intercultural communication competence may be defined as the process of obtaining desirable communicative outcomes through the appropriate management of levels of individuation/stereotype expectation in communication, given a cognitive awareness of all participants' cultural orientations, cultural history, and motivations. This process involves the bidirectional, cumulative interactions of all of the variables discussed in this chapter, as opposed to an isolated criterion to be predicted by any one or more of the model's variables. In other words, the model makes primary causal predictions, as indicated by the right-facing arrows, but the process continues beyond the psychological and communicative outcomes in that these latter outcomes, in turn, contribute to further enhanced communication management, to further learning and development, and to potential shifts in cultural orientation over time, as indicated by the left-facing arrows. For example, the outcomes of appropriate language use and reduced psychological stress may in turn assist in optimal communication management, which may further contribute to one's knowledge of history, politics, and motivations, that may eventually affect macro-sociological variables such as community ideologies and acculturation orientations.

Regarding the location of the variables in the schematic representation of the model, the "types of interactants" and "cognitive preparedness" variables occur at the left side of Fig. 24.1 because they may be considered antecedent variables; the cultural orientation variable is placed along with the antecedent variables as well because individuals' cultural orientations are likely to be more static than the variables that follow to the right. Similarly, the learning and development variable is proposed primarily as an antecedent variable to communication management, because knowledge of history, politics, and laws may be considered to be more predictive of communication management than communication management is to one's learning and development. Generally, with the exception of cognitive preparedness, the model reads from left to right with the more macrolevel, static variables on the left and the more microlevel, dynamic (or communicative-context-specific) variables on the right.

The implications of such a model for intercultural communication skills rest in its applicability to the concrete, behavioral, intercultural skill recommendations proposed by Gallois and Callan (1997), such as the act of treating the other person as an individual rather than as a group representative; listening and observing carefully; and using other sources of information to test assumptions, such as books or mass media. An increase in communication management in terms of Gallois and Callan's suggestions, although begging for empirical verification, may lead to improved detection and repair of communication difficulties as they occur—and therefore to reduced risk for miscommunication. The improved intercultural communication and intergroup respect resulting from the prescriptive function of this model may also enable interlocutors from all cultures involved to achieve a greater sense of cultural vitality.

Our process model is a departure from previous work in the area of intercultural communication skills because of its predictive as well as prescriptive nature: It predicts the conditions under which improved intercultural communication may occur, and, if used in conjunction with Gallois and Callan's (1997) suggestions for improved intercultural communication, it prescribes concrete behaviors in which individuals may engage for more skilled communication. It is also a departure from previous

work in its application of the individuation-stereotype expectation dialectic to the intercultural communication context, as well as a step in the direction of answering the call for culture-general theoretical models and the call for models that integrate previous theoretical work (e.g., Giles, 2000; Martin, 1993).

Our model may also meet some of the Gallois et al. (1995) criteria for determining the overall value of intercultural communication theories. For example, it incorporates features of cultural variability, given that communication management behaviors can be engaged in within any intercultural context, regardless of one's definition of culture. In other words, unlike other conceptions in the literature, this model does not limit notions of "culture" to the nation-state. Additionally, as stated earlier, it suggests specific behaviors that communicators can exercise that may improve competence in both the "sociostructural context," that is, the political, historical, religious, and economic features of the culture, as well as the "immediate social context" (cf. Gallois et al., 1995, p. 126). Given the inclusion of these macrolevel sociological variables, our model suggests, in effect, a new definition of intercultural communication competence.

Finally, as with any suggested approach, however theoretically and pragmatically appealing it may seem, there are possible by-product limitations. In the case of increased perceptions of individuation of others, there are limitations that such processing might impose on social performance for some individuals in some contexts. For example, efforts to individuate one's conversational partner may disturb conversational flow because of overattentiveness, thereby causing an interlocutor to appear unnecessarily anxious or unnatural. The act of mindful individuation may also cause individuals to misattribute traits and behaviors to personal idiosyncrasies that are actually group based. Such processing may also cause one to downplay or ignore group-based features of which the other person is proud and that he or she may wish to have acknowledged. Alternatively, some individuals (e.g., from collectivist cultures) may not wish to be perceived in terms of their individual characteristics in certain social situations.

Given that intercultural communication competence and skills researchers have not, as yet, incorporated the constructs and processes highlighted by our model, we clearly cannot provide an assessment of its validity on the basis of existing research. That is an exciting prospect for the future, however, and we believe the utility of the model will be all the more apparent in light of this future empirical research.

## CONCLUSION

Future research may examine and evaluate the impact of the process model on intercultural communication satisfaction in a variety of contexts. Additionally, research may test the assumption regarding the culture-general applicability of this model, through culture-specific research that examines the effects of increased perceptions of individuation of outgroup members on communicative outcomes. Comparative analyses may also be conducted, testing its effectiveness in various intercultural contexts against its effectiveness in the arena of elderly health care, for which CEA was originally developed. Finally, evaluative research may extend to intercultural training programs, given the implications of the model for intercultural communication skill and competence. Just as Van Patten (1992) discussed the need for training in situational awareness, or "air sense," on the part of Air Force pilots (p. 83), intercultural communication training programs can prescribe the new model to alert trainees' senses to a host of features of the intercultural communication environment. An

enhanced sense of the communication context may empower some individuals to avoid certain forms of miscommunication, and similar “accidents,” in novel settings.

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