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COMM 11 Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication textbook

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COMM 11

Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication

(Dr. Teresa A. Fisher)

This open education resource (OER) textbook has been revised and adapted from four OER textbooks as well as from/by Dr. Fisher herself. Information on each of the four sources is found on the next two pages. This textbook is provided to students for use in Dr. Fisher's COMM 11 classes at no cost to the students.

Information on source textbooks:

Interpersonal Communication: A MindfulApproach to Relationships

Jason S. Wrench

Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter

Katherine S. Thweatt

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Chapter 10 was derived primarily from this textbook:
A Primer on Communication Studies
This is the book A Primer on Communication Studies (v. 1.0).

Table of Contents

Preface: An introduction to this textbook

Hello and welcome to COMM 11 Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication at Bronx Community College (CUNY). This textbook was specifically designed to meet the student learning outcomes (SLOs) assigned to this course while providing students with a quality no-cost textbook option. It was created for use in sections taught by Dr. Teresa Fisher although other instructors may choose to use it, as well. To create it, I have adapted four OER (open education resource) textbooks as well as added my own observations and outside research, but the bulk of the information comes from the 2020 textbook *Interpersonal Communication: A Mindful Approach to Relationships* by Jason S. Wrench, Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, and Katherine S. Thweatt.

In addition to this textbook, I have created video lectures for you to watch that will, along with our time together in class, expand upon the reading with real world examples and by applying the concepts to practical everyday experiences. The video lectures are found on our Blackboard site (and embedded in the course outline of the syllabus).

I should probably warn you that I love teaching COMM 11. :-) I believe it to be one of the most important classes you will take during you time in college. If you take this class seriously, I sincerely believe you will leave the class not only a more skilled and confident communicator, but also a stronger critical thinker.

Several years ago, at the end of the last class of the semester, a student said to me, "When we first started the class, I thought there wasn't much to talk about with communication." He paused and then added, "I had no idea there was so much to learn." Indeed, there is a lot to learn when it comes to interpersonal communication, but the reality is that you know a lot of it just by the fact you've been communicating for dozens of years already. What we'll do in class is break down communication, take it apart, if you will, specifically focusing on interpersonal communication, so we can figure out how it works. And then learn how to understand and do it better, building up a more solid foundation of your interpersonal communication skills.

Each chapter covers a different facet of interpersonal communication starting with some basics. Then we move into culture, the self, perception, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and listening. Finally, we also look at interpersonal communication and relationships as well as interpersonal communication and conflict. There's even a section on oral presentations (speeches) to help build your confidence in that area (and help you prepare a final assignment).

So let's begin!

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Foundation and Basic Principles

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

Number of Communicators Involved

As the definition from Bochner in the previous paragraph noted, most scholars agree that interpersonal communication involves "at least two communicators." Although a helpful tool to separate interpersonal communication from small group or organizational communication, some scholars argue that looking specifically at one dyad is an accurate representation of interpersonal. For example, if you and your dating partner are talking about what a future together might look like, you cannot exclude all relational baggage that comes into that discussion. You might be influenced by your own family, friends, coworkers, and other associates. So although there may be only two people interacting at one point, there are strong influences that are happening in the background.

Physical Proximity of the Communicators

In a lot of early writing about interpersonal communication, the discussion of the importance of physical proximity was a common one. Researchers argued that interpersonal communication is a face-to-face endeavor. However, with the range of mediated technologies we have in the 21st Century, we often communicate interpersonally with people through social networking sites, text messaging, email, the phone, and a range of other technologies. Is the interaction between two lovers as they break up via text messages any less "interpersonal" than when the breakup happens face-to-face? The issue of proximity is an interesting one but given that today so much of our interpersonal interactions use technology, our understanding of proximity is changing.

Nature of the Interaction Units

One of our primary reasons for communicating with other people is trying to understand them and how and why they communicate. As such, some messages may help us understand and predict how people will behave and communicate, so do those interactions have a higher degree of "interpersonalness?"

Imagine you and your partner just fought. You are not sure what caused the fight in the first place. During the ensuing conversation (once things have settled down), you realize that your partner feels that when you flirt with others in public, it diminishes your relationship.

Through this conversation, you learn how your behavior causes your partner to get upset and react angrily. You now have more information about how your partner communicates and what your behavior does to cause these types of interactions. Some would argue this type of conversation has a high degree of "interpersonalness." On the other hand, if you "like" a stranger's post on Facebook, have you engaged in interpersonal communication? Is this minimal form of interaction even worth calling interpersonal communication?

Degree of Formality and Structure

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

Why Study Communication?

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

Reasons to Study Communication

We need to study communication for a variety of reasons. First, it gives us a new perspective on something we take for granted every day. As stated earlier, most people think they are excellent communicators. However, most people never ask another person if they are great communicators. Besides being in a public speaking class or listening to your friends' opinions, you probably do not get a lot of feedback on the quality of your communication. In this book, we will learn all about communication from different perspectives. You won't be able to see the impact of your communication behaviors, if you don't focus on certain communication aspects.

The second reason we study communication is based on the quantity of our time that is devoted to that activity. Think about your daily routine; I am sure that it involves communicating with others (via face-to-face, texting, electronic media, etc.). Because we spend so much of our time communicating with others, we should make that time worthwhile. We need to learn how to communicate and communicate better because a large amount of our time is allotted to communicating with others.

The last reason why we study communication is to increase our effectiveness. Marriages and relationships often fail for several reasons. The most popular reason is that people don't know how to communicate with each other, which leads to irreconcilable differences. People often do not know how to work through problems, and it creates anger, hostility, and possibly violence. In these cases,

communication needs to be effective for the relationship to work and be satisfying. Think about all the relationships that you have with friends, family, coworkers, and significant others. This course could possibly make you more successful in those relationships.

Communication Needs

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

Physical

Studies show that there is a link between mental health and physical health. In other words, people who encounter negative experiences, but are also willing to communicate those experiences are more likely to have better mental and physical health.[iii] Ronald Adler, Lawrence Rosenfeld, and Russell Proctor found that communication has been beneficial to avoiding or decreasing:[iv]

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

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

Identity

Communication is not only essential for us to thrive and live. It is also important to discover who we are. From a very young age, you were probably told a variety of characteristics about your physical appearance and your personality. You might have been told that you are funny, smart, pretty, friendly, talented, or insightful. All of these comments probably came from someone else. For instance, Sally went to a store without any makeup and saw one of her close friends. Sally's friend to her that she looked horrible without any makeup. So, from that day forward, she never walked out of the house without her cosmetics. You can see that this one comment affected Sally's behavior but also her perceptions about herself. Just one comment can influence how you think, act, and feel. Think about all the comments that you have been told in your life. Were they hurtful comments or helpful comments? Did they make you stronger or weaker? You are who you are based on what others have told you about yourself and how you responded to these comments. In another opposite example, Mark's parents told him that he wasn't very smart and that he would probably amount to nothing. Mark used these comments to make himself better. He studied harder and worked harder because he believed that he was more than his parents' comments. In this situation, you can see that the comments helped shaped his identity differently in a positive manner.

Social

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

Practical

Communication is a key ingredient in our life. We need it to operate and do our daily tasks. Communication is the means to tell the barista what coffee you prefer, inform your physician about what hurts, and advise others that you might need help.

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

Moreover, we know that communication is not only crucial in professional settings but in personal settings. Daniel Canary, Laura Stafford, and Beth Semic found that communication behaviors are essential in marriages because communication is essential for marriage longevity and success.[vii] In another study, Laura Stafford and Daniel Canary illustrated the importance of communication in dating relationships.[viii] All in all, communication is needed for people to relate to others, build connections, and help our relationships exist.

Basic Principles of Human Communication

The origin of the word communication can be traced back to the Latin word communico, which is translated to mean "to join or unite," "to connect," "to participate in" or "to share with all." This root word is the same one from which we get not only the word communicate, but also common, commune, communion, and community. Thus, we can define communication as a process by which we share ideas or information with other people. We commonly think of communication as talking, but it is much broader than just speech.

Other characteristics of voice communicate messages, and we communicate, as well, with eyes, facial expressions, hand gestures, body position, and movement. Let us examine some basic principles about how we communicate with one another.

Communication Is Symbolic

Have you ever noticed that we can hear or look at something like the word "cat" and immediately know what those three letters mean? From the moment you enter grade school, you are taught how to recognize sequences of letters that form words that help us understand the world. With these words, we

can create sentences, paragraphs, and books like this one. The letters used to create the word "cat" and then the word itself is what communication scholars call symbols. A symbol is a mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.

Let's think about one of the most important words commonly tossed around, love. The four letters that make of the word "l," "o," "v," and "e," are visual symbols that, when combined, form the word "love," which is a symbol associated with intense regard or liking. For example, I can "love" chocolate. However, the same four-letter word has other meanings attached to it as well. For example, "love" can represent a deeply intimate relationship or a romantic/sexual attachment. In the first case, we could love our parents/guardians and friends, but in the second case, we experience love as a factor of a deep romantic/sexual relationship. So these are just three associations we have with the same symbol, love. In Figure 1.1, we see American Sign Language (ASL) letters for the word "love." In this case, the hands themselves represent symbols for English letters, which is an agreed upon convention of users of ASL to represent "love."
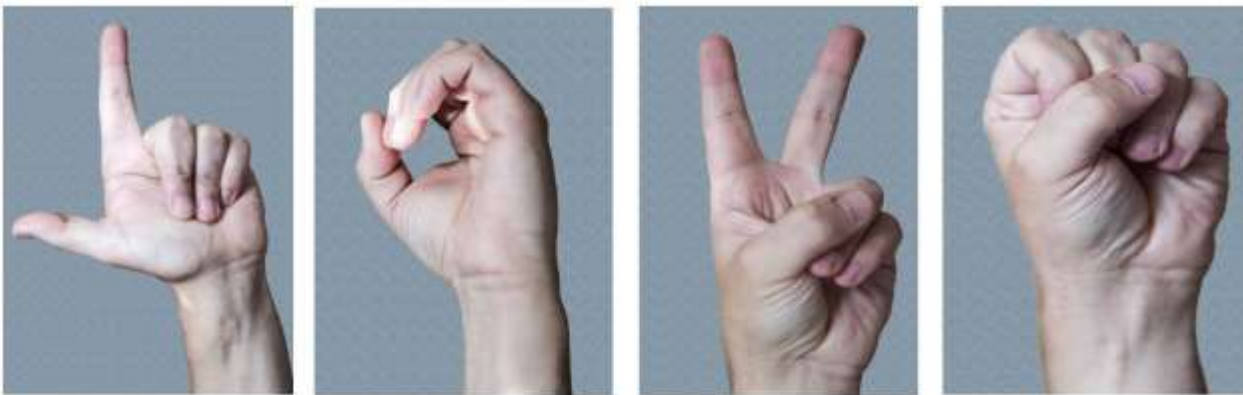
Figure 1.1 Child Using ASL to Sign Love
"love." By David Pacey. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license.

Symbols can also be visual representations of ideas and concepts. For example, look at the symbols in Figure 1.2 of various social media icons. In this image, you see symbols for a range of different social media sites, including Facebook (lowercase "f"), Twitter (the bird), Snap Chat (the ghost image), and many others. Admittedly, the icon for YouTube uses its name.

Figure 1.2 Social Media Icons
"Social Media Mix 3D Icons - Mix #1'." by Blogtrepreneur.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license.

The Symbol is Not the Thing

Now that we've explained what symbols are, we should probably offer a few very important guides. First, the symbol is not the thing that it is representing. For example, the word "dog" is not a member of the canine family that greets you when you come home every night. If we look back at those symbols listed in Figure 1.1, those symbols are not the organizations themselves. The "p" with a circle around it is not Pinterest. The actual thing that is "Pinterest" is a series of computer code that exists on the World Wide Web that allows us, people, to interact.

Arbitrariness of Symbols

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

Figure 1.3 Dog and Cat
"Dog and cat." by kitty.green66. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license.

Let's look at another symbolic example you are probably familiar with – :). The "smiley" face or the two pieces of punctuation (colon followed by closed parentheses) is probably the most notable symbol used in Internet communication. This symbol may seem like it's everywhere today, but it's only existed since September 1982. In early September 1982, a joke was posted on an electronic bulletin board about a fake chemical spill at Carnegie Mellon University. At the time, there was no easy way to distinguish between serious versus non-serious information. A computer scientist named Scott E. Fahlman entered the debate with the following message (Figure 1.4):

The Original Emoticons

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

:-)

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

:-(

Figure 1.4

Thus the first emoticon, a sequence of keyboard characters used to represent facial expressions or emotions, was born. Even the universal symbol for happiness, the yellow circle with the smiling face, had only existed since 1963 when graphic artist Harvey Ross Ball created it. The happy face was created as a way to raise employee morale at State Mutual Life Assurance Company of Worcester, Massachusetts. Of course, when you merge the happy face with emoticons, we eventually ended up with emojis (Figure 1.5). Of course, many people today just take emojis for granted without ever knowing their origin at all.

Figure 1.5 Emojis

Communication Is Shared Meaning

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

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

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

Here's is how your second friend described the experience:

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

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

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

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

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

Communication Involves Intentionality

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

Others argue that you "cannot, not communicate." This idea notes that we are always communicating with those around us. As we'll talk more about later in this book, communication can be both verbal (the words we speak) and nonverbal (gestures, use of space, facial expressions, how we say words, etc.). From this perspective, our bodies are always in a state of nonverbal communication, whether it's intended or not. Maybe you've walked past someone's office and saw them hunched over at their desk, staring at a computer screen.

Based on the posture of the other person, you decide not to say "hi" because the person looks like they are deep in thought and probably busy. In this case, we interpret the person's nonverbal communication as saying, "I'm busy." In reality, that person could just as easily be looking at Facebook and killing time until someone drops by and says, "hi."

Dimensions of Communication

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

Relational Dimension

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

Content Dimension

In the same fashion, every time we speak, we have a content dimension. The content dimension is the information that is stated explicitly in the message. When people focus on the content of a message, then ignore the relationship dimension. They are focused on the specific words that were used to convey the

message. For instance, if you ran into an ex-lover who said "I'm happy for you" about your new relationship. You might wonder what that phrase means. Did it mean that your ex was truly happy for you, or that they were happy to see you in a new relationship, or that your ex thinks that you are happy? One will ponder many interpretations of the message, especially if a relationship is not truly defined. In this example, you can see the communicator struggling to determine which is more important -- the relational dimension of the message in that an ex, particularly if it was a tough breakup, truly wishing you happiness seems suspicious or unlikely to be sincere or the content dimension -- that the ex is being sincere and thus the message can be interpreted solely by what the words, "I'm happy for you" mean, that the ex is truly happy for you.

Another example might be a new acquaintance who talks about how your appearance looks "interesting." You might be wondering if your new friend is sarcastic, or if they just didn't know a nicer way of expressing their opinion. Because your relationship is so new, you might think about why they decided to pick that term over another term. Hence, the content of a message impacts how it is received. In other words, while the content dimension of the message focuses on the meaning of the words themselves, the relational dimension considers other elements, namely one's relationship with the other person. The tone of one's message can also alter the content dimension and can thus be factored into the relational dimension of the message. If, in the first example above, "I'm happy for you" is said with sarcasm and/or while the ex is rollingn their eyes at you, it's likely you'll rely more on the relational dimension of the message than on the content dimension to determine the ex's true meaning. It goes back to that old saying, "It wasn't what he said, it was how he said it." "What he said" is the content dimension. "How he said it" along with other relationship factors is the relational dimension.

Communication Is a Process

The word "process" refers to the idea that something is ongoing, dynamic, and changing with a purpose or towards some end. A communication scholar named David K. Berlo was the first to discuss human communication as a process back in 1960.[ix] From Berlo's perspective, communication is a series of ongoing interactions that change over time. For example, think about the number of "inside jokes" you may have with your best friend. Sometimes you can get to the point where all you say is one word, and both of you can crack up laughing. This level of familiarity and short-hand communication didn't exist when you first met but has developed over time. Ultimately, the more interaction you have with someone, the more your relationship with that person will evolve. Let's look at some aspects of the communication process: that it can be intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, irreversible, unrepeatable, and it is guided by rules and norms.

<u>Communication is Intentional and Unintentional</u>

Since intrapersonal communication happens in our heads and isn't intended for others to perceive, it wouldn't be considered communication. But imagine the following scenario: You and I are riding on a bus and you are sitting across from me. As I sit thinking about a stressful week ahead, I wrinkle up my forehead, shake my head, and put my head in my hands. Upon seeing this you think, "That guy must be pretty stressed out." In this scenario, did communication take place? If I really didn't intend for anyone to see the nonverbal communication that went along with my intrapersonal communication, then this definition would say no. But even though words weren't exchanged, you still generated meaning from the communication I was unintentionally sending.

Communication is Conscious and Unconscious

Communication messages also vary in terms of the amount of conscious thought that goes into their creation. In general, we can say that intentional communication usually includes more conscious thought and unintentional communication usually includes less. For example, some communication is reactionary and almost completely involuntary. We often scream when we are frightened, say "ouch!" when we stub our toe, and stare blankly when we are bored. This isn't the richest type of communication, but it is communication. Some of our interactions are slightly more substantial and include more conscious thought but are still very routine. For example, we say "excuse me" when we need to get past someone, say "thank you" when someone holds the door for us, or say "what's up?" to our neighbor we pass every day in the hall. The reactionary and routine types of communication just discussed are common, but the messages most studied by communication scholars are considered constructed communication. These messages include more conscious thought and intention than reactionary or routine messages and often go beyond information exchange to also meet relational and identity needs. As we will learn later on, a higher degree of conscious thought and intention doesn't necessarily mean the communication will be effective, understood, or ethical. In addition, ethical communicators cannot avoid responsibility for the effects of what they say by claiming they didn't "intend" for their communication to cause an undesired effect. Communication has short- and long-term effects, which illustrates the next principle we will discuss—communication is irreversible.

Communication is Irreversible

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

Communication is Not Repeatable

If you try to recreate a good job interview experience by asking the same questions and telling the same stories about yourself, you can't expect the same results. Even trying to repeat a communication encounter with the same person won't feel the same or lead to the same results. Even if the words and actions stay the same, the physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts will vary and ultimately change the communication encounter. Have you ever tried to recount a funny or interesting experience to a friend who doesn't really seem that impressed? These "I guess you had to be there" moments illustrate the fact that communication is unrepeatable.

Communication is Guided by Rules and Norms

Whether verbal or nonverbal, mediated or interpersonal, our communication is guided by rules and norms.

Communication Is Culturally Determined

The word culture refers to a "group of people who through a process of learning can share perceptions of

the world that influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior."[x] Let's breakdown this definition. First, it's essential to recognize that culture is something we learn. From the moment we are born, we start to learn about our culture. We learn culture from our families, our schools, our peers, and many other sources as we age. Specifically, we learn perceptions of the world. We learn about morality. We learn about our relationship with our surroundings. We learn about our places in a greater society. These perceptions ultimately influence what we believe, what we value, what we consider "normal," and what rules we live by. For example, many of us have beliefs, values, norms, and rules that are directly related to the religion in which we were raised. As an institution, religion is often one of the dominant factors of culture around the world.

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

Religion can also impact what you value. Cherokee are taught to value the earth and the importance of keep balance with the earth. Judaic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.), on the other hand, teach that humans have been placed on earth to dominate and control the earth. As such, the value is more on what the earth can provide than on ensuring harmony with nature.

Religion can also impact what you view as "normal." Many adherents to Islam stress the importance of female modesty, so it is normal for women to cover their heads when in public or completely cover their entire bodies from head to toe. On the other hand, one branch of Raëlianism promotes a pro-sex feminist stance where nudity and sex work are normal and even celebrated.

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

Finally, these beliefs, values, norms, and rules ultimately impact how all of us interact and behave with others. For example, because of the Islamic rules on and norms about female modesty, in many Islamic countries, women cannot speak with men unless they are directly related to them by birth or marriage.

The critical part to remember about these actual behaviors is that we often have no idea how (and to what degree) our culture influences our communicative behavior until we are interacting with someone from a culture that differs from ours. We'll talk more about issues of intercultural interpersonal interactions in chapter two of this textbook.

Communication Occurs in a Context

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

Imagine you're hanging out at your local restaurant, and you hear someone at the next table say, "I can't believe that guy. He's always out in left field!" As an American idiom, we know that "out in left field" generally refers to something unexpected or unusual. The term stems out of baseball because the player who hangs out in left field has the farthest to throw to get a baseball back to the first baseman in

an attempt to tag out a runner. However, if you were listening to this conversation in farmland, you could be hearing someone describe a specific geographic location (e.g., "He was out in left field chasing after a goat who stumbled that way"). In this case, context does matter.

Communication Is Purposeful

We communicate for different reasons. We communicate in an attempt to persuade people. We communicate to get people to like us. We communicate to express our liking of other people. We could list different reasons why we communicate with other people. Often we may not even be aware of the specific reason or need we have for communicating with others.

Communication Competence

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

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

Understanding Competence

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

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

Also, competence can be taught. The main reason why taking a communication course is so important is to be a better speaker. Hence, this is why many schools make it a requirement for college

students. Think about an invention or idea you might have. If you can't communicate that idea or invention, then it will probably never come to fruition.

Characteristics of Competence

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

Skillful

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

Adaptable

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

Involved

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

Understands Their Audience

Fourth, competent communicators can understand their audience. Keeping with the same example of politicians, many of them will say things like, "I know what it is like not to be able to feed your family, to struggle to make ends meet, or not to have a job. I know what you are going through. I understand where you are coming from." These phrases are ways to create a bond between the speaker and the receiver of the message. Competent communicators can empathize and figure out the best way to

approach the situation. For instance, if someone you know had a miscarriage and truly has wanted to have kids for a long time, then it would probably be very inconsiderate to say, "just try again." This comment would be very rude, especially if this person has already tried for a long time to have a child. A competent communicator would have to think about how this person might feel and what words would genuinely be more appropriate to the situation.

Cognitive Complexity

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

Another way to think about cognitive complexity is as looking at a situation from multiple perspectives. Unlike empathy, where you're putting yourself in the other person's shoes to understand their perspective, with cognitive complexity is about being able to look at things from multiple perspectives. If your friend is late to meet you, for example, it could be because your friend is rude and doesn't value your time. But perhaps your friend got stuck at work and isn't able to access their phone to let you know they are running late. Or something else may have happened such as they fell ill or had an accident and are in an ambulance on the way to the hospital, they stopped to provide assistance to someone in need and couldn't contact you to let you know. There are lots of possibilities. While the simplest explanation may be the most logical, it's not the only one and, as competent communicators, we know that it's best to keep an open mind and consider a variety of possibilities in any scenario. We'll discuss this more in chapter 4 when we explore how perception influences interpersonal communication.

Self-Monitoring

The last characteristic of competent communicators is the ability to monitor yourself. Also known as self- monitoring. This is the ability to focus on your behavior, and, in turn, determine how to behave in the situation. In every speaking situation, most people will have an internal gauge of what they might say next or not say. Some people never give any thought to what they might say to others. These individuals would have low self-monitoring skills, in which what you see is what you get. You could have high self-monitors that pay attention to every little thing, how they stand, where their eyes move, how they gesture, and maybe even how they breathe. They pay attention to these minor details because they are concerned with how the message might come across to others. Competent communicators have a balance of high and low self-monitoring, in which they realize how they might be perceived, but they are not overly focused on all the details of themselves.

Types of Human Communication

While this course focuses on interpersonal communication, there are other important types of communication. Let's briefly discuss four of those types, including interpersonal communication. In a later section as well as throughout the remainder of this textbook, we'll focus specifically on interpersonal communication, but it will be helpful to first differentiate it from the other types.

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication refers to communication phenomena that exist within or occur because of an individual's self or mind. Some forms of intrapersonal communication can resemble a conversation one has with one's self. This "self-talk" often is used as a way to help us make decisions or make sense of the world around us. Maybe you've gone to the grocery store, and you're repeating your grocery list over and over in your head to make sure you don't forget anything. Maybe at the end of the day, you keep a diary or journal where you keep track of everything that has happened that day. Or perhaps you're having a debate inside your head on what major you should pick. You keep weighing the pros and cons of different majors, and you use this internal debate to help you flesh out your thoughts and feelings on the subject. All three of these examples help illustrate some of what is covered by the term "intrapersonal communication."

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

Interpersonal Communication

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

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

responding to emails that come from one person, so the email exchange is a form of interpersonal communication. In the next section of this chapter, we'll dive deeper into interpersonal communication.

Small Group Communication

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

We engage in small groups throughout our lives. Chances are you've engaged in some kind of group project for a grade while you've been in school. This experience may have been a great one or a horrible one, depending on the personalities within the group, the ability of the group to accomplish the goal, the in-fighting of group members, and many other factors. Whether you like group work or not, you will engage in many groups (some effective and some ineffective) over your lifespan. We're all born into a family, which is a specific type of group relationship. When you were younger, you may have been in play-groups. As you grew older, you had groups of friends you did things with. As you enter into the professional world, you will probably be on some kind of work "team," which is just a specialized type of group. In other words, group communication is a part of life.

Public Communication

The next category of communication is called public communication. Public communication occurs when an individual or group of individuals sends a specific message to an audience. This one-to-many way of communicating is often necessary when groups become too large to maintain interactions with all group members. One of the most common forms of public communication is public speaking.

The size of the audience one speaks to will impact how someone delivers a speech. If you're giving a speech to ten people, you'll have the ability to watch all of your audience members and receive real-time feedback as people nod their heads in agreement or disagreement. On the other hand, if you're speaking to 10,000+ people at once, a speaker cannot watch all of their audience members and get feedback. With a smaller audience, a speaker can adapt their message on the fly as they interpret audience feedback.

With a larger audience, a speaker is more likely to deliver a very prepared speech that does not alter based on individual audience members' feedback. Although this book is not a public speaking book, we would recommend that anyone take a public speaking class, because it's such an essential and valuable skill in the 21st Century. As we are bombarded with more and more messages, being an effective speaker is more important today than ever before.

Mediated Communication

The final type of communication is mediated communication, or the use of some form of technology to facilitate information between two or more people. We already mentioned a few forms of mediated communication when we talked about interpersonal communication: phone calls, emails, text messaging, etc. In each of these cases, mediated technology is utilized to facilitate the share of information between two people.

Most mediated communication occurs because technology functions as the link between someone sending information and someone receiving information. For example, you go online and look

up the statistics from last night's baseball game. The website you choose is the link between you and the reporter who authored the information. In the same way, if you looked up these same results in a newspaper, the newspaper would be the link between you and the reporter who wrote the article. The technology may have changed from print to electronic journalism, but the basic concept is still very much alive.

Today we are surrounded by a ton of different media options. Some common examples include cable, satellite television, the World Wide Web, content streaming services (i.e., Netflix, Hulu, etc.), social media, magazines, voice over internet protocol (VoIP – Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, etc.), and many others. Television, radio, newspapers, and magazines fall into the category of **mass** communication, as they are a way to communicate with a large group of people all at once, but the listeners cannot communicate back. In other words, you can yell at the quarterback all you want while watching the Chicago Bears play a game on television, but he's not going to hear you. That's mass communication. Of course, you can tweet your displeasure and tag his Twitter account and maybe he'll respond after the game, that's mediated communication. We have more forms of mediated communication today than we have ever had before in history. Most of us will only experience and use a fraction of the mediated communication technologies that are available for us today. In a later section of this chapter, we'll explore the impact of mediated communication a bit more in-depth.

Interpersonal Communication: A Closer Look

Interpersonal Communication can be informal (the checkout line) or formal (lecture classroom). Often, interpersonal communication occurs in face-to-face contexts. It is usually unplanned, spontaneous, and ungrammatical. Think about the conversations that you have with your friends and family. These are mainly interpersonal in nature. It is essential to learn about interpersonal communication because this is the type of communication that you will be doing for most of your life. At many colleges, public speaking is a required course. Yet, most people will not engage in making a public speech for the majority of their life, but they will communicate with one other person daily, which is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication can help us achieve our personal and professional goals. In this section, you will learn the concepts associated with interpersonal communication and how certain variables can help you achieve your goals.

Meeting Personal Needs

Communication fulfills our physical, personal, and social needs. Research has shown a powerful link between happiness and communication.[xiii] In this particular study that included over 200 college students, they found that the ones who reported the highest levels of happiness also had a very active social life. They noted there were no differences between the happiest people and other similar peers in terms of how much they exercised, participated in religion, or engaged in other activities. The results from the study noted that having a social life can help people connect with others. We can connect with others through effective communication. Overall, communication is essential to our emotional wellbeing and perceptions about life.

Everyone has dreams that they want to achieve. What would happen if you never told anyone about your dreams? Would it really be possible to achieve your dreams without communication? To make your dreams a reality, you will have to interact with several people along the way who can help you fulfill your dreams and personal needs. The most famous people in history, who were actors, musicians, politicians, and business leaders, all started with a vision and were able to articulate those ideas to someone else who could help them launch their careers.

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

Research has shown that couples who engage in effective communication report more happiness than couples who do not.[xiv] Communication is not an easy skill for everyone. As you read further, you will see that there are a lot of considerations and variables that can affect how a message is relayed and received. As the arrow in Figure 2.1 indicates, Maslow believed that human needs emerge in order starting from the bottom of the pyramid. At the basic level, humans must have physiological needs met, such as breathing, food, water, sex, homeostasis, sleep, and excretion. Once the physiological needs have been met, humans can attempt to meet safety needs, which include the safety of the body, family, resources, morality, health, and employment. A higher-order need that must be met is love and belonging, which encompasses friendship, sexual intimacy, and family. Another higher-order need that must be met before self-actualization is esteem, which includes self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, and respect by others. Maslow argued that all of the lower needs were necessary to help us achieve psychological health and eventually self-actualization.[xv] Self-actualization leads to creativity, morality, spontaneity, problem-solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts.

Figure 1.6 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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<u>Communicating and Meeting Personal Needs</u>

It is important to understand people and know that people often communicate to satisfy their needs, but each person's need level is different. To survive, physiological and safety needs must be met. Through communication, humans can work together to grow food, produce food, build shelter, create safe environments, and engage in protective behaviors. Once physiological and safety needs have been met, communication can then shift to love and belonging.

Instead of focusing on living to see the next day, humans can focus on building relationships by

discussing perhaps the value of a friendship or the desire for sexual intimacy. After creating a sense of love and belonging, humans can move forward to working on "esteem." Communication may involve sharing praise, working toward goals, and discussion of strengths, which may lead to positive self-esteem. When esteem has been addressed and met, humans can achieve self-actualization. Communication will be about making life better, sharing innovative ideas, contributions to society, compassion and understanding, and providing insight to others. Imagine trying to communicate creatively about a novel or express compassion for others while starving and feeling unprotected. The problem of starving must be resolved before communication can shift to areas addressed within self-actualization.

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

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

Learning About Self and Others

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

Classmates provide a great deal of feedback to each other. They may comment on how well one particular student does, and this contributes to the student's self-concept. The student might think, "People think I am a good student, so I must be." When we interact with others, how they perceive and relate to us impacts our overall self-concept. According to Reńe M. Dailey[xviii], adolescents' self-concepts were impacted by daily conversations when acceptance and challenges were present.

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

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

Self-esteem is a part of self-concept. Self-esteem includes judgments of self-worth. A person can vary on high to low evaluations of self-esteem. People with high self-esteem will feel positive about themselves and others. They will mainly focus on their successes and believe that others' comments are helpful. On the other hand, people with low self-esteem will view things negatively and may focus more on their failures. They are more likely to take other people's comments as criticism or hostility. A recent study found that people with low self-esteem prefer to communicate indirectly, such as an email or text, rather than face-to-face compared to people with high self-esteem.[xix] We will discuss self-concept and self-esteem in greater depth in chapter 3.

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Research indicates that your self-concept doesn't happen when you are born.[xx] Rather, it happens over time. When you are very young, you are still learning about your body. Some children's songs talk about your head, shoulders, and toes. As you develop into an adult, you learn more about yourself with others. It is through this communication with others that we not only learn about our self, but we can build and maintain relationships. To start a relationship with someone else, we might ask them very generic questions, such as their favorite color or favorite movie. Once we have established a connection, we might invite them to coffee or lunch. As we spend time with others, then we learn more about them by talking with them, and then we discover our likes and dislikes with someone. It is through this sharing of information with others that we learn more about them. We can build intimacy and a deeper connection with others when they tell us more about their experiences and their perspectives.

Think about all the relationships that you have developed over time. Now think about how these people either shaped your self-concept or perceptions regarding your self-esteem. For instance, you may have had a coach or teacher that impacted the way that you learn about a certain topic. You may have had an inspirational teacher that helped you find your career path or you might have had a coach that constantly embarrassed you in front of your teammates by yelling at you. These two very different experiences can impact how you feel about yourself.

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

From an early age, we might compare ourselves to others. This is called social comparison. For instance, in grade school, your teacher might have asked everyone to line up against the wall to see who is the tallest and who is the shortest. Instinctively, we already compare ourselves to others. When there is an exam, students want to know how other people performed on the exam to see if they are different or similar. By comparing ourselves to others, we might be able to discern if we are better or worse than others, which can, in turn, influence our self-esteem.

We will build and maintain relationships with others who have similar self-concepts to us, or we perceive them to have a similar self-concept about ourselves. Your closest friends are usually people that are similar to you in some way. These relationships most likely occurred because you were willing to disclose information about yourself to see if you were similar or compatible with the other person.

Elements of Interpersonal Communication

You may think that communication is easy. However, at moments in your life, communication might be hard and difficult to understand. We can study communication similar to the way we study other systems. There are elements to the communication process that are important to understand. Each interaction that we have will typically include a sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, and noise.

Let's take a closer look at each one.

Sender

Humans encode messages naturally, and we don't often consider this part of the process. However, if you have ever thought about the exact words that you would use to get a later curfew from your parents/guardians and how you might refute any counterpoints, then you intuitively know that choosing the right words – "encoding" – weighed heavily in your ability to influence your parents/guardians successfully. The language you chose mattered.

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

Receiver

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

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

Message

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

Channel

With advances in technology, cell phones act as many different channels of communication at once. Consider that smartphones allow us to talk and text. Also, we can receive communication through Facebook, Twitter, Email, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, and Vox. All of these channels are in addition to our traditional channels, which were face-to-face communication, letter writing, telegram, and the telephone. The addition of these new communication channels has changed our lives forever. The

channel is the medium in which we communicate our message. Think about breaking up a romantic relationship. Would you rather do it via face-to-face or via a text message? Why did you answer the way that you did? The channel can impact the message.

Now, think about how you hear important news. Do you learn about it from the Internet, social media, television, newspaper, or others? The channel is the medium in which you learn about information.

It may seem like a silly thing to talk about channels, but a channel can make an impact on how people receive the message. For instance, a true story tells about a professional athlete who proposed marriage to his girlfriend by sending her the ring through the postal mail service. He sent her a ring and a recorded message asking her to marry him. She declined his proposal and refused to return the ring.[xxi] In this case, the channel might have been better if he asked her face-to-face.

Just be mindful of how the channel can affect the way that a receiver reacts and responds to your message. For instance, a handwritten love letter might be more romantic than a typed email. On the other hand, if there was some tragic news about your family, you would probably want someone to call you immediately rather than sending you a letter.

Overall, people naturally know that the message impacts which channel they might use. In a research study focused on channels, college students were asked about the best channels for delivering messages.[xxii] College students said that they would communicate face-to-face if the message was positive, but use mediated channels if the message was negative.

Feedback

Feedback is the response to the message. If there is no feedback, communication would not be effective. Feedback is important because the sender needs to know if the receiver got the message. Simultaneously, the receiver usually will give the sender some sort of message that they comprehend what has been said. If there is no feedback or if it seems that the receiver did not understand the message, then it is negative feedback. However, if the receiver understood the message, then it is positive feedback. Positive feedback does not mean that the receiver entirely agrees with the sender of the message, but rather the message was comprehended. Sometimes feedback is not positive or negative; it can be ambiguous. Examples of ambiguous feedback might include saying "hmmm" or "interesting." Based on these responses, it is not clear if the receiver of the message understood part or the entire message. It is important to note that feedback doesn't have to come from other people. Sometimes, we can be critical of our own words when we write them in a text or say them out loud. We might correct our words and change how we communicate based on our internal feedback.

Environment

The context or situation where communication occurs and how it affects the experience is referred to as the environment. We know that the way you communicate in a professional context might be different than in a personal context. In other words, you probably won't talk to your boss the same way you would talk to your best friend. (An exception might be if your best friend was also your boss). The environment will affect how you communicate. For instance, in a library, you might talk more quietly than normal so that you don't disturb other library patrons. However, in a nightclub or bar, you might speak louder than normal due to the other people talking, music, or noise. Hence, the environment makes a difference in the way in which you communicate with others.

It is also important to note that environments is related to fields of experience or a person's past experiences or background (e.g., cultural background, group membership, knowledge). For instance, a

town hall meeting that plans to cut primary access to lower socioeconomic residents might be perceived differently by individuals who use these services and those who do not. Environments might overlap, but sometimes they do not. Some people in college have had many family members who attended the same school, but other people do not have any family members that ever attended college.

Noise

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

There are four types of noise. The first type is external noise. This is noise that comes from outside the communicator. For instance, people talking, birds chirping, a jackhammer pounding concrete, a car revving by, are all different types of external noise.

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

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

The fourth and last type of noise is called physiological noise. This type of noise is because the receiver's body interferes or hinders the acceptance of a message. For instance, if the person is blind, they are unable to see any written messages that you might send. If the person is deaf, then they are unable to hear any spoken messages. If the person is very hungry, then they might pay more attention to their hunger than any other message.

Models of Interpersonal Communication

In the world of communication, we have several different models to help us understand what communication is and how it works. A model is a simplified representation of a system (often graphic) that highlights the crucial components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real-world. Creating a visual model to represent communication can be very useful to better understanding how the process works. There are many models out there, some more useful than others when it comes to interpersonal communication. In this section, we will briefly discuss three types of models: action, interactional, and transactional. It is the transactional communication model that will be of most use to use for exploration of interpersonal communication.

Over the next few paragraphs, we're going to examine three different types of models that communication scholars have proposed to help us understand interpersonal interactions: action, interaction, and transaction.

Action Models

Action models are communication models that view communication as a one- directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver. They are also referred to as "transmission" models. This model focuses on the sender and message within a communication encounter. Although the receiver is included in the model, this role is viewed as more of a target or end point rather than part of an ongoing process. We are left to presume that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not. Think of how a radio message is sent from a person in the radio studio to you listening in your car. The sender is the radio announcer who encodes a verbal message that is transmitted by a radio tower through electromagnetic waves (the channel) and eventually reaches your (the receiver's) ears via an antenna and speakers in order to be decoded. The radio announcer doesn't really know if you receive his or her message or not, but if the equipment is working and the channel is free of static, then there is a good chance that the message was successfully received.

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

Although the action model may seem simple or even underdeveloped to us today, the creation of this model allowed scholars to examine the communication process in new ways, which eventually led to more complex models and theories of communication that we will discuss more later. This model is not quite rich enough to capture dynamic face-to-face interactions, but there are instances in which communication is one-way and linear, especially computer- mediated communication (CMC). The transmission model of communication is well suited for describing the act of text messaging since the sender isn't sure that the meaning was effectively conveyed or that the message was received at all. Noise can also interfere with the transmission of a text. If you use an abbreviation the receiver doesn't know or the phone autocorrects to something completely different than you meant, then semantic noise has interfered with the message transmission. You have likely experienced similar problems with text messaging, and a quick Google search for examples of text messages made funny or embarrassing by the autocorrect feature proves that many others do, too.

Interaction Models

The next evolution of communication models are the interaction models. Interaction models view the sender and the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication. One of the biggest differences between the action and interaction models is a heightened focus on feedback. Rather than having one sender, one message, and one receiver, this model has two sender-receivers who exchange messages. Each participant alternates roles as sender and receiver in order to keep a communication encounter going. Although this seems like a perceptible and deliberate process, we alternate between the roles of sender and receiver very quickly and often without conscious thought.

The interaction model is also less message focused and more interaction focused. While the action model focused on how a message was transmitted and whether or not it was received, the

interaction model is more concerned with the communication process itself. In fact, this model acknowledges that there are so many messages being sent at one time that many of them may not even be received. Some messages are also unintentionally sent. Therefore, communication isn't judged effective or ineffective in this model based on whether or not a single message was successfully transmitted and received. This model considers the physical context of the message -- the environmental factors in a communication encounter (size, layout, temperature, and lighting of a space) -- as well as the psychological context of it -- the mental and emotional factors in a communication encounter (e.g., stress, anxiety, emotions).

Transaction Models

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

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

<u>Barnlund's Transactional Model</u>

In 1970, Dean C. Barnlund created the transactional model of communication to understand basic interpersonal communication.[xxiii] Barnlund argues that one of the problems with the more linear models of communication (the action or transmission models as well as the interaction models) is that they resemble mediated messages. The message gets created, the message is sent, and the message is received. For example, we write an email, we send an email, and the email is read. Instead, Barnlund argues that during interpersonal interactions, we are both sending and receiving messages simultaneously. Out of all the other communication models, this one includes a multi-layered feedback system. We can provide oral feedback, but our nonverbal communication (e.g., tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures) is equally important to how others interpret the messages we are sending we use others' nonverbal behaviors to interpret their messages. As such, in any interpersonal interaction, a ton of messages are sent and received simultaneously between the two people.
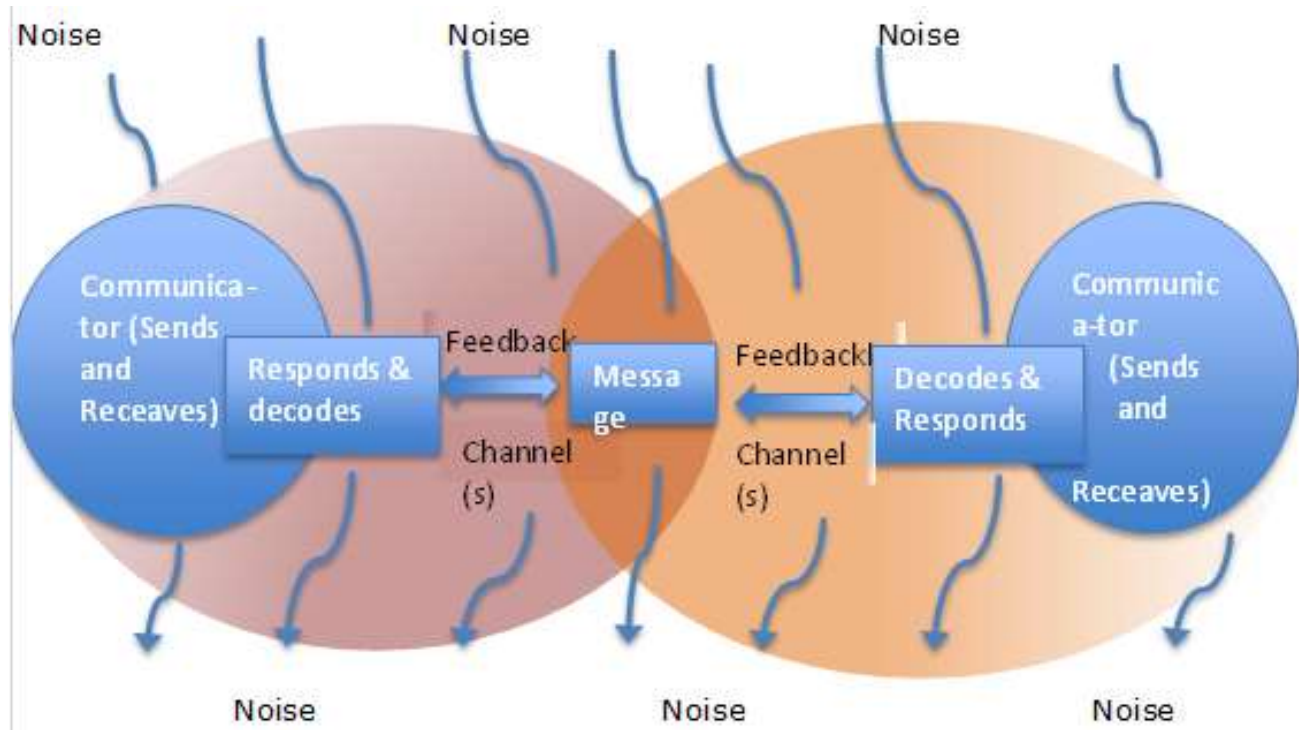
Figure 1.7: Transactional Communication Model
"File:Transactional.png" by Phuongtn is licensed with CC BY-SA 3.0. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0

The Importance of Cues

The main components of the model include cues. There are three types of cues: public, private, and behavioral. Public cues are anything that is physical or environmental. Private cues are referred to as the private objects of the orientation, which include the senses of a person. Behavioral cues include nonverbal and verbal cues.

The Importance of Context

Furthermore, the transactional model of communication has also gone on to represent that three contexts coexist during an interaction:

- Social Context: The rules and norms that govern how people communicate with one another.
- Cultural Context: The cultural and co-cultural identities people have (e.g., ability, age, biological sex, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, social class).
- Relational Context: The nature of the bond or emotional attachment between two people (e.g., parent/guardian-child, sibling-sibling, teacher-student, health care worker-client, best friends, acquaintances). It includes the previous interpersonal history and type of relationship we have with a person.

Through our interpersonal interactions, we create social reality, but all of these different contexts impact this reality.

The Importance of Noise

Another important factor to consider in Barnlund's Transactional Model is the issue of noise, which includes things that disturb or interrupt the flow of communication. Like the three contexts explored

above, there are another four contexts that can impact our ability to interact with people effectively:[xxiv]
- Physical Context: The physical space where interaction is occurring (office, school, home, doctor's office, is the space loud, is the furniture comfortable, etc.).
- Physiological Context: The body's responses to what's happening in its environment.
- Internal: Physiological responses that result because of our body's internal processes (e.g., hunger, a headache, physically tired).
- External: Physiological responses that result because of external stimuli within the environment (e.g., are you cold, are you hot, the color of the room, are you physically comfortable).
- Psychological Context: How the human mind responds to what's occurring within its
- environment (e.g., emotional state, thoughts, perceptions, intentions, mindfulness).
- Semantic Context: The possible understanding and interpretation of different messages sent (e.g., someone's language, size of vocabulary, effective use of grammar).

In each of these contexts, it's possible to have things that disturb or interrupts the flow of communication. For example, in the physical context, hard plastic chairs can make you uncomfortable and not want to sit for very long talking to someone. Physiologically, if you have a headache (internal) or if a room is very hot, it can make it hard to concentrate and listen effectively to another person. Psychologically, if we just broke up with our significant other, we may find it difficult to sit and have a casual conversation with someone while our brains are running a thousand miles a minute. Semantically, if we don't understand a word that someone uses, it can prevent us from accurately interpreting someone's messages. When you think about it, with all the possible interference of noise that exists within an interpersonal interaction, it's pretty impressive that we ever get anything accomplished.

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

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

Transaction Principles
As you can see, these models of communication are all very different. They have similar components, yet they are all conveyed very differently. Some have features that others do not. Nevertheless, there are transactional principles that are important to learn about interpersonal communication.
- **Communication is Complex**: People might think that communication is easy. However, there are a lot of factors, such as power, language, and relationship differences, that can impact the conversation. Communication isn't easy, because not everyone will have the same interpretation of the message. You will see advertisements that some people will love and others will be offended by. The reason is that people do not identically receive a message.
- **Communication is Continuous:** In many of the communication models, we learned that

communication never stops. Every time a source sends a message, a receiver will decode it, and it goes back-and-forth. It is an endless cycle, because even if one person stops talking, then they have already sent a message that the communication needs to end. As a receiver, you can keep trying to send messages, or you can stop talking as well, which sends the message to the other person that you also want to stop talking.

- **Communication is Dynamic:** With new technology and changing times, we see that communication is constantly changing. Before social media, people interacted very differently. Some people have suggested that social media has influenced how we talk to each other. The models have changed over time because people have also changed how they communicate. People no longer use the phone to call other people; instead, they will text message others because they find it easier and less evasive.

The advantage of the transactional model is it shows that there is a shared field of experience between the sender and receiver. The transactional model shows that messages happen simultaneously with noise. However, the disadvantages of the model are that it is complex, and it suggests that the sender and receiver should understand the messages that are sent to each other.

Interpersonal Communication Skills

In this chapter, we have learned about different aspects of interpersonal communication. Overall, some skills can make you a better interpersonal communicator. We will discuss each one in more detail below.

Listening Skills

The most important part of communication is not the actual talking, but the listening part. If you arenot a good listener, then you will not be a good communicator. One must engage in mindful listening.Mindful listening is when you give careful and thoughtful attention to the messages that you receive.

People will often listen mindfully to important messages or to people that matter most. Think about howhappy you get when you are talking to someone you really love or maybe how you pay more attention towhat a professor says if they tell you it will be on the exam. In each of these scenarios, you are giving the speaker your undivided attention. Most of our listening isn't mindful, but there will be times where it will be important to listen to what others are telling us so that we can fulfill our personal and/or professional goals. We'll discuss listening in more detail in Chapter 7.

People Skills

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

Empathy

Empathy is often referred to as putting oneself in another's shoes, to see the world from their

perspective. Social work researcher Brené Brown describes empathy as *feeling with* another person as opposed to sympathy which is *feeling for* another person[xxvii]. In that talk, she quotes nursing scholar Theresa Wiseman who describes four qualities of empathy: perspective taking, staying out of judgement, recognizing emotion in other people, and then communicating that emotion. However, psychologist and author Paul Bloom cautions against relying too much on empathy as, when applied too broadly (particularly in moral reasoning situations), it can be biased and even unethical.[xxviii] He makes a case for compassion as a stronger tool for us to use.[xxix] Whether or not you agree with Bloom, empathy is still seen in society as a helpful and positive skill to utilize. But, as with many things, it must be used wisely and intentionally.

Emotional Intelligence

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

Appropriate Skill Selection

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

Communicating Ethically

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

Social Media and Interpersonal Communication

I would be remiss if we didn't talk about social media and its impact on interpersonal communication. Rather than devote a whole chapter to the subject, we'll instead talk about it briefly here and then weave it throughout the remaining chapters. As communicating on social media is such a big part of how many of us communicate today, it would be foolish to treat it solely as a separate entity. Thus, in this section, we will discuss some of the characteristics of communication on social media so that we can use them to help us interpret its influence in our later discussions.

Characteristics of Communication on Social Media
Asynchronous versus Synchronous

Some technologies are what we call **asynchronous**, a mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are *not* concurrently engaged in communication. When Person A sends a message, Person B does not need to be on the computer at the same time to receive the message. There could be a delay of hours or even days before that message is received and Person B responds. In this case, asynchronous messages are akin to letter writing. Some common forms of asynchronous communication today include email, texting, social media posts, and classroom discussion boards.

In contrast, **synchronous** communication is happening simultaneously. It's what happens when we are face-to-face. At the same time the message is sent, it is received and a reply can happen instantaneously either verbally or nonverbally. As technology has improved, the asynchronous nature of mediated communication has changed. While you still wait to get a text or email, you can video chat with someone simultaneously (provided, of course, your internet is fast enough and your connection is solid). In that situation, when Person A sends a message, Person B is receiving that message in real time, like they would in a face-to-face interaction. The first synchronous mode of communication was the chatroom. In 1988, Jarkko "WiZ" Oikarinen wrote the code for the first Internet Relay Chat (IRC) client and server at the University of Oulu, Finland. IRC was initially started as a system to replace an existing BBS, but WiZ realized that he had something completely different. With IRC, individuals from around the world could login using an IRC Chat Client (software on their computer), which would allow them to access a server elsewhere in the world to interact with people in real time. The invention of IRC led to the proliferation of chatrooms throughout the 1980s and 90s.

New technology was also developed through the European organization Groupe Speciale Mobile (GSM). The goal of the GSM was to create protocols for second-generation global cellphone networks. One of the protocols that was created was the Short Messaging Service (SMS). The concept was developed in 1985 by Friedhelm Hillebrand and Bernard Ghillebaert, but the first SMS message wouldn't be sent until 1992. SMS originated from the radio telegraphy in radio memo pagers using standardized phone protocols, and was later defined as part of the Global System for Mobile Communications series of standards in 1985. The "short" part of SMS refers to the maximum length of the messages that could be sent at the time: 160 characters (letters, numbers, or symbols in the Latin alphabet). If you haven't figured it out yet, the system created by Hillebrand and Ghillebaert is the system most of you use every day to send text messages. Although texting can be either asynchronous or synchronous, historically it was one of the earliest technologies to facilitate real-time (synchronous) online communication.

Leanness versus Richness

Richness is defined as "the potential information carrying capacity of data."[xxx] In Robert H. Lengel's doctoral dissertation, he proposed that media varied in richness depending on how much information is provided through the communication.[xxxi] For example, in print media, all we have is text. As such, we don't have nonverbal behaviors of the author to help us interpret the words we are reading. Thus, the communication is not as rich or, to use another term, it has **leanness**. With FtF communication, on the other hand, we have the full realm of nonverbal behaviors to which we can attend to understand the sender's message. Thus, we can ascertain that the richer the media, the less ambiguous a message is for a receiver.[xxxii]

<u>Digital Permanence</u>

Another characteristic of mediated communication is the permanence of those messages. Once you have posted something on social media, it lives on forever. Even if you go back and delete an embarrassing picture or post, it's possible someone may have saved it or captured it in a screenshot. Not to mention it lives in a server farm somewhere out there in cyber space.

While we tend to think of digital permanence negatively, in how it can harm how future professional aspirations, for example, there are positives to this permanence. For example, if you have an email from your boss giving you the day off and he later tries to say he didn't approve your request, you have the email to prove that he did approve it. I am a fan of *Judge Judy* and there are many litigants who win their case because they have the emails, texts, and social media posts that demonstrate the truth of their claims.

<u>Hyperpersonal</u>

Perhaps not quite a characteristic of social media communication, one concept that is unique to it comes from communication scholar Joseph Walther. Walther came up with the idea he called hyperpersonal interactions.[xxxiii] Hyperpersonal interactions are those that go above and beyond those possible in traditional FtF interactions. For example, many people who belong to online self-help groups discuss feelings and ideas that they would never dream of discussing with people in an FtF interaction unless that person was their therapist. Furthermore, during social media interactions an individual can refine their message in a manner that is impossible to do during an FtF interaction, which help them present a specific face to an interactant. I'm sure we've all written a text, Facebook post, or email and then decided to delete what we'd just written rather than post or send it because it was not in our best interest to put it out in the world. In mediated interactions, we have this ability to fine-tune our messages before transmitting, whereas in FtF messages, we don't have the ability to sit and ponder our responses writing and rewriting them until we're ready to orally communicate during a FtF interaction. Furthermore, in FtF interactions, there is an expectation that the interaction keeps moving at a steady pace without the ability to edit one's ideas; whereas, with CMC we can take time to fine-tune our messages in a way that is impossible during an FtF interaction. All of this helps an individual create the public face that they want to be known by.

Somewhat related to hyperpersonal is the idea of **disinhibition***,* another aspect of communicating on social media. The people we refer to online as "trolls", those who post mean and nasty comments, are the worst example of disinhibition. They are saying whatever they want without considering the consequences of their actions.

Netiquette

Over the years, numerous norms have developed to help individuals communicate on social media. They're so common that we have a term for them, **netiquette**. Netiquette is the set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediating technologies.

Our definition of netiquette emphasizes that different contexts can create different netiquette needs. Specifically, how one communicates professionally and how one communicates socially are often quite different. For example, you may find it entirely appropriate to say, "What's up?!" at the beginning of an email to a friend, but you would not find it appropriate to start an email to your boss in this same fashion. Furthermore, it may be entirely appropriate to downplay or disregard spelling errors or grammatical problems in a text you send to a friend, but it is completely inappropriate to have those

same errors and problems in a text sent to a professional-client or coworker. One of the biggest challenges many employers have with young employees who are fresh out of college is that they don't know how to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate communicative behavior in differing contexts.

This lack of professionalism is also a problem commonly discussed by college and university faculty and staff. Think about the last email you sent to one of your professors? Was this email professional? Did you remember to sign your name? You'd be amazed at the lack of professionalism many college and university faculty and staff see in the emails sent by your peers. Here are some general guidelines for sending professional emails:

- Include a concise, direct subject line.
- Do not mark something as "urgent" unless it really is.
- Begin with a proper greeting (Dear Mr. X, Professor Y:, etc.)
- Double-check your grammar.
- Correct any spelling mistakes.
- Include only essential information. Be concise.
- State your intention clearly and directly.
- Make sure your message is logically organized.
- Be polite and ensure your tone is appropriate.
- Avoid all CAPS or all lowercase letters.
- Avoid "textspeak" (e.g., plz, lol)
- If you want the recipient to do something, make the desired action very clear.
- End with a polite closing (using "please" and "thank you").
- Do not send an email if you're angry or upset.
- Edit and proofread before hitting "send."
- Use "Reply All" selectively (very selectively)

Second, our definition of netiquette combines both rules and norms. Part of being a competent communicator in a CMC environment is knowing what the rules are and respecting them. For example, if you know that Twitter's rules ban hate speech, then engaging in hate speech using the Twitter platform shows a disregard for the rules and would not be considered appropriate behavior. In essence, hate speech is anti-netiquette. We also do not want to ignore the fact that in different social media contexts, different norms often develop. For example, maybe you're taking an online course and you're required to engage in weekly discussions. One common norm in an online class is to check the previously replies to a post before posting your reply. If you don't, then you are jumping into a conversation that's already occurred and throwing your two-cents in without knowing what's happening.

Third, netiquette attempts to govern what is both acceptable and polite. Yelling via a text message may be acceptable to some of your friends, but is it polite given that typing in all caps is generally seen as yelling? Being polite shows others respect and demonstrates socially appropriate behaviors.

Fourth, our definition involves interacting with others. This interaction can be one-on-one, or this interaction can be one-to-many. The first category, one-on-one, is more in the wheelhouse of interpersonal communication. Examples include sending a text to one person, sending an email to one person, talking to one person via Skype or Zoom, etc. The second category, one-to-many, requires its own set of rules and norms. Some examples of common one-to-many social media contexts could include engaging in a group chat via texting, "replying all" to an email received, being interviewed by a committee via Skype, etc. Notice that our examples for one-to-many involve the same technologies used

for one-on-one communication.

      Lastly, netiquette can vary based on the different types of mediating technologies. For example, it may be considered entirely appropriate for you to scream, yell, and curse when your playing with your best friend on Fortnite, but it wouldn't be appropriate to use the same communicative behaviors when engaging in a video conference over Skype. Both technologies use VoIP, but the platforms and the contexts are very different, so they call for different types of communicative behaviors. Some differences will exist in netiquette based on whether you're in an entirely text-based medium (e.g., email, texting) or one where people can see you (e.g., Skype, WebEx, Zoom). Ultimately, engaging in netiquette requires you to learn what is considered acceptable and polite behavior across a range of different technologies.

Concluding Thoughts

As we bring this first chapter to a close, take some time to reflect on all you have learned. This was a really big chapter with lots of information to digest. By looking at communication as a whole and interpersonal communication specifically, we have set the foundation on which we will build the remainder of the course. In subsequent chapters, we will build upon what we learned here focusing on key areas that influence interpersonal communication: culture (intercultural communication), the self, perception, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and listening. We will finish the semester by focusing on interpersonal communication and relationships as well as interpersonal communication and conflicts.

Additional Resources

Each chapter has a series of *video lectures* to accompany them. They supplement the reading, adding additional context and examples to help illustrate the concepts more clearly. They also take the place of classroom lectures. Our classroom time will be spent in activities, discussion, and additional exploration of the course concepts. These video lectures will be found on our course's Blackboard page in the weekly folders – each hyperlinked in the section that tells you what to do before class. You will also find them hyperlinked in the course outline on the syllabus, as well. A *study guide* (chapter outlines) with all chapters will be located in the "Additional Resources" section of our Blackboard site as well as in the weekly folders for the weeks in which a quiz or exam is scheduled. Finally, you can access the PowerPoint presentations for the video lectures and my teaching presentations in the "Additional Resources" section.

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Chapter 2
Intercultural Communication

One of the most important factors in our understanding of communication is culture. Every one of us has grown up in a unique cultural environment, and this culture has impacted how we communicate. Culture is such an ingrained part of who we are that we often don't even recognize our own culture. In this chapter, we're going to explore culture and its impact on interpersonal communication.

What is Culture?

When people hear the word "culture," many different images often come to mind. Maybe you immediately think of going to the ballet, an opera, or an art museum. Other people think of traditional dress. However, the word "culture" has a wide range of different meanings to a lot of different people. For example, when you travel to a new country (or even a state within your own country), you expect to encounter different clothing, languages, foods, rituals, etc.… The word "culture" is a hotly debated term among academics. In 1952, A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of 164 definitions for the word "culture." Culture is often described as "the way we do things."[i] In their book, the authors noted, "Considering that concept [of culture] has had a name for less than 80 years, it is not surprising that full agreement and precision has not yet been attained."[ii] Kroeber and Kluckhohn predicted that eventually, science would land on a singular definition of culture as it was refined through the scientific process over time. Unfortunately, the idea of a single definition of culture is no closer to becoming a reality today than it was in 1952.[iii]

For our purposes, we are going to talk about culture as "a group of people who through a process of learning are able to share perceptions of the world which influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior."[iv] Let's break down this definition. First, when we talk about "culture," we are starting off with a group of people. One of the biggest misunderstandings new people studying culture have is that an individual can have their own personalized culture. Culture is something that is formed by the groups that we grow up in and are involved with through our lifetimes.

Second, we learn about our culture. In fact, culture becomes such an ingrained part of who we are that we often do not even recognize our own culture and how our own culture affects us daily. Just like language, everyone is hardwired to learn culture. What culture we pick up is ultimately a matter of the group(s) we are born into and raised. Just like a baby born to an English-speaking family isn't going to magically start speaking French out of nowhere, neither will a person from one culture adopt another culture accidentally.

Third, what we learn ultimately leads to a shared perception of the world. All cultures have stories that are taught to children that impact how they view the world. If you are raised by Jewish or Christian parents/guardians, you will learn the creation story in the Bible. However, this is only one of many different creation myths that have abounded over time in different cultures:

- The Akamba in Kenya say that the first two people were lowered to earth by God on a cloud.
- In ancient Babylon and Sumeria, the gods slaughtered another god named We-ila, and out of his blood and clay, they formed humans.
- One myth among the Tibetan people is that they owe their existence to the union of an

ogress, not of this world, and a monkey on Gangpo Ri Mountain at Tsetang.
- And the Aboriginal tribes in Australia believe that humans are just the decedents of gods.[v]

Ultimately, which creation story we grew up with was a matter of the culture in which we were raised. These different myths lead to very different views of the individual's relationship with both the world and with their God, gods, or goddesses.

Fourth, the culture we are raised in will teach us our beliefs, values, norms, and rules. Beliefs are assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something. For example, in all of the creation myths discussed in the previous paragraph, these are beliefs that were held by many people at various times in human history. Next, we have values, or important and lasting principles or standards held by a culture about desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes. This definition is a bit complex, so let's break it down. When looking at this definition, it's important first to highlight that different cultures have different perceptions related to both courses of action or outcomes. For example, in many cultures throughout history, martyrdom (dying for one's cause) has been something deeply valued. As such, in those cultures, putting one's self in harm's way (course of action) or dying (outcome) would be seen as both desirable and appropriate. Within a given culture, there are generally guiding principles and standards that help determine what is desirable and appropriate. In fact, many religious texts describe martyrdom as a holy calling. So, within these cultures, martyrdom is something that is valued. Next, within the definition of culture are the concepts of norms and rules. Norms are informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture. Rules, on the other hand, are the explicit guidelines (generally written down) that govern acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture. With rules, we have clearly concrete and explicitly communicated ways of behaving, whereas norms are generally not concrete, nor are they explicitly communicated. We generally do not know a norm exists within a given culture unless we violate the norm or watch someone else violating the norm. The final part of the definition of culture, and probably the most important for our purposes, looking at interpersonal communication, is that these beliefs, values, norms, and rules will govern how people behave.

Co-cultures

In addition to a dominant culture, most societies have various co-cultures—regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, and other cultural groups that exert influence in society. Other co-cultures develop among people who share specific beliefs, ideologies, or life experiences. For example, within the United States we commonly refer to a wide variety of different cultures: Amish culture, African American culture, Buddhist Culture, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexed, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) culture. With all of these different cultural groups, we must realize that just because individuals belong to a cultural group, that does not mean that they are all identical. For example, African Americans in New York City are culturally distinct from those living in Birmingham, Alabama, because they also belong to different geographical co-cultures. Within the LGBTQIA culture, the members who make up the different letters can have a wide range of differing cultural experiences within the larger co- culture itself. As such, we must always be careful to avoid generalizing about individuals because of the co-cultures they belong to.

Co-cultures bring their unique sense of history and purpose within a larger culture. Co-cultures will also have their holidays and traditions. For example, one popular co-cultural holiday celebrated in the United States is Cinco de Mayo. Many U.S. citizens think that Cinco de Mayo is a Mexican holiday.

However, this is not a Mexican holiday. Outside of Puebla, Mexico, it's considered a relatively minor holiday even though children do get the day off from school. One big mistake many U.S. citizens

make is assuming Cinco de Mayo is Mexican Independence Day, which it is not. Instead, El Grito de la Indepedencia (The Cry of Independence) is held annually on September 16 in honor of Mexican Independence from Spain in 1810. Sadly, Cinco de Mayo has become more of an American holiday than it is a Mexican one.

Just as an FYI, Cinco de Mayo is the date (May 5, 1862) observed to commemorate the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla that conclude the Franco-Mexican War (also referred to as the Battle of Puebla Day). We raise this example because often the larger culture coopts parts of a co-culture and tries to adapt it into the mainstream. During this process, the meaning associated with the co-culture is often twisted or forgotten. If you need another example, just think of St. Patrick's Day, which evolved from a religious celebration marking the death of St. Patrick on March 17, 461 CE, to a day when "everyone's Irish" and drinks green beer.

Microcultures

The last major term we need to explain with regards to culture is what is known as a microculture. A microculture, sometimes called a local culture, refers to cultural patterns of behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization. "Members of a microculture will usually share much of what they know with everyone in the greater society but will possess a special cultural knowledge that is unique to the subgroup."[vi] If you're a college student and you've ever lived in a dorm, you may have experienced what we mean by a microculture. It's not uncommon for different dorms on campus to develop their own unique cultures that are distinct from other dorms. They may have their own exclusive stories, histories, mascots, and specializations. Maybe you live in a dorm that specializes in honor's students or pairs U.S. students with international students. Perhaps you live in a dorm that is allegedly haunted. Maybe you live in a dorm that values competition against other dorms on campus, or one that doesn't care about the competition at all. All of these examples help individual dorms develop unique cultural identities.

We often refer to microcultures as "local cultures" because they do tend to exist among a small segment of people within a specific geographical location. There's quite a bit of research on the topic of classrooms as microcultures. Depending on the students and the teacher, you could end up with radically different classroom environments, even if the content is the same. The importance of microcultures goes back to Abraham Maslow's need for belonging. We all feel the need to belong, and these microcultures give us that sense of belonging on a more localized level.

For this reason, we often also examine microcultures that can exist in organizational settings. One common microculture that has been discussed and researched is the Disney microculture. Employees (oops! We mean cast members) who work for the Disney company quickly realize that there is more to working at Disney than a uniform and a name badge. Disney cast members do not wear uniforms; everyone is in costume. When a Disney cast member is interacting with the public, then they are "on stage;" when a cast member is on a break away from the public eye, then they are "backstage." From the moment a Disney cast member is hired, they are required to take Traditions One and probably Traditions Two at Disney University, which is run by the Disney Institute (http://disneyinstitute.com/). Here is how Disney explains the purpose of Traditions: "Disney Traditions is your first day of work filled with the History & Heritage of The Walt Disney Company, and a sprinkle of pixie dust!"[vii] As you can tell, from the very beginning of the Disney cast member experience, Disney attempts to create a very specific microculture that is based on all things Disney.

The Function of Culture

Collective Self-Esteem

Henri Tajfel originally coined the term "collective self" as "that aspect of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."[viii] Another term for the collective self is **social identity**, which is our identity based on our group membership. Jennifer Crocker and Riia Luhtanen took Tajfel's ideas one step further and discussed them as an individual's collective self-esteem, or the aspect of an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.[ix] Based on their research, Crocker and Luhtanen found four different factors related to an individual's collective self-esteem: private collective esteem, membership esteem, public collective esteem, and importance to identity.

The first factor of collective self-esteem is the individual's private collective esteem, or the degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group. Every individual belongs to a wide range of groups, and we can evaluate these groups as either positive or negative. Imagine you've been brought up in a community where gang membership is a very common practice. You may have been forced into gang life at a very early age. Over time, you may start to see a wide array of problems with gangs, so you may start to devalue the group. In this case, you would have low private collective esteem.

The second factor of collective self-esteem is membership esteem, which is the degree to which an individual sees themself as a "good" member of a group. Maybe you've belonged to a religious organization your entire life. Over time, you start to find yourself wondering about the organization and your place within the organization. Maybe you see yourself as having ideas and opinions that are contrary to the organization, or maybe your behavior when not attending religious services is not what the organization would advocate. In this case, you may start to see yourself as a "bad" member of this organization, so your membership esteem would be lower than someone who sees themself as a "good" member of this organization.

The third factor of collective self-esteem is public collective self-esteem, or the degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively. Maybe you're a lesbian college student at a very progressive institution where students overwhelmingly support LGBTQIA rights. In this case, the collective views the group that you belong to positively.

The final factor of collective self-esteem is importance to identity, or the degree to which group membership is important to an individual. As mentioned earlier, we all belong to a wide range of cultural groups. Some of these groups are near and dear to us, while others are ones we don't think about very often, so they just aren't very important to us. For example, if you're someone who has always lived in Charleston, South Carolina, then being a member of the Southerner cultural group may be a very important part of your identity. If you ended up leaving the south and moving to Oregon, this "southerner" label may take on even more meaning for you and become an even stronger identity marker because your immediate cultural group no longer surrounds you.

There has been a wealth of research conducted on the importance of collective self-esteem on individuals. For example, if you compare your cultural groups as being better than other cultural groups, then you will experience more positive emotions and self-evaluations.[x] However, the opposite is also true. Individuals who compare their cultural groups to those cultural groups that are perceived as "better-off," tend to experience more negative emotions and lower self-evaluations. As you can imagine, an individual who is a member of a group that is generally looked down upon by society will have a constant battle internally as they battle these negative emotions and subsequent lower self-evaluations

because of membership within a cultural group.

You may be wondering how this ultimately impacts interpersonal communication. Research has examined how an individual's collective self-esteem impacts their interpersonal interactions.[xi] The researchers found that "during interactions in which multicultural persons felt that their heritage culture was being positively evaluated, they were more likely to perceive the interaction as intimate, they disclosed more and perceived their interaction partner as more disclosing, they enjoyed the interaction more, and they were more likely to indicate that they felt personally accepted."[xii] Furthermore, individuals with high collective self-esteem generally had more favorable interactions with people of differing cultures. On the other hand, individuals who had low levels of public collective self-esteem tended to recall less intimate social interactions with people from different cultures. As you can see, cultural self-esteem, our social identity, is an essential factor in our intercultural interactions with other people. For this reason, understanding how we view our cultural identities becomes very important because it can predict the types of intercultural interactions we will ultimately have.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are "a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group."[xiii] Many people immediately hear the word "stereotype" and cringe because it's often filled with negative connotations. However, not all stereotypes are necessarily wrong or bad. Some stereotypes exist because they are accurate.[xiv] Often groups have real differences, and these differences are not bad or wrong; they just are. Let's look at a real stereotype that plays out. When people hear the words "flight attendant," they generally associate females with the term. In fact, in the 1980s only 19% of flight attendants were male, and today 26% of flight attendants are male.[xv] Are all flight attendants female? Obviously, not; however, the majority of flight attendants are female. We call these types of jobs sex-segregated because the jobs are held overwhelmingly by one biological sex or the other when there is no real reason why either sex cannot be effective within the job. However, many also hold the stereotype that flight attendants are all young. Although this was historically true, the ages of flight attendants has changed: 16-24 year olds (4.9%), 25-34 year olds (16.8%), 35-44 year olds (29.7%), 45-54 year olds (28.2%), and 55+ year olds (21.4%). As you can see, the overwhelming majority of flight attendants are 35 years of age or older. Almost half of flight attendants today are over 45 years of age. In this case, the stereotype of the young flight attendant simply doesn't meet up with reality.

Furthermore, there can be two distinctly different types of stereotypes that people hold: cultural and personal. Cultural stereotypes are beliefs possessed by a larger cultural group about another social group, whereas personal stereotypes are those held by an individual and do not reflect a shared belief with their cultural group(s). In the case of cultural stereotypes, cultural members share a belief (or set of beliefs) about another cultural group. For example, maybe you belong to the Yellow culture and perceive all members of the Purple culture as lazy. Often these stereotypes that we have of those other groups (e.g., Purple People) occur because we are taught them since we are very young. On the other hand, maybe you had a bad experience with a Purple Person being lazy at work and in your mind decide all Purple People must behave like that. In either case, we have a negative stereotype about a cultural group, but how we learn these stereotypes is very different.

Now, even though some stereotypes are accurate and others are inaccurate, it does not mitigate the problem that stereotypes cause. Stereotypes cause problems because people use them to categorize people in snap judgments based on only group membership. Going back to our previous example, if you run across a Purple person in your next job, you'll immediately see that person as lazy without having any other information about that person. When we use blanket stereotypes to make a priori (before the fact) judgments about someone, we distance ourselves from making accurate, informed decisions about

that person (and their cultural group). Stereotypes prejudice us to look at all members of a group as similar and to ignore the unique differences among individuals. Additionally, many stereotypes are based on ignorance about another person's culture.

Try this exercise: picture someone named Mel. OK, now picture someone named Hillary. What did the people you pictured look like? The immediate impressions we get in our minds occur because of stereotypes we associate with these words. One of our authors has a cousin named Melanie, who is often called Mel by the family, and our coauthor had a close friend in college, who was a male, named Hillary. This simple exercise demonstrates how often and easy it is for stereotypes to enter into our heads.

Culture as Normative

Another function of culture is that it helps us establish norms. Essentially, one's culture is normative,[xvi] or we assume that our culture's rules, regulations, and norms are correct and those of other cultures are deviant, which is highly ethnocentric. The term ethnocentrism can be defined as the degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating other cultures according their own culture's preconceptions, often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior. All of us live in a world where we are raised in a dominant culture. As a result of being raised in a specific dominant culture, we tend to judge other cultures based on what we've been taught within our own cultures. We also tend to think our own culture is generally right, moral, ethical, legal, etc. When a culture appears to waiver from what our culture has taught is right, moral, ethical, legal, etc., we tend to judge those cultures as inferior.

One of our coauthor's favorite examples of the problem of ethnocentrism comes from the MTV television show *Road Rules: The Quest*. In one episode, one of the contestants, Ellen, is walking around in Marrakech, Morocco, wearing very short shorts. In an Islamic country where a woman wearing revealing clothing is a violation of Islamic law, Ellen was violating the culture's dress code. To this end, some of the villagers in Marrakech took it upon themselves to correct Ellen's nonverbal behavior by throwing rocks at her. Of course, Ellen just couldn't understand why these male villagers were throwing rocks at her. Although throwing rocks at another person should be viewed as universally inappropriate, Ellen's ethnocentric behavior and complete lack of understanding of Muslim countries were also inappropriate. Ellen was walking around in a foreign country and was completely unaware that she presented herself in public was seen as an insult to Allah and society. Admittedly, this episode aired in July 2001, so we were just a few short months before 9-11 and the public awakening to a whole range of issues occurring in the Middle East.

At the same time, ethnocentrism isn't 100% a horrible thing either. Shortly after 9-11, a flag shortage occurred in the United States because people wanted to display our unity and pride during those horrible days after the atrocities that occurred on U.S. soil. Patriotism is a more mild form of ethnocentrism. The fact that we view ourselves as "American" is even somewhat ethnocentric because technically there are three rather large countries that are all in North American and 13 in South America. By definition, we're all Americans. However, U.S. citizens have clung to the title "American" without ever giving thought to those other countries that exist on these two continents. Here's another interesting fact. I was recently surfing the Internet looking for uses of the word "American" for this chapter. Here is one I found from a protestor in Alabama, "We live in America. We speak American." I'll give the speaker the benefit of the doubt and believe she meant we speak English, which is true for the majority of citizens in the United States (78.1% according to U.S. Census data from 2021, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/). However, more people in North and South America do not speak English when compared to those who do.

Cultural Characteristics and Communication

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

Edward T. Hall

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

Low vs. High Context

One of Halls most essential contributions to the field of intercultural communication is the idea of low-context and high-context cultures. The terms "low-context culture" (LCC) and "high-context culture" (HCC) were created by Hall to describe how communication styles differ across cultures. In essence, "in LCC, meaning is expressed through explicit verbal messages, both written and oral. In HCC, on the other hand, intention or meaning can best be conveyed through implicit contexts, including gestures, social customs, silence, nuance, or tone of voice."[xx] Table 6.1 further explores the differences between low-context and high-context cultures. In Table 6.1, we broke down issues of context into three general categories: communication, cultural orientation, and business. You may be wondering, by this point, how low-context and high-context cultures differ across different countries. Figure 6.1 illustrates some of the patterns of context that exist in today's world.[xxi]

Figure 6.1 Low- and High-Context Nations

	Low-Context	**High-Context**
Communication		
Type of Communication	Explicit Communication	Implicit Communication
Communication Focus	Focus on Verbal Communication	Focus on Nonverbal Communication
Context of Message	Less Meaningful	Very Meaningful
Politeness	Not Important	Very Important
Approach to People	Direct and Confrontational	Indirect and Polite
Cultural Orientation		
Emotions	No Room for Emotions	Emotions Have Importance
Approach to Time	Monochromatic	Polychromatic
Time Orientation	Present-Future	Past
In/Out-Groups	Flexible and Transient Grouping Patterns	Strong Distinctions Between In and Out-Groups
Identity	Based on Individual	Based on Social System
Values	Independence and Freedom	Tradition and Social Rules/Norms
Business		
Work Style	Individualistic	Team-Oriented
Work Approach	Task-Oriented	Relationship-Oriented
Business Approach	Competitive	Cooperative
Learning	Knowledge is Transferable	Knowledge is Situational
Sales Orientation	Hard Sell	Soft Sell
View of Change	Change over Tradition	Tradition over Change

Table 6.1 Low-Context vs. High-Context Cultures

Geert Hofstede

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

masculinity vs. femininity, low vs. high uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint. Let's briefly look at each of these.

Low vs. High Power Distance

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

> Households in the lowest quintile had incomes of $20,599 or less in 2012. Households in the second quintile had incomes between $20,600 and $39,764, those in the third quintile had incomes between $39,765 and $64,582, and those in the fourth quintile had incomes between $64,583 and $104,096. Households in the highest quintile had incomes of $104,097 or more. The top 5 percent had incomes of $191,157 or more.[xxv]

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

Individualism vs. Collectivism

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

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

on how the group can grow and be productive.

Masculinity vs. Femininity

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

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

> *A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life* [emphasis in original].[xxix]

The top five most masculine countries are Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, Austria, and Venezuela (the U.S. is number 19 out of 76); whereas, feminine countries are represented by Sweden, Norway, Latvia, Netherlands, and Denmark. As you can imagine, depending on the type of culture you live in, you will have wildly different social interactions with other people. There's also a massive difference in the approach to marriage. In masculine cultures, women are the caretakers of the home, while men are to be healthy and wealthy. As such, women are placed in a subservient position to their husbands are often identified socially by their husbands. For example, an invitation to a party would be addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith." In feminine cultures, men and women are upheld to the same standards, and their relationships should be based on mutual friendship.

Low vs. High Uncertainty Avoidance

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

interpersonal perspective, people from high uncertainty avoidant cultures are going to have a lot more anxiety associated with interactions involving people from other cultures. Furthermore, there tend to be higher levels of prejudice and higher levels of ideological, political, and religious fundamentalism, which does not allow for any kind of debate.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

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

Indulgence vs. Restraint

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

Stella Ting-Toomey

In 1988, intercultural communication research Stella Ting-Toomey developed **face-negotiation theory** to help explain the importance of **face** within interpersonal interactions.[xxxv] The basic idea behind face-negotiation theory is that face-saving, conflict, and culture are all intertwined. In the most recent version of her theory, Stella Ting-Toomey outlines seven basic factors of face-negotiation theory:

1. People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations.
2. The concept of face is especially problematic in emotionally vulnerable situations (such as embarrassment, request, or conflict situations) when the situation identities of the communicators are called into question.
3. The cultural variability dimensions of individualism-collectivism and small/large power distance shape the orientations, movements, contents, and styles of facework.
4. Individualism-collectivism shapes members' preferences for self-oriented facework versus other-oriented facework.
5. Small/large power distance shapes members' preferences for horizontal-based facework versus vertical-based facework.
6. The cultural variability dimensions, in conjunction with individual, relational, and situational factors influence the use of particular facework behaviors in particular cultural scenes.
7. Intercultural facework competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively.[xxxvi]

First and foremost, communication and face are highly intertwined concepts, so when coming to an intercultural encounter, it is important to remember the interrelationship between the two. As far as Ting-Toomey's theory goes, she takes this idea one step further to understanding how face and communication ultimately enable successful intercultural conflict management. Face-negotiation theory ultimately concerned with three different types of face: self-face (concern for our face), other- face (concern for another person's face), and mutual-face (concern for both interactants and the relationship).[xxxvii] As you can see from Ting-Toomey's last assumption in her theory above, individuals who are competent in facework can recognize when facework is necessary and then handle those situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively. As such, facework should be viewed as a necessary component for understanding any form of interpersonal interaction but is especially important when examining interpersonal interactions that occur between people from differing cultural backgrounds.

Improving Intercultural Communication Skills

Become Culturally Intelligent

One of the latest buzz-words in the business world is "cultural intelligence," which was initially introduced to the scholarly community in 2003 by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang.[xxxviii] In the past decade, a wealth of research has been conducted examining the importance of cultural intelligence during interpersonal interactions with people from other cultures. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is defined as an "individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity."[xxxix]

Four Factors of Cultural Intelligence

In their original study on the topic, Earley and Ang argued that cultural intelligence is based on four

distinct factors: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Before continuing, take a minute and complete the Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire in Table 6.2.

Cognitive CQ

First, cognitive CQ involves knowing about different cultures (intercultural knowledge). Many types of knowledge about a culture can be relevant during an intercultural interaction: rules and norms, economic and legal systems, cultural values and beliefs, the importance of art within a society, etc.… All of these different areas of knowledge involve facts that can help you understand people from different cultures. For example, in most of the United States, when you are talking to someone, eye contact is very important. You may have even been told by someone to "look at me when I'm talking to you" if you've ever gotten in trouble. However, this isn't consistent across different cultures at all. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures often view direct contact when talking to someone superior as a sign of disrespect. Knowing how eye contact functions across cultures can help you know more about how to interact with people from various cultures. Probably one of the best books you can read to know more about how to communicate in another culture is Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway's book *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More than 60 Countries*.[xl]

Motivational CQ

Second, we have motivational CQ, or the degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to different cultural environments. Motivation is the key to effective intercultural interactions. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you are not motivated to have successful intercultural interactions, you will not have them.

Metacognitive CQ

Third, metacognitive CQ involves being consciously aware of your intercultural interactions in a manner that helps you have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures (intercultural understanding). All of the knowledge about cultural differences in the world will not be beneficial if you cannot use that information to understand and adapt your behavior during an interpersonal interaction with someone from a differing culture. As such, we must always be learning about cultures but also be ready to adjust our knowledge about people and their cultures through our interactions with them.

Behavioral CQ

Lastly, behavioral CQ is the next step following metacognitive CQ, which is behaving in a manner that is consistent with what you know about other cultures.[xli] We should never expect others to adjust to us culturally. Instead, culturally intelligent people realize that it's best to adapt our behaviors (verbally and nonverbally) to bridge the gap between people culturally. When we go out of our way to be culturally intelligent, we will encourage others to do so as well.

 As you can see, becoming a truly culturally intelligent person involves a lot of work. As such, it's important to spend time and build your cultural intelligence if you are going to be an effective communicator in today's world.

Engaging Culturally Mindful Interactions

Admittedly, being culturally competent takes a lot of work and a lot of practice. Even if you're not completely culturally competent, you can engage with people from other cultures in a mindful way.

First, when it comes to engaging with people from other cultures, we need to be fully in the moment and not think about previous interactions with people from a culture or possible future interactions with people from a culture. Instead, it's essential to focus on the person you are interacting with. You also need to be aware of your stereotypes and prejudices that you may have of people from a different culture. Don't try to find evidence to support or negate these stereotypes or prejudices. If you focus on evidence- finding, you're just trying to satisfy your thoughts and feelings and not mindfully engaging with this other person. Also, if you find that your mind is shifting, recognize the shift and allow yourself to re-center on your interaction with the other person.

Second, go into an intercultural interaction knowing your intention. If your goal is to learn more about that person's culture, that's a great intention. However, that may not be the only intention we have when interacting with someone from another culture. For example, you may be interacting with someone from another culture because you're trying to sell them a product you represent. If your main intention is sales, then be aware of your intention and don't try to deceive yourself into thinking it's something more altruistic.

Lastly, go into all intercultural interactions with the right attitude. Remember, the goal of being mindful is to be open, kind, and curious. Although we often discuss mindful in terms of how we can be open, kind, and curious with ourselves, it's also important to extend that same framework when we are interacting with people from other cultures. So much of mindful relationships is embodying the right attitude during our interactions with others.

Overall, the goal of mindful intercultural interactions is to be present in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. When you face judgments, recognize them, and ask yourself where they have come from. Interrogate those judgments. At the same time, don't judge yourself for having these ideas. If we have stereotypes about another a specific culture, it's important to recognize those stereotypes, call them out, understand where they came from in the first place, and examine them for factualness.

For example, imagine you're talking to someone from the Republic of Kiribati. Chances are, you've probably never heard of the Republic of Kiribati, but it's a real country in Oceania. But let's say all you know about the people from the Republic of Kiribati is that they like European-style football. During your interaction, you say, "So, what's your favorite football team?" In this moment, you've taken the one stereotype you had and used it to help engage in an interaction. However, if the person comes back and says, "I really don't care. Sports just aren't my thing." How do you respond? First, recognize that you attempted to use a stereotype that you had and call it out for what it was. That doesn't make you a bad person, but we must learn from these encounters and broaden our world views. Second, call out the stereotype in your mind. Before that moment, you may not have even realized that you had a stereotype of people from the Republic of Kiribati. Labeling our stereotypes of other people is important because it helps us recognize them faster, the more we engage in this type of mindful behavior. Third, figure out where that stereotype came from. Maybe you had been in New Zealand and saw a match on the television and saw the Kiribati national football team. In that one moment, you learned a tiny bit about an entire country and pocketed it away for future use. Sometimes it's easy to figure out where our stereotypes evolved from, but sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in us through our own culture that it's hard to really figure out their origin. Lastly, it's time to realize that your stereotype may not be that factual. At the same time, you may have found the one resident of the Republic of Kiribati who doesn't like football. We can often make these determinations by talking to the other person.

At the same time, it's important also to be mindfully open to the other person's stereotypes of people within your own culture. For example, someone from the Republic of Kiribati may have a stereotype that Americans know nothing about football (other than American football). If you're a fan of what we in the U.S. call soccer, then you correct that stereotype or at least provide that person a more

nuanced understanding of your own culture. Sure, American football still is the king of sports in the U.S., but media trends for watching football (soccer) are growing, and more and more Americans are becoming fans.

Table 6.2 Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with your perception. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5

1. When I'm interacting with someone from a differing culture, I know when I use my knowledge of that person's culture during my interactions.
2. When I interact with someone from a culture I know nothing about, I have no problem adjusting my perspective of their culture while we talk.
3. During intercultural interactions, I am well aware of the cultural knowledge I utilize.
4. I always check my knowledge of someone from another culture to ensure that my understanding of their culture is accurate.
5. During my intercultural interactions, I try to be mindful of how my perceptions of someone's culture are either consistent with or differ from reality.
6. I pride myself on knowing a lot about other people's cultures.
7. I understand the social, economic, and political systems of other cultures.
8. I know about other cultures' religious beliefs and values.
9. I understand how daily life is enacted in other cultures.
10. I know the importance of paintings, literature, and other forms of art in other cultures.
11. I enjoy reaching out and engaging in an intercultural encounter.
12. I would have no problem socializing with people from a new culture.
13. Although intercultural encounters often involve stress, I don't mind the stress because meeting people from new cultures makes it worth it.
14. I would have no problems accustoming myself to the routines of another culture.
15. I enjoy being with people from other cultures and getting to know them.
16. I know how to interact verbally with people from different cultures.
17. I know how to interact nonverbally with people from different cultures.
18. I can vary my rate of speech if an intercultural encounter requires it.
19. I can easily alter my behaviors to suit the needs of an intercultural encounter.
20. I can alter my facial expressions if an intercultural encounter requires it.

Scoring To compute your scores follow the instructions below:
Add items 1-5 (Intercultural Understanding) =
Add items 6-10 (Intercultural Knowledge) =
Add items 7-15 (Intercultural Motivation) =
Add items 16-20 (Intercultural Behavior) =

Interpretation
Scores for each of the four factors (intercultural understanding, intercultural knowledge, intercultural motivation, and intercultural behavior) can be added together to get a composite score. Each of the four factors exists on a continuum from 5 (not culturally intelligent) to 25 (highly culturally intelligent). An average person would score between 12-18.

Based On:
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xxxi Ibid.

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Chapter 3
Interpersonal Communication and the Self

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

Self-Concept, Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

Self-Concept

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

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

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. **Social comparison** theory states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference.[ii]

In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn't appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic

ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

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

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

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self- concept. While self-

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

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

Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy refers to the judgments people make about their ability to perform a task within a specific context.[vi] Judgments about our self- efficacy influence our self-esteem, which influences our self-concept. The following example illustrates these interconnections.

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

The verbal and nonverbal feedback we get from people affect our feelings of self- efficacy and

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

   Self-discrepancy theory states that people have beliefs about and expectations for their actual and potential selves that do not always match up with what they actually experience. [viii] To understand this theory, we have to understand the different "selves" that make up our self-concept, which are the actual, ideal, and ought selves. The **actual self** consists of the attributes that you or someone else believes you actually possess. The **ideal self** consists of the attributes that you or someone else would like you to possess. The **ought self** consists of the attributes you or someone else believes you should possess. These different selves can conflict with each other in various combinations. Discrepancies between the actual and ideal/ought selves can be motivating in some ways and prompt people to act for self-improvement. For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so. Discrepancies between the ideal and ought selves can be especially stressful. For example, many professional women who are also mothers have an ideal view of self that includes professional success and advancement. They may also have an ought self that includes a sense of duty and obligation to be a fulltime mother. The actual self may be someone who does OK at both but doesn't quite live up to the expectations of either. These discrepancies do not just create cognitive unease—they also lead to emotional, behavioral, and communicative changes.

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

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

   When our actual self doesn't match up with what we think other people think we should obtain, we are not living up to the ought self that we think others have constructed for us, which can lead to feelings of agitation, feeling threatened, and fearing potential punishment. For example, if your parents think you should follow in their footsteps and take over the family business, but your actual self wants to go into the military, then you may be unsure of what to do and fear being isolated from the family. Finally, when our actual self doesn't match up with what we think we should obtain, we are not meeting what we see as our duties or obligations, which can lead to feelings of agitation including guilt, weakness, and a feeling that we have fallen short of our moral standard.[ix] For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so due to the guilt of reading about the increasing number of animals being housed at the facility. The following is a review of the four potential discrepancies between selves:

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

Influences on Self-Perception

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

Social and Family Influences

Various forces help socialize us into our respective social and cultural groups and play a powerful role in presenting us with options about who we can be. While we may like to think that our self-perception starts with a blank canvas, our perceptions are limited by our experiences and various social and cultural contexts. Parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self.[x] In the past few years, however, there has been a public discussion and debate about how much positive reinforcement people should give to others, especially children. The following questions have been raised: Do we have current and upcoming generations that have been overpraised? Is the praise given warranted? What are the positive and negative effects of praise? What is the end goal of the praise? Let's briefly look at this discussion and its connection to self-perception.

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

be happy despite the effort and sacrifices made. Extrinsic motivation dies when the reward stops. Additionally, too much praise can lead people to have a misguided sense of their abilities. College professors who are reluctant to fail students who produce failing work may be setting those students up to be shocked when their supervisor critiques their abilities or output once they get into a professional context.[xi]

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

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

Culture

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

Race also plays a role in self-perception. For example, positive self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to be higher in African American adolescent girls than Caucasian girls.[xvi] In fact, more recent studies have discounted much of the early research on race and self-esteem that purported that African Americans of all ages have lower self-esteem than whites. Self-perception becomes more complex when we consider biracial individuals—more specifically those born to couples comprising an African American and a white parent.[xvii] In such cases, it is challenging for biracial individuals to embrace both

of their heritages, and social comparison becomes more difficult due to diverse and sometimes conflicting reference groups. Since many biracial individuals identify as and are considered African American by society, living and working within a black community can help foster more positive self-perceptions in these biracial individuals. Such a community offers a more nurturing environment and a buffer zone from racist attitudes but simultaneously distances biracial individuals from their white identity. Conversely, immersion into a predominantly white community and separation from a black community can lead biracial individuals to internalize negative views of people of color and perhaps develop a sense of inferiority. Gender intersects with culture and biracial identity to create different experiences and challenges for biracial men and women. Biracial men have more difficulty accepting their potential occupational limits, especially if they have white fathers, and biracial women have difficulty accepting their black features, such as hair and facial features. All these challenges lead to a sense of being marginalized from both ethnic groups and interfere in the development of positive self-esteem and a stable self-concept.

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

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

Media

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

Researchers have found that only 12 percent of prime-time characters are overweight, which is dramatically less than the national statistics for obesity among the actual US population.[xxi] Further, an analysis of how weight is discussed on prime-time sitcoms found that heavier female characters were often the targets of negative comments and jokes that audience members responded to with laughter. Conversely, positive comments about women's bodies were related to their thinness. In short, the heavier the character, the more negative the comments, and the thinner the character, the more positive the comments. The same researchers analyzed sitcoms for content regarding male characters' weight and found that although comments regarding their weight were made, they were fewer in number and not as

negative, ultimately supporting the notion that overweight male characters are more accepted in media than overweight female characters. Much more attention has been paid in recent years to the potential negative effects of such narrow media representations.

In terms of self-concept, media representations offer us guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable and valued or not valued in our society. Mediated messages, in general, reinforce cultural stereotypes related to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and class. People from historically marginalized groups must look much harder than those in the dominant groups to find positive representations of their identities in media. As a critical thinker, it is important to question media messages and to examine who is included and who is excluded. Advertising in particular encourages people to engage in social comparison, regularly communicating to us that we are inferior because we lack a certain product or that we need to change some aspect of our life to keep up with and be similar to others. For example, for many years advertising targeted to women instilled in them a fear of having a dirty house, selling them products that promised to keep their house clean, make their family happy, and impress their friends and neighbors. Now messages tell us to fear becoming old or unattractive, selling products to keep our skin tight and clear, which will in turn make us happy and popular.

Beware of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

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

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

Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication

Have you ever said too much on a first date? At a job interview? To a professor? Have you ever posted something on Facebook only to return later to remove it? When self-disclosure works out well, it can

have positive effects for interpersonal relationships. Conversely, self-disclosure that does not work out well can lead to embarrassment, lower self-esteem, and relationship deterioration or even termination. As with all other types of communication, increasing your competence regarding self-disclosure can have many positive effects.

So what is self-disclosure? It could be argued that any verbal or nonverbal communication reveals something about the self. The clothes we wear, a laugh, or an order at the drive-through may offer glimpses into our personality or past, but they are not necessarily self-disclosure. Self- disclosure is purposeful disclosure of personal information to another person. If I purposefully wear the baseball cap of my favorite team to reveal my team loyalty to a new friend, then this clothing choice constitutes self-disclosure. Self-disclosure doesn't always have to be deep to be useful or meaningful. Superficial self-disclosure, often in the form of "small talk," is key in initiating relationships that then move onto more personal levels of self-disclosure. Telling a classmate your major or your hometown during the first week of school carries relatively little risk but can build into a friendship that lasts beyond the class.

Theories of Self-Disclosure

In 1973, Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor were interested in discovering how individuals become closer to each other.[xxiv] They believed that the method of self-disclosure was similar to social penetration and hence created the **social penetration theory**. This theory helps to explain how individuals gradually become more intimate based on their communication behaviors. According to the social penetration theory, relationships begin when individuals share non-intimate layers and move to more intimate layers of personal information.[xxv]

Altman and Taylor believed that individuals discover more about others through self-disclosure. How people comprehend others on a deeper level helps us also gain a better understanding of ourselves. The researchers believe that penetration happens gradually. The scholars describe their theory visually like an onion with many rings or levels.[xxvi] A person's personality is like an onion because it has many layers. We have an outer layer that everyone can see (e.g., hair color or height), and we have very personal layers that people cannot see (e.g., our dreams and career aspirations). Three factors affect what people chose to disclose.

The first is personal characteristics (e.g., introverted or extraverted). The second is the possibility of any reward or cost with disclosing to the other person (e.g., information might have repercussions if the receiver does not like or agree with you). And the third is the situational context (e.g., telling your romantic partner that you want to terminate the relationship on your wedding day).

When people first meet each other, they start from their outer rings and slowly move towards the core. The researchers described how people typically would go through various stages to become closer. The first stage is called the orientation stage, where people communicate on very superficial matters like the weather. The next stage is the exploratory affective stage, where people will disclose more about their feelings about normal topics like favorite foods or movies. Many of our friendships remain at this stage. The third stage is more personal and called the affective stage, where people engage in more private topics. The fourth stage is the stable stage, where people will share their most intimate details. The last stage is not obligatory and does not necessarily happen in every relationship, it is the depenetration stage, where people start to decrease their disclosures.

Social penetration theory also contains two different aspects. The first aspect is breadth, which refers to what topics individuals are willing to talk about with others. For instance, some people do not like to talk about religion and politics because it is considered inappropriate. The second aspect is depth, which refers to how deep a person is willing to go in discussing certain topics. For example, some people don't mind sharing information about themselves in regards to their favorite things. Still, they

may not be willing to share their most private thoughts about themselves because it is too personal. The researchers believe that by self-disclosing to others both in breadth and depth, then it could lead to more relational closeness.
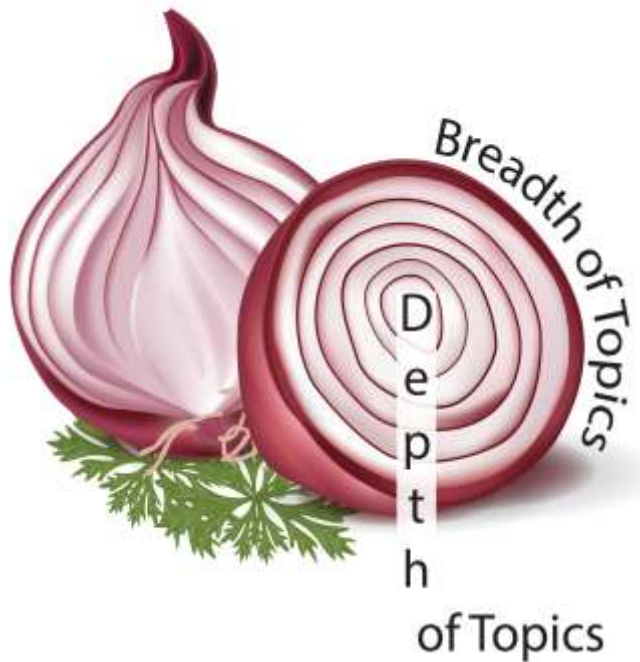
Figure 3.1 Social Penetration Model

Social penetration theory states that as we get to know someone, we engage in a reciprocal process of self-disclosure that changes in breadth and depth and affects how a relationship develops. Depth refers to how personal or sensitive the information is, and breadth refers to the range of topics discussed.[xxvii] You may recall Shrek's declaration that ogres are like onions in the movie Shrek. While certain circumstances can lead to a rapid increase in the depth and/or breadth of self-disclosure, the theory states that in most relationships people gradually penetrate through the layers of each other's personality like we peel the layers from an onion.

The theory also argues that people in a relationship balance needs that are sometimes in tension, which is a dialectic. Balancing a dialectic is like walking a tightrope. You have to lean to one side and eventually lean to another side to keep yourself balanced and prevent falling. The constant back and forth allows you to stay balanced, even though you may not always be even, or standing straight up. One of the key dialectics that must be negotiated is the tension between openness and closedness.[xxviii] We want to make ourselves open to others, through self-disclosure, but we also want to maintain a sense of privacy.

We may also engage in self-disclosure for the purposes of **social comparison**. As discussed earlier, social comparison theory states that we evaluate ourselves based on how we compare with others.[xxix]

We may disclose information about our intellectual aptitude or athletic abilities to see how we relate to others. This type of comparison helps us decide whether we are superior or inferior to others in a particular area. Disclosures about abilities or talents can also lead to self-validation if the person to whom we disclose reacts positively. By disclosing information about our beliefs and values, we can determine if they are the same as or different from others. Last, we may disclose fantasies or thoughts to another to determine whether they are acceptable or unacceptable. We can engage in social comparison

as the discloser or the receiver of disclosures, which may allow us to determine whether or not we are interested in pursuing a relationship with another person.

The final theory of self-disclosure that we will discuss is the **Johari Window**, which is named after its creators Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham.[xxx] The Johari Window can be applied to a variety of interpersonal interactions in order to help us understand what parts of ourselves are open, hidden, blind, and unknown. To help understand the concept, think of a window with four panes. As you can see in Figure 3.1 "Johari Window", one axis of the window represents things that are known to us, and the other axis represents things that are known to others. The upper left pane contains open information that is known to us and to others. The amount of information that is openly known to others varies based on relational context. When you are with close friends, there is probably a lot of information already in the open pane, and when you are with close family, there is also probably a lot of information in the open pane. The information could differ, though, as your family might know much more about your past and your friends more about your present. Conversely, there isn't much information in the open pane when we meet someone for the first time, aside from what the other person can guess based on our nonverbal communication and appearance.
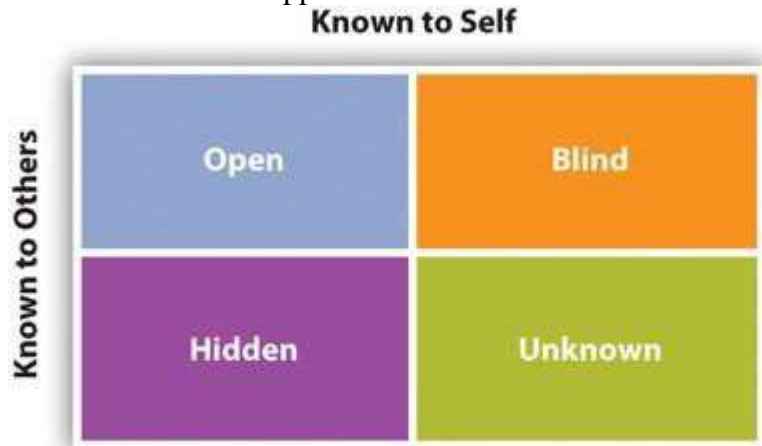
Figure 3.2 Johari Window. Source: Joseph Luft, Of Human Interaction (Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books, 1969).

The bottom left pane contains hidden information that is known to us but not to others. As we are getting to know someone, we engage in self-disclosure and move information from the "hidden" to the "open" pane. By doing this, we decrease the size of our hidden area and increase the size of our open area, which increases our shared reality. The reactions that we get from people as we open up to them help us form our self-concepts and also help determine the trajectory of the relationship. If the person reacts favorably to our disclosures and reciprocates disclosure, then the cycle of disclosure continues and a deeper relationship may be forged.

The upper right pane contains information that is known to others but not to us. For example, we may be unaware of the fact that others see us as pushy or as a leader. Looking back to self- discrepancy theory, we can see that people who have a disconnect between how they see themselves and how others see them may have more information in their blind pane. Engaging in perception checking and soliciting feedback from others can help us learn more about our blind area.

The bottom right pane represents our unknown area, as it contains information not known to ourselves or others. To become more self-aware, we must solicit feedback from others to learn more about our blind pane, but we must also explore the unknown pane. To discover the unknown, we have to

get out of our comfort zones and try new things. We have to pay attention to the things that excite or scare us and investigate them more to see if we can learn something new about ourselves. By being more aware of what is contained in each of these panes and how we can learn more about each one, we can more competently engage in self-disclosure and use this process to enhance our interpersonal relationships.

Self-Disclosure and Social Media

Facebook and Twitter are undoubtedly dominating the world of online social networking, and the willingness of many users to self-disclose personal information ranging from moods to religious affiliation, relationship status, and personal contact information has led to an increase in privacy concerns. Facebook and Twitter offer convenient opportunities to stay in touch with friends, family, and coworkers, but are people using them responsibly? Some argue that there are fundamental differences between today's digital natives, whose private and public selves are intertwined through these technologies, and older generations. Even though some colleges are offering seminars on managing privacy online, we still hear stories of self-disclosure gone wrong, such as the football player from the University of Texas who was kicked off the team for posting racist comments about the president or the student who was kicked out of his private, Christian college after a picture of him dressed in drag surfaced on Facebook. However, social media experts say these cases are rare and that most students are aware of who can see what they're posting and the potential consequences. The issue of privacy management on Facebook is affecting parent-child relationships, too, and as the website "Oh Crap. My Parents Joined Facebook." shows, the results can sometimes be embarrassing for the college student and the parent as they balance the dialectic between openness and closeness once the child has moved away.

The Process of Self-Disclosure

There are many decisions that go into the process of self-disclosure. We have many types of information we can disclose, but we have to determine whether or not we will proceed with disclosure by considering the situation and the potential risks. Then we must decide when, where, and how to disclose. Since all these decisions will affect our relationships, we will examine each one in turn.

Four main categories for disclosure include observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs.[xxxi] Observations include what we have done and experienced. For example, I could tell you that I live in a farmhouse in Illinois. If I told you that I think my move from the city to the country was a good decision, I would be sharing my thoughts, because I included a judgment about my experiences. Sharing feelings includes expressing an emotion—for example, "I'm happy to wake up every morning and look out at the corn fields. I feel lucky." Last, we may communicate needs or wants by saying something like "My best friend is looking for a job, and I really want him to move here, too." We usually begin disclosure with observations and thoughts and then move onto feelings and needs as the relationship progresses. There are some exceptions to this. For example, we are more likely to disclose deeply in crisis situations, and we may also disclose more than usual with a stranger if we do not think we'll meet the person again or do not share social networks. Although we don't often find ourselves in crisis situations, you may recall scenes from movies or television shows where people who are trapped in an elevator or stranded after a plane crash reveal their deepest feelings and desires. I imagine that we have all been in a situation where we said more about ourselves to a stranger than we normally would. To better understand why, let's discuss some of the factors that influence our decision to disclose. Generally speaking, some people are naturally more transparent and willing to self- disclose, while others are more opaque and hesitant to reveal personal information.[xxxii] Interestingly, recent research

suggests that the pervasiveness of reality television, much of which includes participants who are very willing to disclose personal information, has led to a general trend among reality television viewers to engage in self-disclosure through other mediated means such as blogging and video sharing.xxxiii Whether it is online or face-to-face, there are other reasons for disclosing or not, including self-focused, other-focused, interpersonal, and situational reasons.[xxxiv]

Self-focused reasons for disclosure include having a sense of relief or catharsis, clarifying or correcting information, or seeking support. Self-focused reasons for not disclosing include fear of rejection and loss of privacy. In other words, we may disclose to get something off our chest in hopes of finding relief, or we may not disclose out of fear that the other person may react negatively to our revelation. Other-focused reasons for disclosure include a sense of responsibility to inform or educate. Other-focused reasons for not disclosing include feeling like the other person will not protect the information. If someone mentions that their car wouldn't start this morning and you disclose that you are good at working on cars, you've disclosed to help out the other person. On the other side, you may hold back disclosure about your new relationship from your coworker because he or she's known to be loose-lipped with other people's information. Interpersonal reasons for disclosure involve desires to maintain a trusting and intimate relationship. Interpersonal reasons for not disclosing include fear of losing the relationship or deeming the information irrelevant to the particular relationship. Your decision to disclose an affair in order to be open with your partner and hopefully work through the aftermath together or withhold that information out of fear he or she will leave you is based on interpersonal reasons. Finally, situational reasons may be the other person being available, directly asking a question, or being directly involved in or affected by the information being disclosed. Situational reasons for not disclosing include the person being unavailable, a lack of time to fully discuss the information, or the lack of a suitable (i.e., quiet, private) place to talk. For example, finding yourself in a quiet environment where neither person is busy could lead to disclosure, while a house full of company may not.

Deciding when to disclose something in a conversation may not seem as important as deciding whether or not to disclose at all. But deciding to disclose and then doing it at an awkward time in a conversation could lead to negative results. As far as timing goes, you should consider whether to disclose the information early, in the middle, or late in a conversation.[xxxv] If you get something off your chest early in a conversation, you may ensure that there's plenty of time to discuss the issue and that you don't end up losing your nerve. If you wait until the middle of the conversation, you have some time to feel out the other person's mood and set up the tone for your disclosure. For example, if you meet up with your roommate to tell her that you're planning on moving out and she starts by saying, "I've had the most terrible day!" the tone of the conversation has now shifted, and you may not end up making your disclosure. If you start by asking her how she's doing, and things seem to be going well, you may be more likely to follow through with the disclosure. You may choose to disclose late in a conversation if you're worried about the person's reaction. If you know they have an appointment or you have to go to class at a certain time, disclosing just before that time could limit your immediate exposure to any negative reaction. However, if the person doesn't have a negative reaction, they could still become upset because they don't have time to discuss the disclosure with you.

Sometimes self-disclosure is unplanned. Someone may ask you a direct question or disclose personal information, which leads you to reciprocate disclosure. In these instances, you may not manage your privacy well because you haven't had time to think through any potential risks. In the case of a direct question, you may feel comfortable answering, you may give an indirect or general answer, or you may feel enough pressure or uncertainty to give a dishonest answer. If someone unexpectedly discloses, you may feel the need to reciprocate by also disclosing something personal. If you're uncomfortable doing this, you can still provide support for the other person by listening and giving advice or feedback.

Once you've decided when and where to disclose information to another person, you need to figure out the best channel to use. Face-to-face disclosures may feel more genuine or intimate given the shared physical presence and ability to receive verbal and nonverbal communication. There is also an opportunity for immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback, such as asking follow- up questions or demonstrating support or encouragement through a hug. The immediacy of a face- to-face encounter also means you have to deal with the uncertainty of the reaction you'll get. If the person reacts negatively, you may feel uncomfortable, pressured to stay, or even fearful. If you choose a mediated channel such as an e-mail or a letter, text, note, or phone call, you may seem less genuine or personal, but you have more control over the situation in that you can take time to carefully choose your words, and you do not have to immediately face the reaction of the other person. This can be beneficial if you fear a negative or potentially violent reaction. Another disadvantage of choosing a mediated channel, however, is the loss of nonverbal communication that can add much context to a conversation. Although our discussion of the choices involved in self-disclosure so far have focused primarily on the discloser, self- disclosure is an interpersonal process that has much to do with the receiver of the disclosure.

Effects of Disclosure on the Relationship

The process of self-disclosure is circular. An individual self-discloses, the recipient of the disclosure reacts, and the original discloser processes the reaction. How the receiver interprets and responds to the disclosure are key elements of the process. Part of the response results from the receiver's attribution (reason) of the cause of the disclosure, which may include dispositional, situational, and interpersonal attributions.[xxxvi]

Let's say your coworker discloses that she thinks the new boss got his promotion because of favoritism instead of merit. You may make a dispositional attribution that connects the cause of her disclosure to her personality by thinking, for example, that she is outgoing, inappropriate for the workplace, or fishing for information. If the personality trait to which you attribute the disclosure is positive, then your reaction to the disclosure is more likely to be positive. **Situational attributions** identify the cause of a disclosure with the context or surroundings in which it takes place. For example, you may attribute your coworker's disclosure to the fact that you agreed to go to lunch with her. **Interpersonal attributions** identify the relationship between sender and receiver as the cause of the disclosure. So if you attribute your coworker's comments to the fact that you are best friends at work, you think your unique relationship caused the disclosure. If the receiver's primary attribution is interpersonal, relational intimacy and closeness will likely be reinforced more than if the attribution is dispositional or situational, because the receiver feels like they were specially chosen to receive the information.

The receiver's role doesn't end with attribution and response. There may be added burdens if the information shared with you is a secret. As was noted earlier, there are clear risks involved in self-disclosure of intimate or potentially stigmatizing information if the receiver of the disclosure fails to keep that information secure. As the receiver of a secret, you may feel the need to unburden yourself from the co- ownership of the information by sharing it with someone else.[xxxvii] This is not always a bad thing. You may strategically tell someone who is removed from the social network of the person who told you the secret to keep the information secure. Although unburdening yourself can be a relief, sometimes people tell secrets they were entrusted to keep for less productive reasons. A research study of office workers found that 77 percent of workers that received a disclosure and were told not to tell anyone else told at least two other people by the end of the day![xxxviii] They reported doing so to receive attention for having inside information or to demonstrate their power or connection. Needless to say, spreading someone's private disclosure without permission for personal gain does not demonstrate

communication competence.

When the cycle of disclosure ends up going well for the discloser, there is likely to be a greater sense of relational intimacy and self-worth, and there are also positive psychological effects such as reduced stress and increased feelings of social support.

Self-disclosure can also have effects on physical health. Spouses of suicide or accidental death victims who did not disclose information to their friends were more likely to have more health problems such as weight change and headaches and suffer from more intrusive thoughts about the death than those who did talk with friends.[xxxix]

Alternatives to Self-Disclosure

So, if you don't want to self-disclose to others, what are some techniques that you can use? First, you can use deception. Sometimes people lie simply to avoid conflict. This is true in cases where the person may become extremely upset. They can lie to gain power or to save face. They can also lie to guide the interaction. Of course, there is also the benevolent lie (sometimes called a "white" lie). This is the lie done to save someone else's face. It's not done to help oneself but to avoid hurting someone else. Imagine, for example, your grandma bakes you cookies and is so happy that she is able to give them to you, but you don't actually like cookies. Do you tell her that or do you lie and tell her you're so happy she made them for you?

Second, you can equivocate. This means you don't answer the question or provide your comments. Rather, you simply restated what they said differently. For instance, Sally says, "how do you like my new dress?", you can say "Wow! That's a new outfit!" In this case, you don't provide how you feel, and you don't disclose your opinion. You only offer the information that has been provided to you.

Third, you can hint. Perhaps, you don't want to lie or equivocate to someone you care about. You might use indirect or face-saving comments. For example, if your roommate has not helped you clean your apartment, you might say things like, "It sure is messy in here" or "This place could really use some cleaning."

A fourth alternative is silence. Simply not saying anything at all.

Impression Management

How we perceive ourselves manifests in how we present ourselves to others. Impression management is the process of strategically concealing or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions.[xl] We engage in this process daily and for different reasons. Sociologist Erving Goffman, in his seminal 1959 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, really opened up the conversation about impression management, which he called "facework" with the idea that impression management is about figuring out the "face" you want to present to the world. Goffman also noted that we are all essentially performers on a stage, adjusting our performance to help shape how others see and respond to us.

Although people occasionally intentionally deceive others in the process of managing impressions, in general we try to make a good impression while still remaining authentic. Since impression management helps meet our practical, relational, and identity needs, we stand to lose quite a bit if we are caught intentionally misrepresenting ourselves. In May of 2012, Yahoo!'s CEO resigned after it became known that he stated on official documents that he had two college degrees when he actually only had one. In a similar incident, a woman who had long served as the dean of admissions for the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology was dismissed from her position after it was learned that she had only attended one year of college and had falsely indicated she had a bachelor's and

master's degree.[xli] Such incidents clearly show that although people can get away with such false impression management for a while, the eventual consequences of being found out are dire. As communicators, we sometimes engage in more subtle forms of inauthentic impression management. For example, a person may state or imply that they know more about a subject or situation than they actually do in order to seem smart or "in the loop." During a speech, a speaker works on a polished and competent delivery to distract from a lack of substantive content. These cases of strategic impression management may not ever be found out, but communicators should still avoid them as they do not live up to the standards of ethical communication.

Consciously and competently engaging in impression management can have benefits because we can provide others with a more positive and accurate picture of who we are. People who are skilled at impression management are typically more engaging and confident, which allows others to pick up on more cues from which to form impressions.[xlii] Being a skilled impression manager draws on many of the practices used by competent communicators, including becoming a higher self-monitor. When impression management skills and self- monitoring skills combine, communicators can simultaneously monitor their own expressions, the reaction of others, and the situational and social context.[xliii] Sometimes people get help with their impression management. Although most people can't afford or wouldn't think of hiring an image consultant, some people have started generously donating their impression management expertise to help others. Many people who have been riding the tough job market for a year or more get discouraged and may consider giving up on their job search. Now a project called "Style Me Hired" has started offering free makeovers to jobless people in order to offer them new motivation and help them make favorable impressions and hopefully get a job offer.[xliv]

Characteristics of Impression Management

Based on Goffman's work as well as our own experience and the research that has been done since Goffman's time, we there are a few characteristics we can identify with impression management[xlv]. For example, we know that we have more than one "face" that we present to the world. For example, you may have one face you use as a student, another as an employee, another as a friend, and so on. At the core of your being, though, you do have a sense of who you are, how you perceive yourself, which we know is our self-concept. Of course, there will be elements of your self-concept in the faces you present to the world, but as discussed in the previous disclosure section, you may not choose to share all of who you are with everyone you meet.

Another characteristic relates to Goffman's comparison to people as performers with respect to impression management. As we are responding to and/or attempting to influence how others see us, impression management involves a partnership with those around us. For example, if a person wears a new outfit and no one comments on it, they might think that no one liked it and thus not wear it again. Conversely, if they receive many compliments on the outfit, they may wear it more often as well as buy other clothes in a similar style. We can see this happening on social media, too, when people post on their account. If the post receives little attention, they might delete it or not post similar to that again. But if a post is successful, particularly if it goes viral, it is likely the person will attempt to post similar posts in the future.

Of course, just as is true with communication in general, our impression management can be intentional or unintentional. Carefully choosing what to wear for a job interview is an intentional form of impression management. Not realizing that the joke you just told was offensive to some of the people who heard it would be an unintentional form of impression management. This also connects back to the Johari Window model as unintentional impression management would be in the blind area. Whereas intentional impression management would be in the open or hidden areas. I added hidden because those

around you might not be aware of how much effort went into your impression management or how important their impression of you is to you. Several years ago, a student shared how his sister spent twenty minutes taking a selfie to post on her Instagram account. When she posted it, though, she captioned it, "Just woke up and snapped this picture!" She wanted her audience to believe she had just taken a quick picture, but the reality was she carefully selected the picture she posted.

Categories of Impression Management

There are three categories of how we manage others' impressions of us: manner, appearance, and setting[xlvi].

Manner

Manner refers to our words and actions. The words we choose to use and how we speak them are manner. Years ago, I excitedly told someone about a new book about acting I had read by Uta Hagen. I had only seen the author's name written, not heard it pronounced so I said her name as "You-Ta Hāg-en". The person I was speaking with, who was very kind not to make fun of me, said, "Oh, I've also heard it pronounced "U-ta Hog-en". Of course his pronunciation was correct. But my mispronunciation created an unintentional impression about me, specifically about my education level.

We'll talk more about manner in the nonverbal communication chapter (chapter 6) when we look at how we convey meaning through not just the words we use, but how we say them. That includes tone, volume, rate, pronunciation, accent, and emphasis. It also includes, when we think of actions, our posture, gestures, and distance (including the use of personal space). All of these convey more than meaning, they also create impressions in the minds of those who are perceiving our words and our actions.

Appearance

Appearance refers to our clothing and other aspects of our personal appearance. What you wear, how you style your hair, whether or not you wear make-up, these are all a part of your appearance and influences how people perceive you. This is something, too, that we'll talk more about in the nonverbal communication chapter.

Appearance conveys more than just a look, it also can convey meaning. For example, wearing a Yankees t-shirt shows that you are a fan of the team. A friend from graduate school was originally from Boston. She would wear her Boston Red Sox t-shirt in New York City even though the Red Sox are rivals of the Yankees. Sometimes she'd get second looks or even snarky comments from New Yorkers, but still she proudly supported her team. In the days following the Boston Marathon bombing, when she wore her Red Sox shirt in NYC, she said people stopped to offer their condolences to her knowing that she was likely from Boston if she was wearing the shirt here. A different sentiment that people only knew to convey based on her clothing.

Sometimes we may not think much about our appearance. Indeed, whenever I ask the question in my classes about who carefully picked out the outfit they wore to class that day, I'm lucky if one or two students raise their hand. But other times we give quite a bit of attention to our appearance. A date, for example, or a formal event such as a wedding or graduation. Job interviews are another time when a person will carefully dress for the job they want. A student once shared that her brother, who had recently graduated from college and wanted a job working in business, would wear a suit and carry a briefcase to his job interviews. She said she looked in the briefcase and all it had in it were copies of his resume and a banana.

Setting

Setting is how we decorate our homes and offices as well as refers to the cars we drive. Indeed, the material objects and people that surround a person influence our perception. The link between environmental cues and perception is important enough for many companies to create policies about what can and can't be displayed in personal office spaces. It would seem odd for a bank manager to have an *Animal House* poster hanging in his office, and that would influence customers' perceptions of the manager's personality and credibility. The arrangement of furniture also creates impressions. Walking into a meeting and sitting on one end of a long boardroom table is typically less inviting than sitting at a round table or on a sofa.

Think about the places you claim as your own – your home, an office, your car. Do they reflect who you are? Does your space invite people in or make them feel unwelcome? This, too, is something we'll talk more about in the nonverbal communication chapter.

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Chapter 4
Perception and Interpersonal Communication

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

As you can see from the picture (Figure 4.1), how you view something is also how you will describe and define it. Your perception of something will determine how you feel about it and how you will communicate about it.
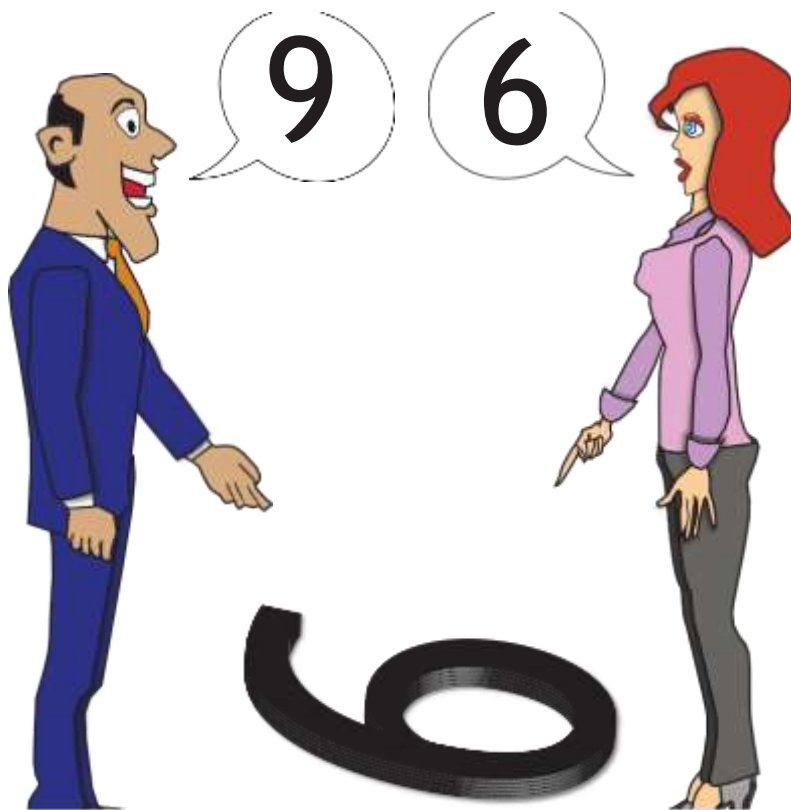
Figure 4.1 It's All About Perception

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

Sometimes the silliest arguments occur with others because we don't understand their perceptions of things. Just like the illustration shows, it is important to make sure that you see things the same way that the other person does. In other words, put yourself in their shoes and see it from their perspective before jumping to conclusions or getting upset. That person might have a legitimate reason why they are not willing to concede with you.

Perception Process

Many of our problems in the world occur due to perception, or the process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information that comes in through your five senses. When we don't get all the facts, it is hard to make a concrete decision. We have to rely on our perceptions to understand the situation. In this chapter, you will learn tools that can help you understand perceptions and improve your communication skills. As you will see in many of the illustrations on perception, people can see different things. In some of the pictures, some might only be able to see one picture, but there might be others who can see both images, and a small amount might be able to see something completely different from the rest of the class.

Many famous artists over the years have played with people's perceptions. Figure 4.2 is an example of three artists' use of twisted perceptions. The first picture was initially created by Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin and is commonly called The Rubin Vase. Essentially, you have what appears to either be a vase (the white part) or two people looking at each other (the black part). This simple image is both two images and neither image at the same time. The second work of art is Charles Allan Gilbert's (1892) painting "All is Vanity." In this painting, you can see a woman sitting staring at herself in the mirror. At the same time, the image is also a giant skull. Lastly, we have William Ely Hill (1915) "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law," which may have been loosely based on an 1888 German postcard. In Hill's painting, you have two different images, one of a young woman and one of an older woman. The painting was initially published in an American humor magazine called Puck. The caption "They are both in this picture — Find them" ran alongside the picture. These visual images are helpful reminders that we don't always perceive things in the same way as those around us. There are often multiple ways to view and understand the same set of events.

When it comes to interpersonal communication, each time you talk to other people, you present a side of yourself. Sometimes this presentation is a true representation of yourself, and other times it may be a fake version of yourself. People present themselves how they want others to see them. Some people present themselves positively on social media, and they have wonderful relationships. Then, their followers or fans get shocked to learn when those images are not true to what is presented. If we only see one side of things, we might be surprised to learn that things are different. In this chapter, we will learn that the perception process has four stages: selecting, organizing, interpreting, and negotiating.
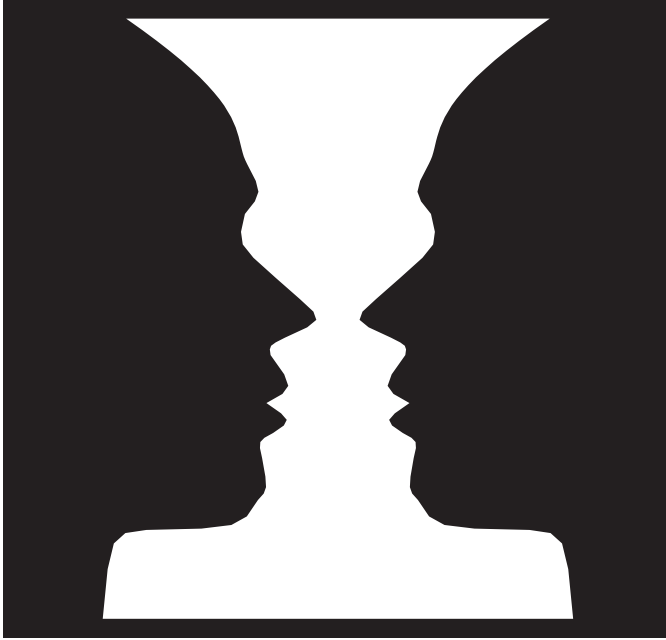
Figure 4.2a The Rubin Vase – based on Edgar John Rubin's (1915) "Vase Ambiguous Figure"
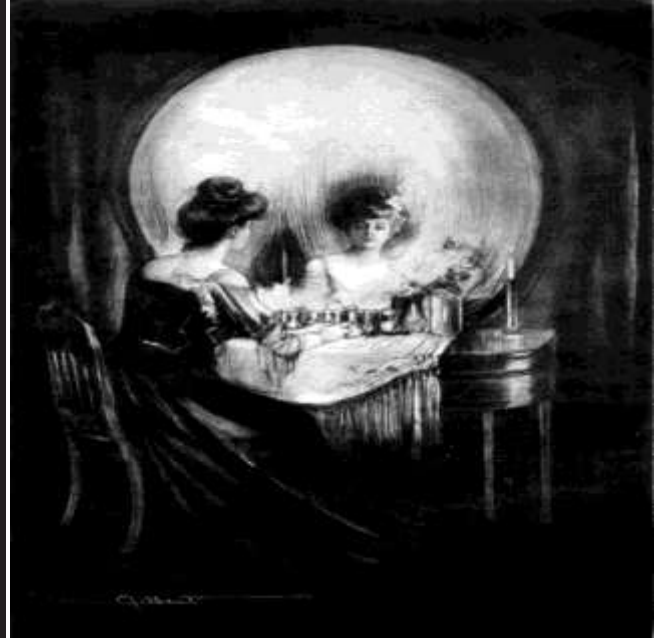
Figure 4.2b Charles Allan Gilbert (1892) "All is Vanity"

Figure 4.2c William Ely Hill (1915) "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law"

Selecting

The first step of the perception process is to select what information you want to pay attention to or focus on, which is called selecting. You will pay attention to things based on how they look, feel, smell, touch, and taste. At every moment, you are obtaining a large amount of information. So, how do you

decide what you want to pay attention to and what you choose to ignore? People will tend to pay attention to things that matter to them. Usually, we pay attention to things that are louder, larger, different, and more complex to what we ordinarily view.

When we focus on a particular thing and ignore other elements, we call it selective perception. For instance, when you are in love, you might pay attention to only that special someone and not notice anything else. The same thing happens when we end a relationship, and we are devasted, we might see how everyone else is in a great relationship, but we aren't.

There are a couple of reasons why you pay attention to certain things more so than others. The first reason why we pay attention to something is because it is extreme or intense. In other words, it stands out of the crowd and captures our attention, like an extremely good-looking person at a party or a big neon sign in a dark, isolated town. We can't help but notice these things because they are exceptional or extraordinary in some way.

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

The third thing that we pay attention to is something that repeats over and over again. Think of a catchy song or a commercial that continually repeats itself. We might be more alert to it since it repeats, compared to something that was only said once.

The fourth thing that we will pay attention to is based on our motives. If we have a motive to find a romantic partner, we might be more perceptive to other attractive people than normal, because we are looking for romantic interests. Another motive might be to lose weight, and you might pay more attention to exercise advertisements and food selection choices compared to someone who doesn't have the motive to lose weight. Our motives influence what we pay attention to and what we ignore.

The last thing that influences our selection process is our emotional state. If we are in an angry mood, then we might be more attentive to things that get us angrier. As opposed to, if we are in a happy mood, then we will be more likely to overlook a lot of negativity because we are already happy. Selecting doesn't involve just paying attention to certain cues. It also means that you might be overlooking other things. For instance, people in love will think their partner is amazing and will overlook a lot of their flaws. This is normal behavior. We are so focused on how wonderful they are that we often will neglect the other negative aspects of their behavior.

Organizing

Look again at the three images in Figure 4.2. What were the first things that you saw when you looked at each picture? Could you see the two different images? Which image was more prominent? When we examine a picture or image, we engage in organizing it in our head to make sense of it and define it. This is an example of organization. After we select the information that we are paying attention to, we have to make sense of it in our brains. This stage of the perception process is referred to as organization. We must understand that the information can be organized in different ways. After we attend to something, our brains quickly want to make sense of this data. We quickly want to understand the information that we are exposed to and organize it in a way that makes sense to us.

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

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

Interpreting

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

We interpret other people's behavior daily. Walking to class, you might see an attractive stranger smiling at you. You could interpret this as a flirtatious behavior or someone just trying to be friendly. Scholars have identified some factors that influence our interpretations:[18]

Personal Experience

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

Another example might be a traumatic relationship break up. You might have had a relational partner that cheated on you and left you with trust issues. You might find another romantic interest, but in the back of your mind, you might be cautious and interpret loving behaviors differently, because you don't want to be hurt again.

Involvement

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

Expectations

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

Assumptions

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

Relational Satisfaction

Fifth, relational satisfaction will make you see things very differently. Relational satisfaction is how satisfied or happy you are with your current relationship. If you are content, then you are more likely to view all your partner's behaviors as thoughtful and kind. However, if you are not satisfied in your relationship, then you are more likely to view their behavior has distrustful or insincere. Research has shown that unhappy couples are more likely to blame their partners when things go wrong compared to happy couples.[19]

Negotiation

The last phase of the perception process is called negotiation. In this phase, people are trying to understand what is happening. People often use narratives or stories to explain and depict their life. For instance, a disagreement between a teacher and student might look very different depending on which perspective you take. The student might perceive that they are hard-working and very studious. The student thinks they deserve a high grade. However, the teacher might feel that their job is to challenge all students to their highest levels and be fair to all students. By listening to both sides, we can better understand what is going on and what needs to be done in certain situations. Think about car accidents and how police officers have to listen to both sides. Police officers have to determine what happened and who is at fault. Sometimes it is not an easy task.

Influences on Perception

All of us don't perceive the same things. One person might find something beautiful, but another person might think it is horrible. When it comes to our perception, there are four primary influences we should understand: physiological, psychological, social, and cultural. There are also some attribution errors that we must be aware of to avoid making mistakes when perceiving situations.

Physiological Influences

Some of the reasons why we don't interpret things, in the same way are due to physiology. Hence, biology has an impact on what we do and do not perceive. In this section, we will discuss the various physiological influences.

1. Senses – Our senses can have an impact on what and where we focus our attention. For instance, if you have a strong sense of smell, you might be more sensitive to a foul-smelling odor compared to someone who cannot smell anything due to sinus problems. Our senses give us a different perception of the world.
2. Age – Age can impact what we perceive. Have you ever noticed that children have so much energy, and the elderly do not? Children may perceive that there is so much to do in a day, and the elderly may perceive that there is nothing to do. Our age influences how we think about things.
3. Health – when we are healthy, we have the stamina and endurance to do many things. However, when we are sick, our bodies may be more inclined to rest. Thus, we will perceive a lot of information differently. For instance, when you are healthy, some of your favorite meals will taste really good, but when you are sick, it might not taste so good, because you cannot smell things due to a stuffy nose.
4. Hunger – When you are hungry, it is tough to concentrate on anything except food. Studies have shown that when people are hungry, all they focus on is something to eat.
5. Biological cycles – Some people are "morning larks" and some are "night owls." In other words, there are peaks where people perform at their highest level. For some individuals, it is late at night, and for others, it is early in the morning. When people perform at their peak times, they are likely to be more perceptive of information. If you are a person who loves getting up early, you would probably hate night classes, because you are not able to absorb as much information as you could if the class was in the morning.

Psychological Influences

Sometimes the influences on perception are not physiological but psychological. These influences include mood and self-concept. These influences are based in our mind, and we can't detect them in others.

1. Mood – Whether we are happy or sad can affect how we view the world. For instance, if we are happy, then anything that happens, we might view it more positively.
2. Self-concept – If we have a healthy self-concept of ourselves, we may not be offended if someone makes a negative remark. Yet, if we have a poor self-concept of ourselves, then we are probably going to be more influenced by negative remarks. The stronger our self-concept is, the more likely it will affect how we view perceive other people's communication behaviors toward us.

Social Influences

Social influences include sex and gender roles, as well as occupational roles. These roles can impact our perceptions. Because we are in these roles, we might be likely to think differently than others in different roles.

1. Sex and gender roles – We have certain expectations in our culture regarding how men and women should behave in public. Women are expected to be more nurturing than men. Moreover, men and women are viewed differently concerning their marital status and age.

2. Occupational roles – Our jobs have an influence on how we perceive the world. If you were a lawyer, you might be more inclined to take action on civil cases than your average member of the public, because you know how to handle these kinds of situations. Moreover, if you are a nurse or medical specialist, you are more likely to perceive the health of other individuals. You would be able to tell if someone needed urgent medical care or not.

Another social influence on perception is known as **Standpoint Theory[ii]**. Quite simply, this theory states that your perspective is influenced by where you stand. In other words, your experience colors your perspective. If, for example, you were raised in an upper class family, you might not understand the challenges many working class families face. This can lead to misinterpretations if you base your interpretation on your own perspective without taking others' perspectives into consideration.

Cultural Influences

In a recent meeting, the boss said, "Remember the Golden Rule," and a coworker from India asked the staff about the meaning of that phrase. He wondered if there was a silver rule or a bronze rule. The reason he didn't understand this concept is due to cultural influences. We know that everyone doesn't perceive things in the same fashion.

In some countries, the elderly are highly respected individuals, where the youth go to for advice and wisdom. Yet, in other countries, the elderly are seen as lazy and worthless. Hence, our culture has an impact on how we perceive the world and others. Communication is different across cultures. Western cultures, like the United States, value talk and view it as very important to function and conduct business. Thus, they do not like silence because it can be perceived as shyness, frustration, and intimidating.[56] Western culture dislikes silence because it is uncomfortable and problematic. Asian cultures have different perceptions of communication. Silence is seen as valuable to reflect on one's thinking. Asians might view someone who is talkative very negatively. Based on this example, we can see that cultural perceptions can lead to problems, because, to an American, silence is considered rude and to an Asian, silence is good. To effectively communicate, we need to understand cultural perceptions.

Attribution Errors

For the purposes of this discussion attribution is simply how we interpret another person's behavior. As you read this section, keep in mind that these attribution errors, as well as the influences discussed in the previous section, apply to how you perceive others and to how others perceive you. Just as others make impressions on us, we make impressions on others. We have already learned how the perception process works in terms of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and negotiating. In this section, we will focus on how we perceive others, with specific attention to how we interpret our perceptions of others in ways that can lead us to make mistakes, if we're not careful.

Fundamental Attribution Error

One of the most common perceptual errors is the fundamental attribution error, which refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions.[iii] For example, when the professor who wrote this part of the chapter worked at an urban college in Denver, Colorado, they often had students come into class irritated, saying, "I got a parking ticket! I can't believe those people. Why don't they get a real job and stop ruining my life!" If you Google some clips from the reality television show *Parking Wars*, you will see the ire that people often direct at parking enforcement officers. In this case, illegally parked students attribute the cause of their situation to the

malevolence of the parking officer, essentially saying they got a ticket because the officer was a mean/bad person, which is an internal attribution. Students were much less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing his or her job (an external attribution) and the ticket was a result of the student's decision to park illegally.

Self-Serving Bias

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

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

First Impressions

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

The old saying "You never get a second chance to make a good impression" points to the fact that first impressions matter. The brain is a predictive organ in that it wants to know, based on previous experiences and patterns, what to expect next, and first impressions function to fill this need, allowing us to determine how we will proceed with an interaction after only a quick assessment of the person with whom we are interacting.[iv] Research shows that people are surprisingly good at making accurate first impressions about how an interaction will unfold and at identifying personality characteristics of people they do not know. Studies show that people are generally able to predict how another person will behave toward them based on an initial interaction. People's accuracy and ability to predict interaction based on

first impressions vary, but people with high accuracy are typically socially skilled and popular and have less loneliness, anxiety, and depression; more satisfying relationships; and more senior positions and higher salaries.[v] So not only do first impressions matter, but having the ability to form accurate first impressions seems to correlate to many other positive characteristics.

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

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

Halo and Horns Effect

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

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

the negative first impression could lead the executive to minimize or ignore those positive characteristics, and the company may not hire her.

When we hold on to a belief after new information comes in that contradicts our initial belief, that is referred to as **confirmation bias**. Just like it sounds, we are confirming our bias. We may not even be aware we're doing it. We simply find a way to make the new information fit into our previous way of thinking. Obviously, this can be dangerous whether we're talking about the halo effect or the horns effect. In the horns effect, we may unduly criticize or continue to treat someone badly based on that initial negative characteristic if we use confirmation bias to misinterpret new information about the person. For example, imagine showing up late for your first day of work because you took the wrong exit. But you apologize and then you make sure to work hard that day and every day that follows as well as show up early or on time every day after that. Hopefully, your boss will see the lateness on the first day as a one-time event and judge your work ethic based on what comes after, the showing up early/on time and doing hard work. But if your boss instead uses the horns effect and decides you are an irresponsible person and likely a poor worker, they may miss out on all that good work. Indeed, if they hold to that first impression through confirmation bias, rather than revise their opinion, you may receive poor evaluations based on an impression rather than your actual work output!

Assuming Others Are Like Us

Another common error we can make is assuming others are like us. This goes back to some of our earlier discussion about the physiological, psychological, social, and cultural influences on perception including standpoint theory. For example, I love the movie *The Joy Luck Club* (based on the Amy Tan novel). Years ago, I convinced my mom to watch it with me. After we finished watching it, she turned to me and asked, "So what was it you liked about that movie?" I thought since I loved it, she'd love it, too. I was wrong. As I discovered, my mom and I have different tastes in movies.

Snap Judgements

Snap judgements are quick decisions we make on a daily basis. They can be made in a moment or over the course of several minutes. Deciding, for example, whether or not to go through a yellow light is an example of a quick snap judgement.

Snap judgements are more accurate when they are based on one's experience and expertise. In other words, if the yellow light is at a traffic stop you travel through a lot and you are familiar with how long it will stay yellow as well as what the other traffic is likely to do, your decision is likely to be safer than if it's your first time at that traffic light. More experienced drivers will also make that decision differently than less experienced drivers will. Years ago, I was driving in a small town in Massachusetts on a rainy Saturday. It was a town I drove in several times a week and I was at a four-way stop in the middle of the busy town center with just two lanes of traffic each way. I needed to make a left turn and there was no left-hand turn signal. The pattern for this light was such that after my green light turned red, all traffic would be stopped for the pedestrians to cross in both directions. And there were a lot of pedestrians. So rather than commit to the turn, as I knew the light was soon to turn from green to yellow, I hung back and, sure enough, the light turned yellow, so I waited to make my turn. I was also driving a rear-wheel-drive car that I knew, on the wet pavement, would likely fishtail if I tried to make the turn fast and I didn't want to risk hitting any pedestrians. As I expected, lots of pedestrians immediately started crossing as soon as the light changed from red and the walk sign came on. I had made a snap judgement to wait for the next time my light would be green, which I knew would happen soon. However, the driver behind me was apparently impatient, as he got out of his car, walked up to mine, and knocked on my window. When I rolled it down a bit, he asked if I planned to go at the next green

light. I quickly explained why I'd waited saying that I hadn't wanted to kill anyone by risking a fast turn. He didn't have a reply to that and walked back to his car. The light then changed, and I made my left turn. I saw in my rear view mirror that he eventually made his left hand turn, as well, although he stayed a few blocks behind me the rest of the time we traveled in the same direction.

But when snap judgements are based on faulty information such as stereotypes, they tend to be inaccurate and should be examined before acting upon them.

Perception Checking

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

The cautionary adage "Things aren't always as they appear" is useful when evaluating your own perceptions. Sometimes it's a good idea to bounce your thoughts off someone, especially if the perceptions relate to some high-stakes situation. But not all situations allow us the chance to verify our perceptions. Preventable crimes have been committed because people who saw something suspicious didn't report it even though they had a bad feeling about it. Of course, we have to walk a line between being reactionary and being too cautious, which is difficult to manage. We all know that we are ethically and sometimes legally required to report someone to the police who is harming himself or herself or others, but sometimes the circumstances are much more uncertain.

What can you do when you have a situation with a friend, co-worker, family member, or other person in an interpersonal communication situation when you are uncertain as to what is happening or want to double check your interpretation before making an assumption about that situation? A **perception checking statement** is one useful strategy you can use. It involves three steps, which are described below. Once you understand the basic principle behind the strategy, you can modify it to better fit your personality and communication style.

1. Describe the behavior you observed
2. Offer two or more possible interpretations of that behavior
3. Seek clarification about the interpretations

The first step, in my opinion, is the most important one because it's the step we often forget when confronting someone about a problem or concern we have. We tend to start with our interpretation so that the listener isn't sure where that interpretation is coming from. If you've ever had someone say to you, "Are you mad at me?" and you have no idea why they think that, it's because they forgot the first step of the perception checking statement. If they had said, "You haven't called me in days, are you mad at me?" then you would have known what prompted their question. So the first step is to describe what is happening or happened that prompted you to bring your concerns to the listener.

In the second step, rather than offering one definitive interpretation, you're using **cognitive complexity** to offer more than one interpretation. This serves a couple of functions. It lets the listener know that you're not sure of what's going on and are interested in hearing their perspective. It also helps you as the speaker to stay open-minded and show care for the other person.

The third step is simply passing the conversation to the other person. A request for clarification could be as simple as ending the perception checking statement with, "What's up?" or "What's

happening?"

Although the perception checking statement is arguably a very appropriate way of communicating, that doesn't mean you'll be effective. If the other person isn't willing to speak to you or isn't ready yet to talk about the situation, they may not respond in a way that promotes a conversation. But at least you've done your part by communicating clearly and specifically your concerns in an open and respectful way. If nothing else, you've hopefully opened the door for the conversation to continue at a later point. Of course, that is assuming you've used it well. It's entirely possible to say you are using a perception checking statement while actually being insincere. For example, if you said to someone, "You haven't called me in a while. Are you avoiding me or just being rude? What's up?", it's unlikely you'll get a very positive response since at least one of the interpretations offered is rather aggressive, more likely to provoke an argument than a conversation.

If you find the perception checking statement a bit cumbersome or clunky, remember that you can modify it as long as you keep the important pieces in. For example, instead of saying, "You haven't called me in a while, I'm wondering if you've been sick, busy with work, or annoyed with me. What's happening?", you could simply say, "We haven't spoken in a while, is everything okay?" In the first version, I have all three of the steps of the perception checking statement, but it's a bit long and awkward. In the second version, I still have the first step as I've described the behavior – a lack of communication. But rather than offer multiple interpretations and then a request for clarification, I've combined the two into one overall possible interpretation – wondering if everything is okay, which also serves as a request to clarify.

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[ii] Borland, E. (2014). Standpoint theory. *Encyclopedia Brittanica* (online). https://www.britannica.com/topic/standpoint-theory.

[iii] Allan L. Sillars, "Attributions and Communication in Roommate Conflicts," Communication Monographs 47, no. 3 (1980): 183.

[iv] Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 280.

[v] Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 281.

[vi] Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 281.

Chapter 5
Verbal Elements of Communication

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

This example gives us an understanding of how language can influence how our perceptions. Kelly and James had two different perceptions of the same event. One person was worried, and the other person was excited. Chapter 5 examines verbal communication because we know that words are powerful. The words that we use can impact how other people perceive us and how to perceive others.

Language is a system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols. Language consists of the use of words in a structured way. Language helps us understand others' wants, needs, and desires. Language can help create connections, but it can also pull us apart. Language is so vital to communication. Imagine if you never learned a language; how would you be able to function? Without language, how could you develop meaningful connections with others? Language allows us to express ourselves and obtain our goals. Language is the most important element in human communication. Language is made up of words, which are arbitrary symbols. In this chapter, we will learn about how words work, the functions of language, and how to improve verbal communication.

How Words Work

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

Words and Meaning

Words can have different rules to help us understand the meaning. There are three rules: semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic.[ii]

Semantic Rules

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

to communicate with others if we did not have semantic rules.

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

Syntactic Rules

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

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

Another example is Figure 5.1. In this case, we learn the importance that a comma can make in written in language. In the first instance, "Let's eat grandma!" is quite different than the second one, "Let's eat, grandma!" The first implies cannibalism and the second a family dinner. As the image says, punctuation saves lives.
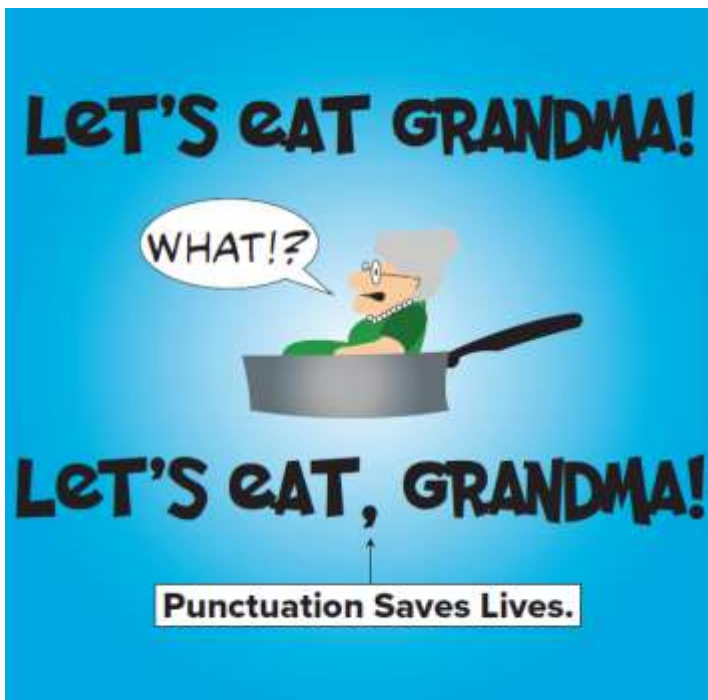

Figure 5.1 Commas Matter

Pragmatic Rules

Third, pragmatic rules help us interpret messages by analyzing the interaction completely. We need to consider the words used, how they are stated, our relationship with the speaker, and the objectives of our communication. For instance, the words "I want to see you now" would mean different things if the

speaker was your boss versus your lover. One could be a positive connotation, and another might be a negative one. The same holds true for humor. If we know that the other person understands and appreciates sarcasm, we might be more likely to engage in that behavior and perceive it differently from someone who takes every word literally.

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

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

Words Create Reality

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

Another example might be the word "intimacy." Intimacy to one person might be something similar to love, but to another person, it might be the psychological connection that you feel to another person. Words can impact a person's reality of what they believe and feel.

If a child complains that they don't feel loved, but the parents/guardians argue that they continuously show affection by giving hugs and doing fun shared activities, who would you believe? The child might say that they never heard their parents/guardians say the word love, and hence, they don't feel love. So, when we argue that words can create a person's reality, that is what we mean. Specific words can make a difference in how a person will receive the message. That is why certain rhetoricians and politicians will spend hours looking for the right word to capture the true essence of a message. A personal trainer might be careful to use the word "overweight" as opposed to "fat," because it just sounds drastically different. At Disney world, they call their employees "cast members" rather than workers, because it gives a perception that each person has a part in helping to run the show. Even on a resume, you might select words that set you apart from the other applicants. For instance, if you were a cook, you might say "culinary artist." It gives the impression that you weren't just cooking food, you were making masterpieces with food. Words matter, and how they are used will make a difference.

Words Reflect Attitudes

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

how the person perceives them.

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

1. Global labels. "You're a liar." Labeling someone irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy calls his or her whole identity as a person into question. Such sweeping judgments and generalizations are sure to only escalate a negative situation.
2. Sarcasm. "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Even though sarcasm is often disguised as humor, it usually represents passive- aggressive behavior through which a person indirectly communicates negative feelings.
3. Dragging up the past. "I should have known not to trust you when you never paid me back that
4. $100 I let you borrow." Bringing up negative past experiences is a tactic used by people when they don't want to discuss a current situation. Sometimes people have built up negative feelings that are suddenly let out by a seemingly small thing in the moment.
5. Negative comparisons. "Jade graduated from college without any credit card debt. I guess you're just not as responsible as her." Holding a person up to the supposed standards or characteristics of another person can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.
6. Judgmental "you" messages. "You're never going to be able to hold down a job." Accusatory messages are usually generalized overstatements about another person that go beyond labeling but still do not describe specific behavior in a productive way.
7. Threats. "If you don't stop texting back and forth with your ex, both of you are going to regret it." Threatening someone with violence or some other negative consequence usually signals the end of productive communication. Aside from the potential legal consequences, threats usually overcompensate for a person's insecurity.

Level of Abstraction

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

In 1941, linguist S.I. Hayakawa created what is called the abstraction ladder (Figure 5.2).[iv] The abstraction ladder starts abstract at the top, while the bottom rung and is very concrete. In Figure 5.2, we've shown how you can go from abstract ideas (e.g., information) through various levels of more concrete ideas down to the most concrete idea (e.g., interpersonal communication). Ideally, you can see that as we move down the ladder, the topic becomes more fine-tuned and concrete.

In our daily lives, we tend to use high levels of abstraction all the time. For instance, growing up, your parents/guardians probably helped you with homework, cleaning, cooking, and transporting you from one event to another. Yet, we don't typically say thank you to everything; we might make a general

comment, such as a thank you rather than saying, "Thank you so much for helping me with my math homework and helping me figure out how to solve for the volume of spheres." It takes too long to say that, so people tend to be abstract. However, abstraction can cause problems if you don't provide enough description.

Abstract | Information

Research

Academic Fields

Humanities & Social Sciences

Communication Studies

Concrete | Interpersonal Communication
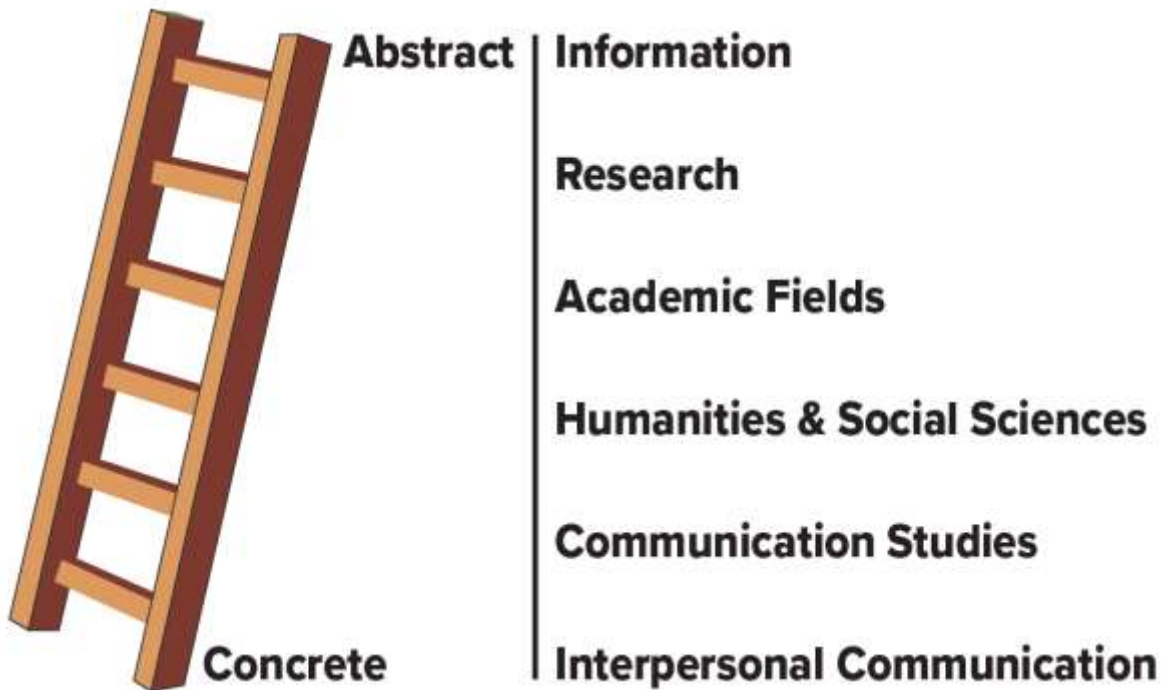
Figure 5.2 Abstraction Ladder

Metamessages

Metacommunication is known as communication about communication.[v] Yet, metamessages are relationship messages that are sent among people who they communicate. These messages can be verbal, nonverbal, direct, or indirect. For instance, if you see two friends just talking about what they did last weekend, they are also sending metamessages as they talk. Metamessages can convey affection, appreciation, disgust, ridicule, scorn, or contempt. Every time you send messages to others, notice the metamessages that they might be sending you. Do they seem upset or annoyed with certain things that you say? In this book, we want to stress the importance of mindfulness when speaking. You may not realize what metamessages you are sending out to others.

Words and Meanings

Words can have denotative meanings or connotative meanings. In this section, we will learn about the differences and the triangle of meaning.[vi] Researchers by the names of Ogden and Richards noticed that misunderstandings occur when people associate different meanings with the same message. Their model illustrates that there is an indirect association between a word and the actual referent or thing it represents. As you can see, when you hear the word "dog," it conjures up meaning for different people. The word "dog" itself is a symbol and signifier, or sound elements or other linguistic symbols that represents an underlying concept or meaning. When we hear the word "dog," it is what we call the "signified," or the meaning or idea expressed when someone hears the word. In this case, maybe you

have a dog, and you really see that dog as your best friend, or, as in my case, you call him your little "cuddle monster" because he always wants to be connected to you at all times. Again, our meaning that we attach to the symbol is still separate from the physical entity itself. In this case, there is a real dog named Teddy, who is the referent, or the physical thing that a word or phrase denotes or stands for.

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

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

Functions of Language

Based on research examining how children learn language, it was found that children are trying to create "meaning potential."[vii] In other words, children learn language so they can understand and be understood by others. As children age, language serves different functions.

Instrumental and Regulatory Functions

Children will typically communicate in a fashion that lets parents/guardians know what they want to do. When children are born, parents/guardians have to figure out if the child is hungry, thirsty, dirty, or sick. Later, when the child acquires language, the child can let the parent/guardian know what they want by using simple words like "eat" or "drink."

Instrumental functions use language to fulfill a need. Previously, we learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. For us to meet our needs, we need to use language that other people understand.

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

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

Interactional and Imaginative Functions

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

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

Personal Functions

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

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

Heuristic and Representational Functions

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

Representational functions of language are used to request or relay information. These statements are straightforward. They do not seek for an explanation. For instance, "my cat is asleep" or "the kitchen light isn't working."

Cultural Functions

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

Analyzing the Hopi Native American language, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf discovered that there is not a difference between nouns and verbs.[x] To the Hopi people, their language showcases how their world and perceptions of the world are always in constant flux. The Hopi believe that everything is evolving and changing. Their conceptualization of the world is that there is continuous time. As Whorf wrote, "After a long and careful analysis the Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, construction or expressions that refer directly to what we call 'time', or to past, present or future."[xi]

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

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

Types of Language

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

Formal vs. Informal Language

You probably know by now that how we communicate in different contexts can vary greatly. For example, how you compose a text to your best friend is going to use different grammatical structures and words than when you compose an email to your professor. One of the main reasons for this difference is because of formal and informal language. Table 5.1 provides a general overview of the major differences between formal and informal language.

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

Table 5.1 Formal vs. Informal Language

Formal Language

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

Informal Language

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

Jargon

Jargon is the specialized or technical language of a specific group or profession that may not be understood by outsiders.[xiii] If you are really into cars or computers, you probably know a lot about the different parts and functions. Jargon is normally used in a specific context and may be understood outside that context. Jargon consists of a specific vocabulary that uses words that only certain people understand. The business world is full of jargon. Joanna Cutrara created a list of 14 commonly heard jargon phrases used in the business world:[xiv]

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

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

Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms are the use of informal words in communication.[xv] Colloquialism varies from region to region. Examples might be "wanna" instead of "want to" or "gonna" instead of "going to." It shows us how a society uses language in their everyday lives. Here's a short list of some common colloquialisms you may have used yourself:

- Bamboozle – to deceive

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

Slang

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

- BAE (baby / before all else)
- On Fleek (looking perfect)
- Bye Felica (saying goodbye to someone you don't like)
- The Tea (gossip)
- Bro (typically a male friend)
- Cash (money)
- Cheesy (cheap or tacky)
- Ship (wanting people to be in a relationship, whether real or fictional)
- Frenemy (someone who is both a friend and an enemy)
- Thirsty (being overly eager or desperate)
- Throw Shade (to insult another person)
- Woke (being acutely aware of social injustice within society)

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

Idioms

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

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

Table 5.2 presents a few idioms.

cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive. His new Ferrari cost an arm and a leg.
cross your fingers	For good luck. Cross your fingers that I pass the English exam with flying colors.
draw a blank	I can't remember. I drew a blank when I tried to remember his brother's name.
get cold feet	Feel too scared to do something. John wanted to ask Maria out but he got cold feet and decided not to.
get out of the wrong side of the bed	In a bad mood. He must have gotten up out of the wrong side of the bed today.
get the picture	Understand. Do you get the picture?
get your act together	Get organized/stop wasting time. You better get your act together or you're going to fail all your classes.
give it a shot	Try. Why not try bungee jumping. Give it a shot.
give him the cold shoulder	Ignore someone. Brett walked right past me without saying a word. He gave me the cold shoulder.
go up in smoke	Evaporate/disappear. His dreams of being a professional athlete went up in smoke when he broke his leg.
have a chip on your shoulder	I think you are great. He has such a chip on his shoulder that he hardly ever relates to anyone.
a piece of cake	That test was a snap–it was a piece of cake. (easy).
a rip off	You spent $500 for a watermelon! What a rip off! You were cheated.
let the cat out of the bag	Spill the beans. Tell a secret. Don't let the cat out of the bag. Keep his surprise birthday party a secret.
off the top of my head	Without thinking. Off the top of my head, I think it's worth $6 million.
out of the blue	Suddenly. Guess who called me out of the blue?
play it by ear	Make no plans–do things spontaneously. Let's just play it by ear tonight and see what comes up.
pull someone's leg	Kid someone. Stop pulling my leg. I know you are kidding!
red tape	Bureaucracy. It's almost impossible to set up a business in Greece because there is so much red tape.
read between the lines	Understand what is not stated. If you read between the lines, you'll realize that he is trying to dump you.
see eye to eye	Agree. He doesn't see eye to eye with his parents at all.
sour grapes	Pretend to not want something that you are desperate for. It's just sour grapes that he is criticizing George's villa in Italy.
slipped my mind	Forgot. I meant to call you last night, but it slipped my mind.
small talk	Chitchat. It's important to be able to make small talk when you meet new people for the first time.
the icing on the cake	Something that makes a good thing great. And the icing on the cake was that the movie for which he earned $12 million, also won the Oscar for best picture.
the last straw	The thing that ruins everything. When my boss asked me to cancel my wedding to complete a project–I said that's the last straw and I quit!
a frog in my throat	I can't speak clearly. Ahem! Sorry I had a frog in my throat.

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Table 5.2 Common Idioms

Clichés

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

Improper Language

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

Biased Language

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

Avoid	Consider Using
Black Attorney	Attorney
Businessman	Businessperson, Business Owner, Executive,Leader, Manager, etc.
Chairman	Chair or Chairperson
Cleaning Lady / Maid	Cleaner, Cleaning Person, Housecleaner, Housekeeper, Maintenance Worker, OfficeCleaner, etc.
Male Nurse	Nurse
Male Flight Attendant or Stewardess	Flight Attendant
Female Doctor	Physician or Doctor
Manpower	Personnel or Staff
Congressman	Legislator, Member of Congress, or Memberof the House of Representatives
Postman	Postal Employee or Letter carrier
Forefather	Ancestor
Policeman	Police Officer / Law Enforcement Officer
Fireman	Firefighter
Disabled	People with Disabilities
Schizophrenic	Person Diagnosed with Schizophrenia
Homosexual	Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexual Men or Women

Table 5.3 Biased Language

One specific type of biased language is called spin, or the manipulation of language to achieve

the most positive interpretation of words, to gain political advantage, or to deceive others. In essence, people utilizing spin can make language choices that frame themselves or their clients in a positive way.

Ambiguous Language

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

Euphemisms

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

Relative Language

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

Static Evaluation

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

Improving Verbal Communication

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

Improving Language Skills

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

Use Repetition

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

Group Similar Words Together

Second, group similar words together. You should never learn vocabulary by looking at a list of words. Think of words as different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It doesn't make sense to look at each piece of the puzzle individually. Rather, you need to fit them together to see the whole picture. The same thing should occur with words. You should memorize words that have similarities in some way. For instance, create a vocabulary around a theme, such as music, or an adjective, such as beautiful.

Build Your Vocabulary

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

- By age 2, people can recognize and speak 200 words.
- By age 3, people can recognize and speak about 2000 words.
- By age 5, people can recognize and speak about 4,000 words.[xxii]

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

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

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

One way to keep learning is to find words that have meaning for you. If you have ever heard a story about survival from someone who has gone through something life-changing, they probably used words that touched you and helped you to connect to the story. In the same fashion, you should find words that can relate to your story. When we find words that have personal meaning to us, we can use

those words more effectively in our own vocabulary. Here are some essential tips for building your vocabulary:

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

Read

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

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

Increase Your Awareness and Adaptation of Language

After learning to improve your vocabulary, it's also important to increase language awareness and adaptation. When we talk about language awareness, we are referring to a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.[xxiv] For our purposes, we define language adaptation as the ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner. As such, it's not just about being aware of language that leads to effective interpersonal interactions, but our ability to adapt our linguistic choices with different people to maximize the effectiveness of our interpersonal communication.

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

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

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

Check for Understanding

As a speaker, you want to know that the receiver of your message understood what you said. This concept is also known as checking for understanding or verifying what has been said is also understood.[xxv] Even if a person is smiling and nodding at you when you talk, it does not necessarily

mean that they are paying attention to everything. They might be trying to be polite and/or friendly. The best way to check for understanding is to use the acronym: TAP. Think of communication like a tap dance; if you don't hear any tapping, would it really be a tap dance? The same thing can be applied to communication. Did you communicate if the other person didn't understand you or get what you were trying to say?

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

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

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

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Chapter 6
Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is defined as communication that is produced by some means other than words (eye contact, body language, or vocal cues, for example).[i] Over the past decade, Botox has been used to paralyze facial muscles for the purpose of reducing the appearance of wrinkles. However, the unintended consequence of this practice is reduced facial expression! The frozen facial expression was recently celebrated by Shape.com, who interviewed a noted plastic surgeon about Hollywood's most notable "frozen faces". Dr. Youn says. "Some stars start treatment early, hoping to prevent wrinkles, but risk robbing their face of natural emotions in the process!"

Imagine the lack of a variety of emotional facial expressions if everyone's face was frozen. The world would be a much less interesting place, and it would be more challenging to stimulate accurate meaning in the minds of others; thus, we will begin this chapter by discussing the importance of nonverbal communication.

Importance of Nonverbal Communication in Interaction

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

The Role of Nonverbal in Everyday Life

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

Nonverbal has Communicative Value

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

Thus, nonverbal communication plays a tremendous role in successfully engaging in interactions. The successful use of nonverbal communication requires an awareness of the value of nonverbal communication and the belief that it is valuable. When individuals are unaware of the

importance of nonverbal communication, they may be overlooking crucial interactional information. For example, one of the authors of this textbook was once meeting with a colleague who was repeatedly sighing during a meeting. Later, when she and her colleague were discussing the meeting, he said, "Didn't you notice that I was sighing?" She told him she did notice that he was sighing, but she was unsure why. We will discuss this further in the ambiguity of nonverbal communication. In this example, the author's colleague was aware of the importance of nonverbal communication and attempted to use it deliberately.

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

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

Nonverbal Used for Relational Purposes

Nonverbal communication is an essential element in relating to others. Nonverbal communication is often the very first way in which we invite a relationship with another, or, at the very least, invite communication. To communicate with another, we must make eye contact with a few exceptions. Thus, relationships begin with nonverbal communication. Also, consider how humans relate to others through touch, scent, hand gestures, physical appearance, and more.

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

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

Nonverbal is Ambiguous

A particularly challenging aspect of nonverbal communication is the fact that it is ambiguous. In the seventies, nonverbal communication as a topic was trendy. Some were under the impression that we could use nonverbal communication to "read others like a book." One of the authors remembers her cousin's wife telling her that she shouldn't cross her arms because it signaled to others that she was closed off. It would be wonderful if crossing one's arms signaled one meaning, but think about the many

meanings of crossing one's arms. An individual may have crossed arms because the individual is cold, upset, sad, or angry. It is impossible to know unless a conversation is paired with nonverbal behavior. Another great example of ambiguous nonverbal behavior is flirting! Consider some very stereotypical behavior of flirting (e.g., smiling, laughing, a light touch on the arm, or prolonged eye contact). Each of these behaviors signals interest to others. The question is whether an individual engaging in these behaviors is indicating romantic interest or a desire for platonic friendship…have you ever walked away from a situation and explained a person's behavior to another friend to determine whether you were being flirted with? If so, you have undoubtedly experienced the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal is Culturally Based

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

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

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

Attribution Error

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

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

Omnipresent

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

Another way of considering the omnipresence of nonverbal communication is to consider the way we walk, posture, engage in facial expression, eye contact, lack of eye contact, gestures, etc. When sitting alone in the library working, your posture may be communicating something to others. If you need to focus and don't want to invite communication, you may keep your head down and avoid eye contact.

Suppose you are walking across campus at a brisk pace. What might your pace be communicating? When discussing the omnipresence of nonverbal communication, it is necessary to discuss Paul Watzlawick's assertion that humans cannot, not communicate. This assertion is the first axiom of his interactional view of communication. According to Watzlawick, humans are always communicating. As discussed in the "silent treatment" example and the posture and walking example, communication is found in everyday behaviors that are common to all humans. We might conclude that humans cannot escape communicating meaning.

Can Form Universal Language

When discussing whether nonverbal communication is a universal language, caution must be used. We must remember that understanding the context in which nonverbal communication is used is almost always necessary to understand the meaning of nonverbal communication. However, there are exceptions concerning what Paul Ekman calls "basic emotions." These will be discussed a bit later in the chapter.

Can Lead to Misunderstandings

Comedian Samuel J. Comroe has tremendous expertise in explaining how nonverbal communication can be misunderstood. Comroe's comedic routines focus on how Tourette's syndrome affects his daily living. Tourette's syndrome can change individual behavior, from uncontrolled body movements to uncontrolled vocalizations. Comroe often appears to be winking when he is not. He explains how his "wink" can cause others to believe he is joking when he isn't. He also tells the story of how he met his

wife in high school. During a skit, he played a criminal and she played a police officer. She told him to "freeze," and he continued to move (due to Tourette's). She misunderstood his movement to mean he was being defiant and thus "took him down." You can watch Comroe's routine here.

Although nonverbal misunderstandings can be humorous, these misunderstandings can affect interpersonal as well as professional relationships. One of the authors once went on an important job interview for a job she was not offered. She asked the interviewer for feedback, and he said, "your answers sounded canned." The author did not think to do so in the moment, but what she should have said is that she may have sounded canned because she frequently thinks about work, her work philosophy, and how she approaches work. Thus, her tone may have been more indicative of simply knowing how she feels rather than "canned."

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

Usually Trusted

Despite the pitfalls of nonverbal communication, individuals typically rely on nonverbal communication to understand the meaning in interactions. Communication scholars agree that the majority of meaning in any interaction is attributable to nonverbal communication. It isn't necessarily true, but we are taught from a very early age that lack of eye contact is indicative of lying. We have learned through research that this "myth" is not necessarily true; this myth does tell a story about how our culture views nonverbal communication. That view is simply that nonverbal communication is important and that it has meaning.

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

According to research, as much as 93% of meaning in any interaction is attributable to nonverbal communication. Albert Mehrabian asserts that this 93% of meaning can be broken into three parts: vocalics, verbal, and body language (Figure 6.1)[iv]

Mehrabian's work is widely reported and accepted. Other researchers Birdwhistell and Philpott say that meaning attributed to nonverbal communication in interactions ranges from 60 to 70%.[v],[vi] Regardless of the actual percentage, it is worth noting that the majority of meaning in interaction is deduced from nonverbal communication.
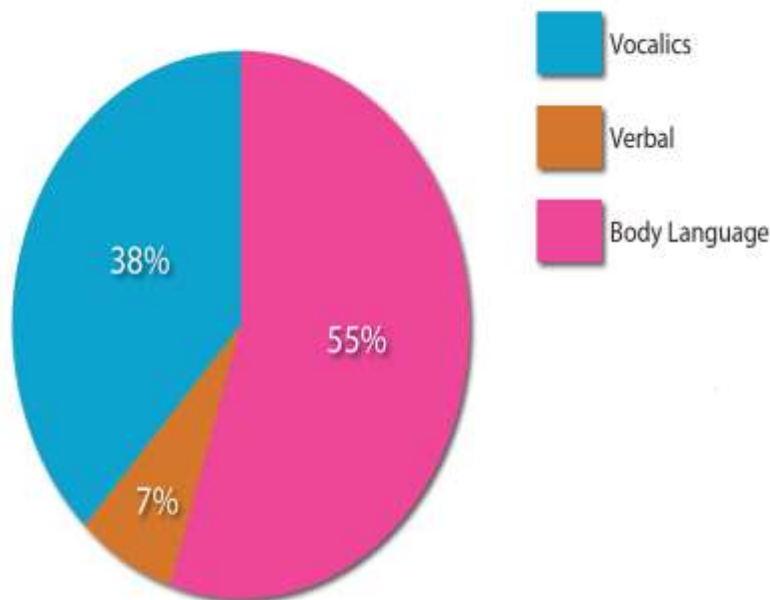
Figure 6.1 Mehrabian's Explanation of Message Meaning

The Six Functions of Nonverbal Communication

As we have established, nonverbal communication plays an important role in communicating successfully and effectively. Because nonverbal communication plays a significant role in interactions, nonverbal communication was studied heavily in the early days of studying communication. These studies resulted in the discovery of multiple utilitarian functions of nonverbal communication.

Complementing

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

Contradicting

At times, an individual's nonverbal communication contradicts verbal communication. Recently, when visiting an aunt's house, one of the author's folded her arms. She asked the author if she was cold and if she needed to turn up the air conditioning. The author said no because she was trying to be polite, but her aunt did not believe her. The author's nonverbal communication gave away her actual discomfort! In this case, the nonverbal communication was truly more meaningful than verbal communication. Consider a situation where a friend says, "The concert was amazing," but the friend's voice is monotone. A response might be, "oh, you sound real enthused." Communication scholars refer to this as "contradicting" verbal and nonverbal behavior. When contradicting occurs, the verbal and nonverbal messages are incongruent. This incongruence heightens our awareness, and we tend to believe the nonverbal communication over verbal communication.

Accenting

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

Repeating

Nonverbal communication that repeats the meaning of verbal communication assists the receiver by reinforcing the words of the sender. Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication may stand alone, but when paired with verbal communication, it servers to repeat the message. For example, nodding one's head while saying "yes" serves to reinforce the meaning of the word "yes," and the word "yes" reinforces the head nod.

Regulating

Regulating the flow of communication is often accomplished through nonverbal behavior communication. Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen state that regulators are "acts which maintain and regulate the back-and-forth nature of speaking and listening between two or more interactions" (1969, p. 82). You may notice your friends nodding their heads when you are speaking. Nodding one's head is a primary means of regulating communication. Other behaviors that regulate conversational flow are eye contact, moving or leaning forward, changing posture, and eyebrow raises, to name a few. You may also have noticed several nonverbal behaviors people engage in when trying to exit a conversation. These behaviors include stepping away from the speaker, checking one's watch/phone for the time, or packing up belongings. These are referred to as leave-taking behaviors. Without the regulating function of nonverbal behaviors, it would be necessary to interrupt conversational content to insert phrases such as "I have to leave." However, when interactants fail to recognize regulating behavior, verbal communication will be used instead.

Substituting

At times, nonverbal behavior serves to replace verbal communication altogether. Substituting nonverbal behaviors must be understood within a context more often than not. For example, a friend may ask you what time it is, and you may shrug your shoulders to indicate you don't know. At other times, your friend may ask whether you want pizza or sushi for dinner, and you may shrug your shoulders to indicate you don't care or have no preference.

Emblems are a specific type of substituting nonverbal behavior that have direct verbal translation. Emblems may generally be understood outside of the context in which they are used. Some highly recognizable emblems in the U.S. culture are the peace sign and the okay sign. Emblems are a generally understood concept and have made their way into popular culture. The term "emblem" may not be applied within popular culture. In the popular television show, Friends, the main characters Ross and Monica are siblings. Ross and Monica are forbidden to "flip the bird" to each other, so they make up their own "emblem," which involves holding one's palms upward in a fist and bumping the outside of

the palm's together. Whether flipping the bird in the traditional manner or doing so Ross and Monica style, each of these represents an emblem that does not require context for accurate interpretation. Emblems will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter.

Categories of Nonverbal Communication

In addition to the functions of nonverbal communication, there are categories of nonverbal communication. This chapter will address several categories of nonverbal communication that are of particular importance in interpersonal relationships. These categories include haptics (touch), vocalics (voice), kinesics (body movement and gestures), oculesics/facial expressions (eye and face behavior), and physical appearance. Each of these categories influences interpersonal communication and may have an impact on the success of interpersonal interactions.

Haptics

Haptics is the study of touch as a form of nonverbal communication. Touch is used in many ways in our daily lives, such as greeting, comfort, affection, task accomplishment, and control. You may have engaged in a few or all of these behaviors today. If you shook hands with someone, hugged a friend, kissed your romantic partner, then you used touch to greet and give affection. If you visited a salon to have your hair cut, then you were touched with the purpose of task accomplishment. You may have encountered a friend who was upset and patted the friend to ease the pain and provide comfort. Finally, you may recall your parents or guardians putting an arm around your shoulder to help you walk faster if there was a need to hurry you along. In this case, your parent/guardian was using touch for control. Several factors impact how touch is perceived. These factors are duration, frequency, and intensity. Duration is how long touch endures. Frequency is how often touch is used, and intensity is the amount of pressure applied. These factors influence how individuals are evaluated in social interactions. For example, researchers state, "a handshake preceding social interactions positively influenced the way individuals evaluated the social interaction partners and their interest in further interactions while reversing the impact of negative impressions."[vii] This research demonstrates that individuals must understand when it is appropriate to shake hands and that there are negative consequences for failing to do so. Importantly, an appropriately timed handshake can erase the negative effects of any mistakes one might make in an initial interaction!

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

It's also essential to understand the importance of touch on someone's psychological wellbeing. Narissra Punyanunt-Carter and Jason Wrench created the touch deprivation scale to examine the lack of haptic communication in an individual's life (Table 5.1).[viii]

As you can see, Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench found that there are three different factors related to touch deprivation: the absence of touch, longing for touch, and sexual intimacy for touch. First, the absence of touch is the degree to which an individual perceives that touch is not a normal part of their day-to-day interactions. Many people can go days or even weeks without physically having contact with another person. People may surround them on a day-to-day basis at work, but this doesn't mean that

they can engage in physical contact with other people.

Second, there is the longing for touch. It's one thing to realize that touch is not a normal part of your day-to-day interactions, but it's something completely different not to have that touch and desire that touch. For some people, the lack of touch can be psychologically straining because humans inherently have a desire for physical contact. For some people, this lack of physical contact with other humans can be satisfied by having a pet.

Lastly, some people desire touch so much that they'll engage in sexual activity just as a way to get touched by another human being. Obviously, these types of situations can be risky because they involve sexual contact outside of an intimate relationship. In fact, "hooking up" can be detrimental to someone's psychological wellbeing.[ix]

In the Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench study, the researchers found that there was a positive relationship between touch deprivation and depression and a negative relationship between touch deprivation and self-esteem. The study also found that those individuals who felt that they did not receive enough touch growing up (tactile nurturance) also reported higher levels of touch deprivation as adults. This is just a further indication of how important touch is for children and adolescents.

Vocalics

In this section, we are going to discuss vocalics, that is, vocal utterances, other than words, that serve as a form of communication. Our discussion will begin with vocal characteristics, including timbre, pitch, tempo, rhythm, and intensity.

Timbre

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary, timbre refers to the "quality given to a sound by its overtones: such as the resonance by which the ear recognizes and identifies a voiced speech sound." (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/timbre accessed on November 25, 2018.) Pitch refers to the frequency range between high and low. Pitch is not generally thought of much unless an individual's pitch stands out. For example, if a female's vocal pitch is low, meaning might be assigned to the low pitch, just as meaning might be attached to a male voice with a high pitch. Also, pitch that is at a higher or lower end of a range will be noticed if there is a momentary or situational change to an individual's pitch that will trigger an assignment of meaning. For example, when children become excited or scared, they may be described as "squealing." The situation will determine whether squealing children are thought to be excited or scared.

Tempo

Tempo refers to the rate at which one speaks. Changes in tempo can reflect emotions such as excitement or anger, physical wellbeing, or energy level. One of the author's aunts is a brittle diabetic. When talking to her aunt, the author can detect whether the aunt's blood sugar is too low if her aunt is speaking extremely slow. Rhythm refers to the pattern used when speaking. Unusual speaking rhythms are often imitated. Consider the speaking rhythm of a "surfer dude" or a "valley girl." One of the most well-known forms of rhythm used in a speech was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech. More recently, the speaking rhythm of President's Obama and Trump are easily identifiable and often imitated by comedians.

Intensity

Finally, intensity refers to how loudly or softly an individual speaks. Intensity can be tied to emotion.

When individuals speak loudly, the increased volume may be used to convey anger, emotional distress, happiness, or heightened excitement. When individuals speak at a lower volume, the decreased volume may be an effort to diffuse an emotionally intense conversation. Lower volume could also be the result of sharing bad news, discussing taboo or sensitive topics (i.e., when people whisper "sex" or "she died"), or conveying private information.

Other Vocal Features

Paralanguage
Paralanguage is another term for vocalics and refers to "extra-linguistic" features involved in speaking, such as the characteristics of speech just discussed, pauses and silences, and nonverbal vocalizations.

Pauses and Silences
Pauses and silences are an important part of creating meaning during an interaction. Pauses draw attention to important parts of messages. The "pregnant pause" is an extra-long pause that precedes particularly weighty information. Pauses are a type of silence that are brief in nature, but prolonged silence such as minutes, hours, or even days can be used to convey meaning as well. Consider a conversation in which the other person does not respond to you. What meaning is conveyed? Is the individual thinking? Is the individual hurt, angry, or too shocked to speak? Myriad meanings of silence help emphasize the significance of silence and that it is as impactful as verbal communication, if not more so.

Dysfluencies, Vocal Fillers, or Verbal Surrogates
Dysfluencies, vocal fillers, or verbal surrogates are sounds that we make as we attempt to fill dead air while we are thinking of what to say next. In the United States, "um" or "uh" are the most commonly used dysfluencies. In conversation, these dysfluencies may pass unnoticed by both the sender or receiver, but consider how the recognition of dysfluencies increases when listening to a speaker who says "uh" or "um" during a speech. When giving a presentation, the speaker may even call attention to dysfluencies by speaking of them directly, and audience members may become distracted by dysfluencies. One of the author's classmates used to count the number of "ums" used by a particular professor who was known to frequently use "um" when teaching. Though focusing on dysfluencies may be common, it is best for the speaker to attempt to reduce an excessive amount of dysfluencies and for listeners to focus on the meaning rather than the "ums" and "uhs."

Kinesics

Kinesics, first coined by Ray Birdwhistell, is the study of how gestures, facial expression, and eye behavior communicate. Gestures can generally be considered any visible movement of the body. These movements "stimulate meaning" in the minds of others.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are another form of kinesics. Paul Eckman and Wallace V. Friesen asserted that facial expressions are likely to communicate "affect" or liking.[x] Eckman and Freisen present seven emotions that are recognized throughout the world. These emotions are often referred to by the acronym S.A.D.F.I.S.H. and include surprise, anger, disgust, fear, interest, sadness, and happiness. Facial expressions are especially useful in communicating emotion. Although not all facial expression is

"universally" recognized, people are generally able to interpret facial expressions within a context. We generally consider happiness is indicated by a smile. Smiling might, however, also communicate politeness, a desire to be pleasing, and even fear. If an individual attempts to use a smile to diffuse a volatile interaction where the individual fears being attacked verbally or physically, then the smile may be an indication of fear. In this case, the smile cannot be accurately interpreted outside of the context.

In a study investigating preferences for facial expressions in relation to the Big Five personality traits, it was found that most participants showed the strongest preferences for faces communicating high levels of agreeableness and extraversion. Individuals who are high in openness preferred a display of all facially- communicated Big Five personality traits. In relation to females who report being highly neurotic, they preferred male faces displaying agreeableness and female faces communicating disagreeableness. Male faces communicating openness were preferred by males who were higher in neuroticism. Interestingly, males reporting higher levels of neuroticism had a lower preference for female faces communicating openness.[xi] This study underscores the importance of facial expressions in determining who we prefer.

Oculesics

Oculesics is the study of how individuals communicate through eye behavior. Eye contact is generally the first form of communication for interactants. Consider when a stranger speaks to you in a grocery store from behind you with a question such as, "Can you reach the Frosted Flakes for me?" When a general question such as this is asked with no eye contact, you may not be aware that the question was meant for you.

Often when discussing eye behavior, researchers refer to "gaze." Research consistently demonstrates that females gaze at interaction partners more frequently than males.[xii],[xiii],[xiv] Also, gaze has been studied concerning deception. Early research determined the significance of eye contact in the interpretation behavior. When people gaze too long or for too little, there is likely to be a negative interpretation of this behavior.[xv] However, later researchers acknowledge that there is a much greater range of acceptable "gazing" as influenced by verbal communication.

Gestures

Kinesics serve multiple functions when communicating—such as emblems, illustrators, affect displays, and regulators.

Emblems

Many gestures are emblems. You may recall from earlier in the chapter that gestures are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.[xvi] Only a handful of emblematic gestures seem to be universal, for example, a shrug of the shoulders to indicate "I don't know." Most emblems are culturally determined, and they can get you into difficulty if you use them in other countries. In the United States, some emblematic gestures are the thumb-up-and-out hitchhiking sign, the circled thumb and index finger Ok sign, and the "V" for victory sign. However, be careful of using these gestures outside the United States. The thumb-up sign in Iran, for example, is an obscene gesture, and our Ok sign has sexual connotations in Ethiopia and Mexico.[xvii]

Illustrators

While emblems can be used as direct substitutions for words, illustrators help emphasize or explain a word. Recall the Smashmouth lyric in All Star: "She was looking kind of dumb with her finger and her

thumb in the shape of an L on her forehead." The "L" gesture is often used to illustrate "loser."

Affect Displays

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

Regulators

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

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of communication through space. Space as communication was heavily studied by Edward T. Hall[xviii], and he famously categorized space into four "distances. These distances represent how space is used and by whom (Figure 6.3).

Hall's first distance is referred to as intimate space and is often referred to as our "personal bubble." This bubble ranges from 0 to 18 inches from the body. This space is reserved for those with whom we have close personal relationships.

The next distance is referred to as personal space and ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. You will notice that, as the distances move further away from the body, the intimacy of interactions decreases. Personal space is used for conversations with friends or family. If you meet a friend at the local coffee shop to catch up on life, it is likely that you will sit between 18 inches and four feet from your friend.

The next distance is "social" distance, ranging from 4 feet to 12 feet. This space is meant for acquaintances.

Finally, the greatest distance is referred to as "public" distance, ranging from 12 feet to 25 feet. In an uncrowded public space, we would not likely approach a stranger any closer than 12 feet. Consider an empty movie theatre. If you enter a theatre with only one other customer, you will not likely sit in the seat directly behind, beside, or in front of this individual. In all likelihood, you would sit further than 12 feet from this individual. However, as the theatre begins to fill, individuals will be forced to sit in Hall's distances that represent more intimate relationships. How awkward do you feel if you have to sit directly next to a stranger in a theatre?
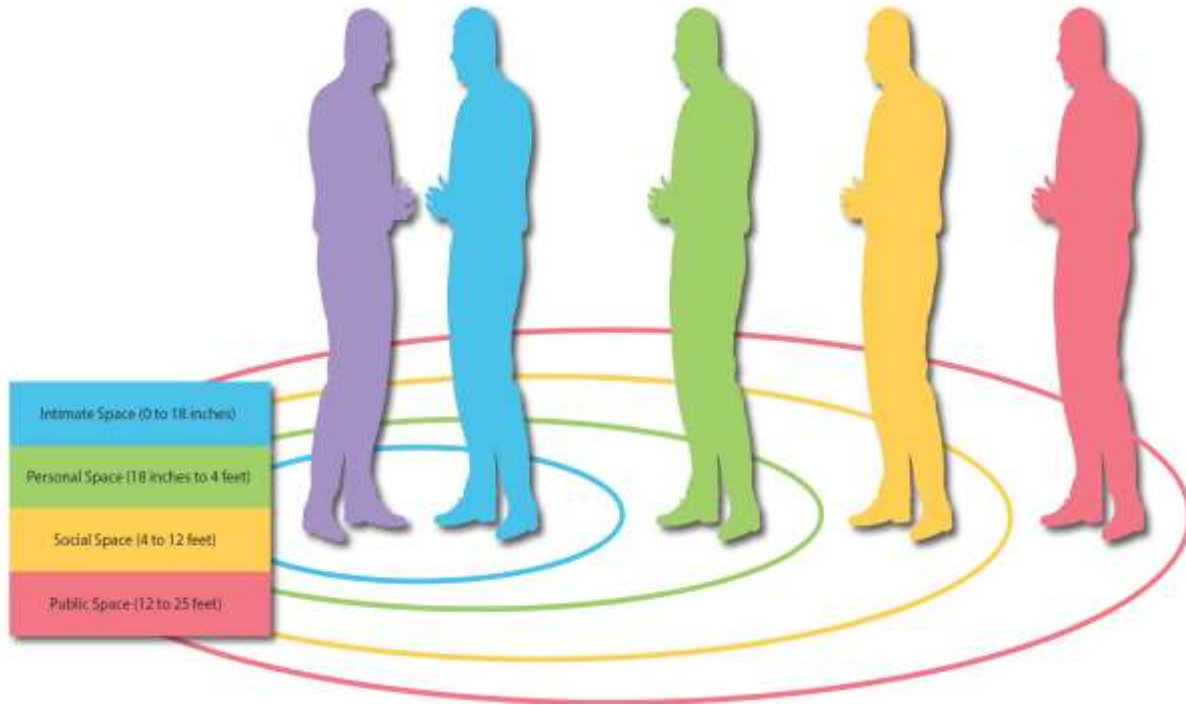
Figure 6.3 Edward T. Hall's Four Spaces

Artifacts

Artifacts are items with which we adorn our bodies or which we carry with us. Artifacts include glasses, jewelry, canes, shoes, clothing, or any object associated with our body that communicates meaning. One very famous artifact that most everyone can recognize is the glasses of Harry Potter. Harry Potter's style of glasses has taken on their own meaning. What does his style of eyewear communicate when donned by others? Clothing also stimulates meaning. Do you recall Barney Stinson's famous line "suit up" in *How I Met Your Mother?* Why was it necessary to suit up? Recently, Snoop Dogg was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Snoop Dogg was wearing a beautiful, classic camel hair overcoat. In contrast, he was wearing large bulky jewelry. What do these two types of artifacts communicate? One of the authors is a big fan. The author interpreted the classic overcoat as Snoop having excellent taste and the jewelry as strength and wealth. Together the artifacts were interpreted as power.

Chronemics

Chronemics, as explained by Thomas J. Bruneau[xix], is the use of time to communicate. The use of time is considered to be culturally bound, with some cultures using monochronic time and others using polychronic time. Cultures using monochronic time engage in one task at a time. Cultures using polychronic time engage in multiple tasks at the same time. This use of time involves fluidity with individuals feeling free to work on multiple tasks simultaneously rather than completing a task before moving to the next task, as in the monochronic use of time. When considering how time is used, it is necessary to consider individual preferences as well as cultural preferences. Traditionally, the U.S. is a monochronic culture along with Canada or Northern Europe. Korea is an example of a polychronic culture along with Latin America, the Arab part of the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, one can live in each of these cultures and express the opposite orientation toward time. One of the authors is admittedly uptight when it comes to time. She is highly monochronic. This author went to a

conference in Puerto Rico, which represents a polychronic orientation toward time. Buses usually run 30 minutes late, if not longer. Time is a bit more fluid rather than incremental in polychronic cultures. Unfortunately, the author failed to take this into account and nearly missed a presentation. This resulted in stress that could have been avoided had she remembered to pay more attention to the time orientation of those around her.

Olfactics

Finally, olfactics generally refers to the influence of scent on perceptions. Scent can draw others in or repel them, and the same scent can have different impacts on different people. According to statistica.com, the global estimated sales value of the fragrances worldwide in 2016 was $47 billion U.S. dollars. This is in addition to $39 billion U.S. dollars in shower and bath products and another $20.5 billion in deodorants. The total spending in these categories was $106.5 billion U.S. dollars. These figures underscore the importance of "smelling good" across the globe. Consider the impact of failing to manage one's natural scent in the workplace. Countless articles in the popular media address how to deal with a "smelly coworker." Thus, it is crucial to be aware of one's scent, including the ones we wear in an effort not to offend those around us. Although smelling "bad" may end a relationship or at least create distance, an attractive scent may help individuals begin a new relationship. Have you ever purchased a new scent before a first date? If so, you are aware of the power of scent to attract a mate. Although we regularly try to cover our scent, we also attempt to control the scent of our environments. The air freshener market in 2016 was valued at $1.62 billion U.S. dollars. Go to your local grocery store and investigate the number of products available to enhance environmental scents. Be prepared to spend a significant amount of time to take in the many products to keep our environments "fresh."[xx]

The amount of money spent on fragrances for the body and home highlights the meaning of scent to humans. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What meaning do you associate with a floral scent vs. a spicy scent?
2. When comparing men's fragrances to women's fragrances, what differences do you notice?
3. Are there scents that immediately transport you back in time, such as the smell of honeysuckle or freshly baked cookies?

Regardless of the scent you prefer, when using scent to communicate positively with others, do not make the mistake of believing the scent you like is loved by those around you!

Physical Appearance

Although not one of the traditional categories of nonverbal communication, we really should discuss physical appearance as a nonverbal message. Whether we like it or not, our physical appearance has an impact on how people relate to us and view us. Someone's physical appearance is often one of the first reasons people decide to interact with each other in the first place.

Dany Ivy and Sean Wahl argue that physical appearance is a very important factor in nonverbal communication:

> The connection between physical appearance and nonverbal communication needs to be made for two important reasons: (1) The decisions we make to maintain or alter our physical appearance reveal a great deal about who we are, and (2) the physical appearance of other people impacts our perception of them, how we communicate with them, how approachable they are, how attractive or unattractive they are, and so on.[xxi]

In fact, people ascribe all kinds of meanings based on their perceptions of how we physically appear to

them. Everything from your height, skin tone, smile, weight, and hair (color, style, lack of, etc.) can communicate meanings to other people. To start our discussion, we're going to look at the three somatotypes.

Somatotypes

In the 1940s, psychologist and physician William Herbert Sheldon introduced the idea of somatotypes.[xxii] In Sheldon's theory, there were three overarching body types: the ectomorph, the endomorph, and the mesomorph. The Somatotyping Scale is based on the general traits that the three different somatotypes possess. Most people are more familiar with their physical looks (Figure 6.4).

Now, you may be wondering to yourself, where did these three terms come from in the first place? Well, Sheldon created these terms from the three germ layers (three primary cell layers) of embryonic development:

- Endoderm (inner layer)
  - develops into the gastrointestinal tract
- Mesoderm (middle layer) – develops into the
- cardiovascular and muscular systems
- Ectoderm (outer layer) – develops into the skin and the nervous systems
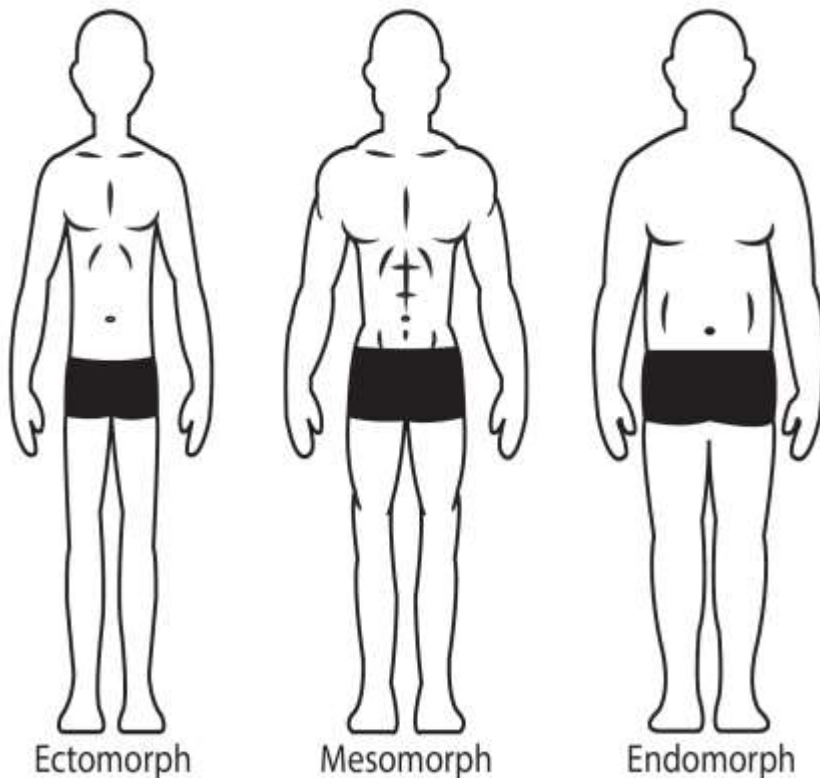

Ectomorph   Mesomorph   Endomorph

Figure 6.4 Sheldon's Somatotypes

In Sheldon's original theory, the different somatotypes also possessed unique personality traits. The Somatotype Perception Scale is just that, stereotypes that some people have associated with the three different body types.[xxiii] However, the media often still portrays these stereotypes in television and

movies. As such, many people still have these stereotypes.

Physical Appearance and Society

Unfortunately, someone's physical appearance has been shown to impact their lives in a number of different ways:

- Physically attractive students are viewed as more popular by their peers.
- Physically attractive people are seen as smarter.
- Physically attractive job applicants are more likely to get hired.
- Physically attractive people make more money.
- Physically attractive journalists are seen as more likable and credible.
- Physically attractive defendants in a court case were less likely to be convicted, and if they were convicted, the juries recommended less harsh sentences.
- Taller people are perceived as more credible.
- People who are overweight are less likely to get job interviews or promotions.

Now, this list is far from perfect and doesn't necessarily take every possible scenario into account. Furthermore, there are some differences between females and males in how they perceive attraction and how they are influenced by attraction. Moreover, culture can play a large part in how physical attractiveness impacts peoples' perceptions. For example, the classic example of how culture determines what is considered physically attractive stems from the paintings of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), who is famous for his use of full-figured women as a depiction of physical ideals.

In the United States today, most females and males that are portrayed in leading roles fall into the mesomorphic somatotype. There are examples of ectomorphic and endomorphic leading players, but the majority of people on television shows and in films are played by people who are mesomorphic body types. In fact, these trends tend to be seen in all of our major media in the United States (e.g., news, magazines, comic books, live theatre).

Body Positivity

There are groups in the United States that are attempting to help break down these walls within our society. For example, in the past few years, there has been a movement known as body positivity. In reality, the idea of body positivity isn't that new. In 1996, Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott founded The Body Positive. In her 2014 book, *embody: Learning to Love Your Unique Body (And Quiet that Critical Voice)*, Connie Sobczak defined body positive as "a way of living that gives you permission to love, care for, and take pleasure in your body throughout your lifespan. Struggles will inevitably occur, especially during times of transition or imbalance."[xxiv] Sobczak goes on to note that practicing body positivity "allows you to find what you need to live with as much self-love and balanced self- care as possible. Experiences of conflict and suffering become opportunities to learn what is required to further your growth so you can find greater contentment and peace."[xxv] The Body Positive has created a basic model for body positivity that consists of five basic competencies: reclaim health, practice intuitive self-care, cultivate self-love, declare your authentic beauty, and build community.

Reclaim Health

The first competency of the Be Body Positive Model is reclaiming one's health. For too long, the health care industry has consistently used someone's body mass index as an indication of someone's physical health. However, there is ample research that "measurements of physical activity and metabolic fitness, such as blood pressure, blood lipids, and blood sugar levels, are far better indicators of physical health

than body size."[xxvi] As such, reclaiming one's health is realizing that the weight loss and diet industry is a profit-making machine that isn't very effective. The weight loss and diet industry is estimated to be worth $245.51 billion by 2022.[xxvii] People spend a ton of money here even though the long-term effects of dieting are abysmal, with most people gaining back the weight they lost and adding some.[xxviii],[xxix] Now, this is not to say that people who are unhealthy should relish their ill-health. Instead, body positivity is about understanding that health isn't a number. One number that is often used to declare someone's "health" is their body mass index. You can calculate your own BMI using this [calculator from the National Institute of Health](). Here are the general categories associated with explaining someone's BMI:

- Underweight = <18.5
- Normal weight = 18.5–24.9
- Overweight = 25–29.9
- Obesity = 30-39
- Morbid Obesity = 40+

In reality, BMI doesn't distinguish between fat and muscle, so many elite bodybuilders have BMIs that say they're obese when they have little to no body fat. It's even possible to have metabolically healthy obesity. According to Patrick J. Skerrett, Former Executive Editor of Harvard Health, metabolically healthy obesity includes the following factors:

- a waist size of no more than 40 inches for a man or 35 inches for a woman
- normal blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar
- normal sensitivity to insulin
- good physical fitness[xxx]

As such, the focus of reclaiming health isn't about a number on a scale, but about being healthy. Unfortunately, many people still have the stereotype in society associating fatness with sickness, which modern medicine knows isn't the case.

Practice Intuitive Self-Care

Intuitive care is learning to trust our bodies regarding both eating and exercise. It's about being attuned to our body and realizing what our body needs. It's not about limiting yourself to 800 calories a day or exercising for nine hours every day. Instead, it's about learning to listen to our bodies mindfully. Intuitive self-care is realizing that our bodies need food and exercise, so we need to listen to them and provide them what they need. At the same time, intuitive self-care realizes that this is going to look different for everyone.

In other words, there is no perfect diet or exercise routine that will be beneficial for everyone. Some people get a "runners high," and others will never experience that euphoric feeling runners discuss. Other people can easily pack on muscle, while others can spend hours and hours in the gym and simply not see the type of growth they desire. Basically, our bodies are different and have inherent limitations on what they achieve. When people have unrealistic expectations for their body can (and should) look like and what their body can achieve, they are considered to have body dysmorphia.

Cultivate Self-Love

As we've discussed with mindfulness throughout this text, one of the problems many people face is an overly critical brain that seems to run non-stop. Cultivating self-love is about learning to make life-affirming choices and not listening to the non-stop vulture sitting on our shoulders. A lot of the practices we've discussed with mindfulness are in line with this idea of cultivating self-love.

Declare Your Own Authentic Beauty

Everyone is beautiful. Yet, we live in a society that places premiums on certain types of physical attributes that get labeled "physically attractive" or "beautiful." Declaring your own authentic beauty is about:

> choosing to see and express ourselves just as we are—internal and external qualities combined. Exploring beauty through a body positive lens teaches us to have a dynamic, engaged relationship with the world around us. We honor our bodies as we pass through each developmental stage of life, which leads to true self-care because we don't confuse it with a desire to transform our physical selves to meet someone else's definition of beauty.[xxxi]

Now, we do not deny that we are bombarded by messages in our society that dictate beauty standards, and it's hard to avoid these images and not let them impact how we evaluate our physical appearance. Learning to declare your authentic beauty is a process and not a process that's going to happen overnight. Instead, it's important to point out those vulture statements when we see them and label them for what they are. The more we start recognizing these vulture statements, the easier it will be to acknowledge our beauty.

Build Community

The last competency in the Be Body Positive Model is building a community of likeminded people who seek to build each other up instead of taking each other down. Many colleges and universities even have Be Body Positive groups on campus to help support each other as we all learn to be more body positive.

The Matching Hypothesis

One obvious area where physical appearance plays a huge part in our day-to-day lives is in our romantic relationships. Elaine Walster and her colleagues coined the "matching hypothesis" back in the 1960s.[xxxii],[xxxiii] The basic premise of the matching hypothesis is that the idea of "opposites attracting" really doesn't pertain to physical attraction. When all else is equal, people are more likely to find themselves in romantic relationships with people who are perceived as similarly physically attractive.

In a classic study conducted by Shepherd and Ellis, the researchers took pictures of married couples and mixed up the images of the husbands and wives.[xxxiv] The researchers then had groups of female and male college students sort the images based on physical attraction. Not surprisingly, there was a positive relationship between the physical attractiveness of the husbands and the physical attractiveness of the wives.

Other physical appearance variables beyond just basic physical attractiveness have also been examined with regards to the matching hypothesis. A group of researchers led by Julie Carmalt found that matching also explained the dating habits of young people.[xxxv] In their study, Carmalt et al. found that individuals who were overweight were less likely to date someone who was physically attractive.

Overall, research generally supports the matching hypothesis, but physical attractiveness is not the only variable that can impact romantic partners (e.g., socioeconomic status, education, career prospects). However, the matching hypothesis is a factor that impacts many people's ultimate dating selection ability.

Improving your Nonverbal Skills

In this chapter, we've examined a wide range of issues related to nonverbal communication. But it's one

thing to understand nonverbal communication and something completely different to communicate using nonverbal behaviors effectively. In this section, we're going to explore some ways that you can start to improve your nonverbal skills.

The Nonverbal Mindset

When it comes to effective communication, you need to develop an appropriate mindset towards nonverbal communication. First, individuals must be aware that nonverbal communication plays a significant role in creating meaning.

Second, individuals must believe nonverbal communication is important and impactful. Awareness of nonverbal communication without the belief that it is important can result in negative outcomes. For example, students in nonverbal communication begin to learn about the importance of clothing and general appearance in creating impressions. Some students "rebel" against the idea that appearance and clothing matter stating, "people should accept me no matter what I am wearing." While this would be ideal, the fact of the matter is that humans size up other humans using visual cues in initial interactions.

Lastly, individuals can analyze their nonverbal communication. This can be accomplished in several ways. Individuals might observe the behavior of individuals who seem to be liked by others and to whom others are socially attracted. The individual should then compare the behaviors of the "popular" person to their own behaviors. What differences exist? Does the other individual smile more, make more or less eye contact, engage in more or less touch, etc.? Based on this comparison, individuals can devise a plan for improvement or perhaps no improvement is needed!

Nonverbal Immediacy

In addition to awareness of nonverbal communication, believing that nonverbal communication is important and analyzing one's own behavior, individuals should be aware of nonverbal immediacy. Immediacy is defined as physical and psychological closeness. More specifically, Mehrabian defines immediacy as behaviors increasing the sensory stimulation between individuals.[xxxvi] Immediacy behaviors include being physically oriented toward another, eye contact, some touch, gesturing, vocal variety, and talking louder. Immediacy behaviors are known to be impactful in a variety of contexts. In instructional, organizational, and social contexts, research has revealed powerful positive impacts attributable to immediacy behaviors, including influence and compliance, liking, relationship satisfaction, job satisfaction, and learning, etc. In the health care setting, the positive outcomes of nonverbally immediate interaction are well documented: patient satisfaction,[xxxvii,xxxviii] understanding of medical information,[xxxix,xl] patient perceptions of provider credibility,[xli] patient perceptions of confidentiality,[xlii] parent recall of medical directives given by pediatricians and associated cognitive learning,[xliii] affect for the provider,[xliv,xlv] and decreased apprehension when communicating with a physician.[xlvi] Individuals can increase their immediacy behaviors through practice!

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Chapter 7
Listening

When it comes to daily communication, we spend about 45% of our listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing.[i] However, most people are not entirely sure what the word "listening" is or how to do it effectively. Listening is the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to consciously practice our own forms of expression. In this chapter we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

Hearing Is Not Listening

Hearing refers to a passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear. Hearing is a physiological process that is continuously happening. We are bombarded by sounds all the time. Unless you are in a sound-proof room or are 100% deaf, we are constantly hearing sounds. Even in a sound-proof room, other sounds that are normally not heard like a beating heart or breathing will become more apparent as a result of the blocked background noise.

Listening, on the other hand, is generally seen as an active process. Listening is "focused, concentrated attention for the purpose of understanding the meanings expressed by a [source]."[ii] From this perspective, hearing is more of an automatic response when your ear perceives information; whereas, listening is what happens when we purposefully attend to different messages.

We can even take this a step further and differentiate normal listening from critical listening. Critical listening is the "careful, systematic thinking and reasoning to see whether a message makes sense in light of factual evidence."[iii] From this perspective, it's one thing to attend to someone's message, but something very different to analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence.

Let's apply these ideas to a typical interpersonal situation. Let's say that you and your best friend are having dinner at a crowded restaurant. Your ear is going to be attending to a lot of different messages all the time in that environment, but most of those messages get filtered out as "background noise," or information we don't listen to at all. Maybe then your favorite song comes on the speaker system the restaurant is playing, and you and your best friend both attend to the song because you both like it. A minute earlier, another song could have been playing, but you tuned it out (hearing) instead of taking a moment to enjoy and attend to the song itself (listen). Next, let's say you and your friend get into a discussion about the issues of campus parking. Your friend states, "There's never any parking on campus. What gives?" Now, if you're critically listening to what your friend says, you'll question the basis of this argument. For example, the word "never" in this statement is problematic because it would mean that the campus has zero available parking, which is probably not the case. Now, it may be difficult for your friend to find a parking spot on campus, but that doesn't mean that there's "never any parking." In this case, you've gone from just listening to critically evaluating the argument your friend is making.

Model of Listening

Judi Brownell created one of the most commonly used models for listening.[iv] Although not the only model of listening that exists, we like this model because it breaks the process of hearing down into clearly differentiated stages: hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding.
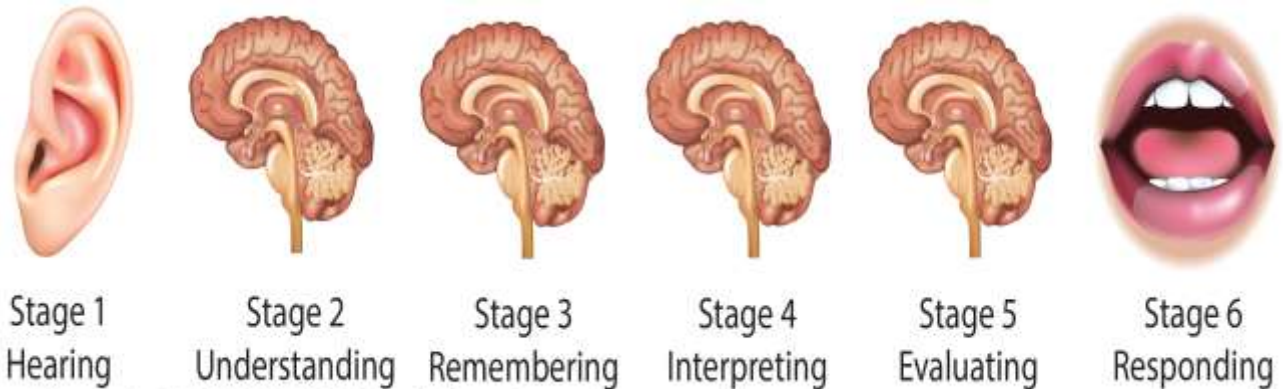
Figure 7.1 HURIER Model of Listening

Hearing

From a fundamental perspective, for listening to occur, an individual must attend to some kind of communicated message. Now, one can argue that hearing should not be equated with listening (as we did above), but it is the first step in the model of listening. Simply, if we don't attend to the message at all, then communication never occurred from the receiver's perspective.

Imagine you're standing in a crowded bar with your friends on a Friday night. You see your friend Darry and yell her name. In that instant, you, as a source of a message, have attempted to send a message. If Darry is too far away, or if the bar is too loud and she doesn't hear you call her name, then Darry has not engaged in stage one of the listening model. You may have tried to initiate communication, but the receiver, Darry, did not know that you initiated communication.

Now, to engage in mindful listening, it's important to take hearing seriously because of the issue of intention. If we go into an interaction with another person without really intending to listening to what they have to say, we may end up being a passive listener who does nothing more than hear and nod our heads. Remember, mindful communication starts with the premise that we must think about our intentions and be aware of them.

Understanding

The second stage of the listening model is understanding, or the ability to comprehend or decode the source's message. When we previously discussed the basic models of human communication, we discussed the idea of decoding a message. Simply, decoding is when we attempt to break down the message we've heard into comprehensible meanings. For example, imagine someone coming up to you asking if you know, "Tintinnabulation of vacillating pendulums in inverted, metallic resonant cups." Even if you recognize all of the words, you may not completely comprehend what the person is even trying to say. In this case, you cannot decode the message. Just as an FYI, that means "jingle bells."

Remembering

Once we've decoded a message, we have to actually remember the message itself, or the ability to recall a message that was sent. We are bombarded by messages throughout our day, so it's completely possible to attend to a message and decode it and then forget it about two seconds later.

For example, I always warn my students that my brain is like a sieve. If you tell me something when I'm leaving the class, I could easily have forgotten what you told me three seconds later because my brain switches gear to what I'm doing next: I run into another student into in the hallway; another thought pops into my head; etc. As such, I always recommend emailing me important things, so I don't forget them. In this case, it's not that I don't understand the message; I just get distracted, and my remembering process fails me. This problem plagues all of us.

Interpreting

The next stage in the HURIER Model of Listening is interpreting. "Interpreting messages involves attention to all of the various speaker and contextual variables that provide a background for accurately perceived messages."[v] So, what do we mean by contextual variables? A lot of the interpreting process is being aware of the nonverbal cues (both oral and physical) that accompany a message to accurately assign meaning to the message.

Imagine you're having a conversation with one of your peers, and he says, "I love math." Well, the text itself is demonstrating an overwhelming joy and calculating mathematical problems. However, if the message is accompanied by an eye roll or is said in a manner that makes it sound sarcastic, then the meaning of the oral phrase changes. Part of interpreting a message then is being sensitive to nonverbal cues.

Evaluating

The next stage is the evaluating stage, or judging the message itself. One of the biggest hurdles many people have with listening is the evaluative stage. Our personal biases, values, and beliefs can prevent us from effectively listening to someone else's message.

Let's imagine that you despise a specific politician. It's gotten to the point where if you hear this politician's voice, you immediately change the television channel. Even hearing other people talk about this politician causes you to tune out completely. In this case, your own bias against this politician prevents you from effectively listening to their message or even others' messages involving this politician.

Overcoming our own biases against the source of a message or the content of a message in an effort to truly listen to a message is not easy. One of the reasons listening is a difficult process is because of our inherent desire to evaluate people and ideas.

When it comes to evaluating another person's message, it's important to remember to be mindful. As we discussed in Chapter 1, to be a mindful communicator, you must listen with an open ear that is nonjudging. Too often, we start to evaluate others' messages with an analytical or cold quality that is antithetical to being mindful.

Responding

In Figure 7.1, hearing is represented by an ear, the brain represents the next four stages, and a person's mouth represents the final stage. It's important to realize that effective listening starts with the ear and centers in the brain, and only then should someone provide feedback to the message itself. Often, people

jump from hearing and understanding to responding, which can cause problems as they jump to conclusions that have arisen by truncated interpretation and evaluation.

Ultimately, how we respond to a source's message will dictate how the rest of that interaction will progress. If we outright dismiss what someone is saying, we put up a roadblock that says, "I don't want to hear anything else." On the other hand, if we nod our heads and say, "tell me more," then we are encouraging the speaker to continue the interaction. For effective communication to occur, it's essential to consider how our responses will impact the other person and our relationship with that other person. Overall, when it comes to being a mindful listener, it's vital to remember COAL: curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.[vi] We need to go into our interactions with others and try to see things from their points of view. When we engage in COAL, we can listen mindfully and be in the moment.

Taxonomy of Listening

Now that we've introduced the basic concepts of listening, let's examine a simple taxonomy of listening that was created by Andrew Wolvin and Carolyn Coakley.[vii] The basic premise of the Wolvin and Coakley taxonomy of listening is that there are fundamental parts to listening and then higher-order aspects of listening. Let's look at each of these parts separately.

Discriminative

The base level of listening is what Wolvin and Coakley called discriminative listening, or distinguishing between auditory and visual stimuli and determining which to actually pay attention to. In many ways, discriminative listening focuses on how hearing and seeing a wide range of different stimuli can be filtered and used.

We're constantly bombarded by a variety of messages in our day-to-day lives. We have to discriminate between which messages we want to pay attention to and which ones we won't. As a metaphor, think of discrimination as your email inbox. Every day you have to filter out messages (aka spam) to find the messages you want to actually read. In the same way, our brains are constantly bombarded by messages, and we have to filter some in and most of them out.

Comprehensive

If we achieve discriminative listening, then we can progress to comprehensive listening. "Comprehensive listening requires the listener to use the discriminative skills while functioning to understand and recall the speaker's information."[viii] If we go back and look at Figure 7.1, we can see that comprehensive listening essentially aligns with understanding and remembering. Wolvin and Coakley argued that discriminative and comprehensive listening are foundational levels of listening. If these foundational levels of listening are met, then they can progress to the other three, higher-order levels of listening: therapeutic, critical, and appreciative.

Therapeutic

Therapeutic listening occurs when an individual is a sounding board for another person during an interaction. For example, your best friend just fought with their significant other and they've come to you to talk through the situation.

Critical

The next aspect of listening is critical listening, or really analyzing the message that is being sent. Instead of just being a passive receiver of information, the essential goal of listening is to determine the acceptability or validity of the message(s) someone is sending.

Appreciative

Lastly, we have appreciative listening, which is when someone simply enjoys the act of listening or the message being sent. For example, let's say you're watching a Broadway musical or play or even a new movie at the cinema. While you may be engaged critically, you also may be simply appreciative and enjoying the act of listening to the message.

Listening Styles

Now that we have a better understanding of how listening works, let's talk about four different styles of listening researchers have identified. Kittie Watson, Larry Barker, and James Weaver defined listening styles as "attitudes, beliefs, and predispositions about the how, where, when, who, and what of the information reception and encoding process."[ix] Watson et al. identified four distinct listening styles: people, content, action, and time.

People

The first listening style is the people-oriented listening style. People-oriented listeners tend to be more focused on the person sending the message than the content of the message. As such, people-oriented listeners focus on the emotional states of senders of information. One way to think about people-oriented listeners is to see them as highly compassionate, empathic, and sensitive, which allows them to put themselves in the shoes of the person sending the message.

People-oriented listeners often work well in helping professions where listening to the person and understanding their feelings is very important (e.g., therapist, counselor, social worker). People-oriented listeners are also very focused on maintaining relationships, so they are good at casual conservation where they can focus on the person.

Action

The second listening style is the action-oriented listener. Action-oriented listeners are focused on what the source wants. The action-oriented listener wants a source to get to the point quickly. Instead of long, drawn-out lectures, the action-oriented speaker would prefer quick bullet points that get to what the source desires. Action-oriented listeners "tend to preference speakers that construct organized, direct, and logical presentations."[x]

When dealing with an action-oriented listener, it's important to realize that they want you to be logical and get to the point. One of the things action-oriented listeners commonly do is search for errors and inconsistencies in someone's message, so it's important to be organized and have your facts straight.

Content

The third type of listener is the content-oriented listener, or a listener who focuses on the content of the message and process that message in a systematic way. Of the four different listening styles, content-oriented listeners are more adept at listening to complex information. Content-oriented listeners "believe

it is important to listen fully to a speaker's message prior to forming an opinion about it (while action listeners tend to become frustrated if the speaker is 'wasting time')."[xi]

When it comes to analyzing messages, content-oriented listeners really want to dig into the message itself. They want as much information as possible in order to make the best evaluation of the message. As such, "they want to look at the time, the place, the people, the who, the what, the where, the when, the how … all of that. They don't want to leave anything out."[xii]

Time

The final listening style is the time-oriented listening style. Time-oriented listeners are sometimes referred to as "clock watchers" because they're always in a hurry and want a source of a message to speed things up a bit. Time-oriented listeners "tend to verbalize the limited amount of time they are willing or able to devote to listening and are likely to interrupt others and openly signal disinterest."[xiii] They often feel that they are overwhelmed by so many different tasks that need to be completed (whether real or not), so they usually try to accomplish multiple tasks while they are listening to a source. Of course, multitasking often leads to someone's attention being divided, and information being missed.

Hopefully, this section has helped you further understand the complexity of listening. We should mention that many people are not just one listening style or another. It's possible to be a combination of different listening styles. However, some of the listening style combinations are more common. For example, someone who is action-oriented and time-oriented will want the bare-bones information so they can make a decision. On the other hand, it's hard to be a people-oriented listener and time-oriented listener because being empathic and attending to someone's feelings takes time and effort.

Listening Responses

Who do you think is a great listener? Why did you name that particular person? How can you tell that person is a good listener? You probably recognize a good listener based on the nonverbal and verbal cues that they display. In this section, we will discuss different types of listening responses. We all don't listen in the same way. Also, each situation is different and requires a distinct style that is appropriate for that situation.

Types of Listening Responses

Ronald Adler, Lawrence Rosenfeld, and Russell Proctor are three interpersonal scholars who have done quite a bit with listening.[xiv] Based on their research, they have found different types of listening responses: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising.[xv]

Silent Listening

Silent listening occurs when you say nothing. It is ideal in certain situations and awful in other situations. However, when used correctly, it can be very powerful. If misused, you could give the wrong impression to someone. It is appropriate to use when you don't want to encourage more talking. It also shows that you are open to the speaker's ideas.

Sometimes people get angry when someone doesn't respond. They might think that this person is

not listening or trying to avoid the situation. But it might be due to the fact that the person is just trying to gather their thoughts, or perhaps it would be inappropriate to respond. There are certain situations such as in counseling, where silent listening can be beneficial because it can help that person figure out their feelings and emotions.

Questioning

In situations where you want to get answers, it might be beneficial to use questioning. You can do this in a variety of ways. There are several ways to question in a sincere, nondirective way (see Table 7.3):

Reason	Example
To clarify meanings	A young child might mumble something and you want to make sure you understand what they said.
To learn about others' thoughts, feelings, and wants (open/closed questions)	When you ask your partner where they see your relationship going in the next few years.
To encourage elaboration	Nathan says "That's interesting!" Jonna has to ask him further if he means interesting in a positive or negative way.
To encourage discovery	Ask your parents how they met because you never knew.
To gather more facts and details	Police officers at the scene of the crime will question any witnesses to get a better understanding of what happened.

Table 7.3 Types of Nondirective Questioning

You might have different types of questions. Sincere questions are ones that are created to find a genuine answer. Counterfeit questions are disguised attempts to send a message, not to receive one. Sometimes, counterfeit questions can cause the listener to be defensive. For instance, if someone asks you, "Tell me how often you used crystal meth." The speaker implies that you have used meth, even though that has not been established. A speaker can use questions that make statements by emphasizing specific words or phrases, stating an opinion or feeling on the subject. They can ask questions that carry hidden agendas, like "Do you have $5?" because the person would like to borrow that money. Some questions seek "correct" answers. For instance, when a friend says, "Do I look fat?" You probably have a correct or ideal answer. There are questions that are based on unchecked assumptions. An example would be, "Why aren't you listening?" This example implies that the person wasn't listening, when in fact they are listening.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is defined as restating in your own words, the message you think the speaker just sent. There are three types of paraphrasing. First, you can change the speaker's wording to indicate what you think they meant. Second, you can offer an example of what you think the speaker is talking about. Third, you can reflect on the underlying theme of a speaker's remarks. Paraphrasing represents mindful listening in the way that you are trying to analyze and understand the speaker's information.

Paraphrasing can be used to summarize facts and to gain consensus in essential discussions. This could be used in a business meeting to make sure that all details were discussed and agreed upon. Paraphrasing can also be used to understand personal information more accurately. Think about being in a counselor's office. Counselors often paraphrase information to understand better exactly how you are feeling and to be able to analyze the information better.

Empathizing

Empathizing is used to show that you identify with a speaker's information. You are not empathizing when you deny others the rights to their feelings. Examples of this are statements such as, "It's really not a big deal" or "Who cares?" This indicates that the listener is trying to make the speaker feel a different way. In minimizing the significance of the situation, you are interpreting the situation in your perspective and passing judgment.

Supporting

Sometimes, in a discussion, people want to know how you feel about them instead of a reflection on the content. Several types of supportive responses are: agreement, offers to help, praise, reassurance, and diversion. The value of receiving support when faced with personal problems is very important. This has been shown to enhance psychological, physical, and relational health. To effectively support others, you must meet certain criteria. You have to make sure that your expression of support is sincere, be sure that other person can accept your support, and focus on "here and now" rather than "then and there."

Analyzing

Analyzing is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message. However, this can be problematic at times. Sometimes the speaker might not be able to understand your perspective or may become more confused by accepting it. To avoid this, steps must be taken in advance. These include tentatively offering your interpretation instead of as an absolute fact. By being more sensitive about it, it might be more comfortable for the speaker to accept. You can also make sure that your analysis has a reasonable chance of being correct. If it were inaccurate, it would leave the person more confused than before. Also, you must make sure the person will be receptive to your analysis and that your motive for offering is to truly help the other person. An analysis offered under any other circumstances is useless.

Evaluating

Evaluating appraises the speaker's thoughts or behaviors. The evaluation can be favorable ("That makes sense") or negative (passing judgment). Negative evaluations can be critical or non-critical (constructive criticism). Two conditions offer the best chance for evaluations to be received: if the person with the problem requested an evaluation, and if it is genuinely constructive and not designed as a putdown.

Advising

Advising differs from evaluations. It is not always the best solution and can sometimes be harmful. In order to avoid this, you must make sure four conditions are present: be sure the person is receptive to your suggestions, make sure they are truly ready to accept it, be confident in the correctness of your advice, and be sure the receiver won't blame you if it doesn't work out.

Barriers to Effective Listening

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process.[xvi] At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

Environmental and Physical Barriers to Listening

Environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, and furniture affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. Some seating arrangements facilitate listening, while others separate people. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. When group members are allowed to choose a leader, they often choose the person who is sitting at the center or head of the table.[xvii] Even though the person may not have demonstrated any leadership abilities, people subconsciously gravitate toward speakers that are nonverbally accessible. The ability to effectively see and hear a person increases people's confidence in their abilities to receive and process information. Eye contact and physical proximity can still be affected by noise. As we learned in the first chapter, environmental noises such as a whirring air conditioner, barking dogs, or a ringing fire alarm can obviously interfere with listening despite direct lines of sight and well-placed furniture.

Physiological noise, like environmental noise, can interfere with our ability to process incoming information. This is considered a physical barrier to effective listening because it emanates from our physical body. Physiological noise is noise stemming from a physical illness, injury, or bodily stress. Ailments such as a cold, a broken leg, a headache, or a poison ivy outbreak can range from annoying to unbearably painful and impact our listening relative to their intensity. Another type of noise, psychological noise, bridges physical and cognitive barriers to effective listening. Psychological noise, or noise stemming from our psychological states including moods and level of arousal, can facilitate or impede listening. Any mood or state of arousal, positive or negative, that is too far above or below our regular baseline creates a barrier to message reception and processing. The generally positive emotional state of being in love can be just as much of a barrier as feeling hatred. Excited arousal can also distract as much as anxious arousal. Stress about an upcoming events ranging from losing a job, to having surgery, to wondering about what to eat for lunch can overshadow incoming messages. While we will explore cognitive barriers to effective listening more in the next section, psychological noise is relevant here given that the body and mind are not completely separate. In fact, they can interact in ways that further interfere with listening. Fatigue, for example, is usually a combination of psychological and physiological stresses that manifests as stress (psychological noise) and weakness, sleepiness, and tiredness (physiological noise). Additionally, mental anxiety (psychological noise) can also manifest itself in our bodies through trembling, sweating, blushing, or even breaking out in rashes (physiological noise). Preferences affect our listening, we are likely to experience more barriers than benefits.

Bad Listening Practices

The previously discussed barriers to effective listening may be difficult to overcome because they are at least partially beyond our control. Physical barriers, cognitive limitations, and perceptual biases exist within all of us, and it is more realistic to believe that we can become more conscious of and lessen them than it is to believe that we can eliminate them altogether. Other "bad listening" practices may be habitual, but they are easier to address with some concerted effort. These bad listening practices include interrupting, eavesdropping, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening, defensive listening, selective listening, insensitive listening, and pseudo- listening.

Interrupting

Conversations unfold as a series of turns, and turn taking is negotiated through a complex set of verbal and nonverbal signals that are consciously and subconsciously received. In this sense, conversational turn taking has been likened to a dance where communicators try to avoid stepping on each other's toes. One of the most frequent glitches in the turn-taking process is interruption, but not all interruptions are considered "bad listening." An interruption could be unintentional if we misread cues and think a person is done speaking only to have him or her start up again at the same time we do. Sometimes interruptions are more like overlapping statements that show support (e.g., "I think so too.") or excitement about the conversation (e.g., "That's so cool!"). Back-channel cues like "uh-huh," as we learned earlier, also overlap with a speaker's message. We may also interrupt out of necessity if we're engaged in a task with the other person and need to offer directions (e.g., "Turn left here."), instructions (e.g., "Will you whisk the eggs?"), or warnings (e.g., "Look out behind you!"). All these interruptions are not typically thought of as evidence of bad listening unless they become distracting for the speaker or are unnecessary.

Unintentional interruptions can still be considered bad listening if they result from mindless communication. As we've already learned, intended meaning is not as important as the meaning that is generated in the interaction itself. So if you interrupt unintentionally, but because you were only half-listening, then the interruption is still evidence of bad listening. The speaker may form a negative impression of you that can't just be erased by you noting that you didn't "mean to interrupt." Interruptions can also be used as an attempt to dominate a conversation. A person engaging in this type of interruption may lead the other communicator to try to assert dominance, too, resulting in a competition to see who can hold the floor the longest or the most often. More than likely, though, the speaker will form a negative impression of the interrupter and may withdraw from the conversation.

Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping is a bad listening practice that involves a calculated and planned attempt to secretly listen to a conversation. There is a difference between eavesdropping on and overhearing a conversation. Many if not most of the interactions we have throughout the day occur in the presence of other people. However, given that our perceptual fields are usually focused on the interaction, we are often unaware of the other people around us or don't think about the fact that they could be listening in on our conversation. We usually only become aware of the fact that other people could be listening in when we're discussing something private.

People eavesdrop for a variety of reasons. People might think another person is talking about them behind their back or that someone is engaged in illegal or unethical behavior. Sometimes people eavesdrop to feed the gossip mill or out of curiosity.[xviii] In any case, this type of listening is considered bad because it is a violation of people's privacy. Consequences for eavesdropping may include an angry reaction if caught, damage to interpersonal relationships, or being perceived as dishonest and sneaky.

Additionally, eavesdropping may lead people to find out information that is personally upsetting or hurtful, especially if the point of the eavesdropping is to find out what people are saying behind their back.

Aggressive Listening

Aggressive listening also referred to as ambushing, is a bad listening practice in which people pay attention in order to attack something that a speaker says.[xix] Aggressive listeners like to ambush speakers in order to critique their ideas, personality, or other characteristics. Such behavior often results from built- up frustration within an interpersonal relationship. Unfortunately, the more two people know each other, the better they will be at aggressive listening. Take the following exchange between long-term partners:

> Deb: I've been thinking about making a salsa garden next to the side porch. I think it would be really good to be able to go pick our own tomatoes and peppers and cilantro to make homemade salsa.
>
> Summer: Really? When are you thinking about doing it?
>
> Deb: Next weekend. Would you like to help?
>
> Summer: I won't hold my breath. Every time you come up with some "idea of the week" you get so excited about it. But do you ever follow through with it? No. We'll be eating salsa from the store next year, just like we are now.

Although Summer's initial response to Deb's idea is seemingly appropriate and positive, she asks the question because she has already planned her upcoming aggressive response. Summer's aggression toward Deb isn't about a salsa garden; it's about a building frustration with what Summer perceives as Deb's lack of follow-through on her ideas. Aside from engaging in aggressive listening because of built-up frustration, such listeners may also attack others' ideas or mock their feelings because of their own low self-esteem and insecurities.

Narcissistic Listening

Narcissistic listening is a form of self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them.[xx] You might consider this type of listener a "stage-hog." Narcissistic listeners redirect the focus of the conversation to them by interrupting or changing the topic. When the focus is taken off them, narcissistic listeners may give negative feedback by pouting, providing negative criticism of the speaker or topic, or ignoring the speaker. A common sign of narcissistic listening is the combination of a "pivot," when listeners shift the focus of attention back to them, and "one-upping," when listeners try to top what previous speakers have said during the interaction. You can see this narcissistic combination in the following interaction:

> Bryce: My boss has been really unfair to me lately and hasn't been letting me work around my class schedule. I think I may have to quit, but I don't know where I'll find another job.
>
> Toby: Why are you complaining? I've been working with the same stupid boss for two

years. He doesn't even care that I'm trying to get my degree and work at the same time. And you should hear the way he talks to me in front of the other employees.

Narcissistic listeners, given their self-centeredness, may actually fool themselves into thinking that they are listening and actively contributing to a conversation. We all have the urge to share our own stories during interactions, because other people's communication triggers our own memories about related experiences. It is generally more competent to withhold sharing our stories until the other person has been able to speak and we have given the appropriate support and response. But we all shift the focus of a conversation back to us occasionally, either because we don't know another way to respond or because we are making an attempt at empathy. Narcissistic listeners consistently interrupt or follow another speaker with statements like "That reminds me of the time…," "Well, if I were you…," and "That's nothing…"[xxi] As we'll learn later, matching stories isn't considered empathetic listening, but occasionally doing it doesn't make you a narcissistic listener.

Defensive listening

Defensive listening is a practice of listening where you perceive an attack where one does not really exist. Sometimes this occurs when we feel guilty, or even insecure. We tend to personalize a comment that might be made innocently. For example, imagine that you have a roommate, and he or she makes the following comment: "Gosh, the shower in here sure gets moldy easily." If you are a defensive listener, you would assume that your roommate was somehow accusing you of not taking better care of the shower. If you both had a rule that said you would wipe the shower down each time you used it, but you had neglected to do so several times, then some guilt might be at work as well!

Selective listening

If you have ever noticed yourself only listening to the points someone makes that are important to you or that you agree with, you might be engaging in selective listening. Children may not pay attention to their parents' conversation until one of them says "you need to have a B average if you want us to pay your car insurance." Similarly, listening to political pundits or figures is often a place where selective listening occurs. You will take in the parts of the discussion that you agree with, and filter out the rest. As with most listening barriers, you can miss a lot of important information.

Insensitive listening

Insensitive listening can often be the exact opposite of empathetic listening. This barrier can also be viewed as literal listening, where we listen for the content, but ignore the relational meaning. This means that we don't pay attention to the emotional cues the other person may be giving. Imagine if your friend did not pass an exam, and then tells you. Rather than asking questions, or providing an empathetic response, your response is "I guess you didn't study" or "Yeah, life can be hard." Neither response will allow your friend to feel good about the exchange.

Pseudo-listening

Do you have a friend or family member who repeats stories? If so, then you've probably engaged in pseudo-listening as a politeness strategy. Pseudo-listening is behaving as if you're paying attention to a speaker when you're actually not.[xxii] Outwardly visible signals of attentiveness are an important part of the listening process, but when they are just an "act," the pseudo-listener is engaging in bad listening behaviors. She or he is not actually going through the stages of the listening process and will likely not

be able to recall the speaker's message or offer a competent and relevant response. Although it is a bad listening practice, we all understandably engage in pseudo-listening from time to time. If a friend needs someone to talk but you're really tired or experiencing some other barrier to effective listening, it may be worth engaging in pseudo- listening as a relational maintenance strategy, especially if the friend just needs a sounding board and isn't expecting advice or guidance. We may also pseudo-listen to a romantic partner or grandfather's story for the fifteenth time to prevent hurting their feelings. We should avoid pseudo-listening when possible and should definitely avoid making it a listening habit. Although we may get away with it in some situations, each time we risk being "found out," which could have negative relational consequences.

Improving Listening Competence

Many people admit that they could stand to improve their listening skills. This section will help us do that. In this section, we will learn strategies for developing and improving competence at each stage of the listening process. We will also define active listening and the behaviors that go along with it. Looking back to the types of listening discussed earlier, we will learn specific strategies for sharpening our critical and empathetic listening skills. In keeping with our focus on integrative learning, we will also apply the skills we have learned in academic, professional, and relational contexts and explore how culture and gender affect listening.

Active Listening

Active listening refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices. Active listening can help address many of the environmental, physical, cognitive, and personal barriers to effective listening that we discussed earlier. The behaviors associated with active listening can also enhance informational, critical, and empathetic listening.

Active Listening Can Help Overcome Barriers to Effective Listening

Being an active listener starts before you actually start receiving a message. Active listeners make strategic choices and take action in order to set up ideal listening conditions. Physical and environmental noises can often be managed by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture. When possible, avoid important listening activities during times of distracting psychological or physiological noise. For example, we often know when we're going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious, and advance planning can alleviate the presence of these barriers. For college students, who often have some flexibility in their class schedules, knowing when you best listen can help you make strategic choices regarding what class to take when. And student options are increasing, as some colleges are offering classes in the overnight hours to accommodate working students and students who are just "night owls."[xxiii] Of course, we don't always have control over our schedule, in which case we will need to utilize other effective listening strategies that we will learn more about later in this chapter.

In terms of cognitive barriers to effective listening, we can prime ourselves to listen by analyzing a listening situation before it begins. For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

1. "What are my goals for listening to this message?"
2. "How does this message relate to me / affect my life?"
3. "What listening type and style are most appropriate for this message?"

Effective listeners must work to maintain focus as much as possible and refocus when attention shifts or

fades.[xxiv] One way to do this is to find the motivation to listen. If you can identify intrinsic and or extrinsic motivations for listening to a particular message, then you will be more likely to remember the information presented. Ask yourself how a message could impact your life, your career, your intellect, or your relationships. This can help overcome our tendency toward selective attention. As senders of messages, we can help listeners by making the relevance of what we're saying clear and offering well-organized messages that are tailored for our listeners. We will learn much more about establishing relevance, organizing a message, and gaining the attention of an audience in public speaking contexts later in the book.

Given that we can process more words per minute than people can speak, we can engage in internal dialogue, making good use of our intrapersonal communication, to become a better listener. Three possibilities for internal dialogue include covert coaching, self-reinforcement, and covert questioning; explanations and examples of each follow:[xxv]

- **Covert coaching** involves sending yourself messages containing advice about better listening, such as "You're getting distracted by things you have to do after work. Just focus on what your supervisor is saying now."
- **Self-reinforcement** involves sending yourself affirmative and positive messages: "You're being a good active listener. This will help you do well on the next exam."
- **Covert questioning** involves asking yourself questions about the content in ways that focus your attention and reinforce the material: "What is the main idea from that PowerPoint slide?" "Why is he talking about his brother in front of our neighbors?"

Internal dialogue is a more structured way to engage in active listening, but we can use more general approaches as well. I suggest that students occupy the "extra" channels in their mind with thoughts that are related to the primary message being received instead of thoughts that are unrelated. We can use those channels to resort, rephrase, and repeat what a speaker says. When we resort, we can help mentally repair disorganized messages. When we rephrase, we can put messages into our own words in ways that better fit our cognitive preferences. When we repeat, we can help messages transfer from short-term to long-term memory.

Other tools can help with concentration and memory. Mental bracketing refers to the process of intentionally separating out intrusive or irrelevant thoughts that may distract you from listening.[xxvi] This requires that we monitor our concentration and attention and be prepared to let thoughts that aren't related to a speaker's message pass through our minds without us giving them much attention. Mnemonic devices are techniques that can aid in information recall.[xxvii] Starting in ancient Greece and Rome, educators used these devices to help people remember information. They work by imposing order and organization on information. Three main mnemonic devices are acronyms, rhymes, and visualization, and examples of each follow:

- **Acronyms.** HOMES—to help remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior).
- **Rhyme.** "Righty tighty, lefty loosey"—to remember which way most light bulbs, screws, and other coupling devices turn to make them go in or out.
- **Visualization.** Imagine seeing a glass of port wine (which is red) and the red navigation light on a boat to help remember that the red light on a boat is always on the port side, which will also help you remember that the blue light must be on the starboard side.

Active Listening Behaviors

From the suggestions discussed previously, you can see that we can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active

listening behaviors as we receive and process messages.

Eye contact is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener's eye contact as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing. When we look away to process new information, we usually do it unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, "That's new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it." We already learned the role that back-channel cues play in listening. An occasional head nod and "uh-huh" signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of "autopilot" listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

A more direct way to indicate active listening is to reference previous statements made by the speaker. Norms of politeness usually call on us to reference a past statement or connect to the speaker's current thought before starting a conversational turn. Being able to summarize what someone said to ensure that the topic has been satisfactorily covered and understood or being able to segue in such a way that validates what the previous speaker said helps regulate conversational flow. Asking probing questions is another way to directly indicate listening and to keep a conversation going, since they encourage and invite a person to speak more.

You can also ask questions that seek clarification and not just elaboration. Speakers should present complex information at a slower speaking rate than familiar information, but many will not. Remember that your nonverbal feedback can be useful for a speaker, as it signals that you are listening but also whether or not you understand. If a speaker fails to read your nonverbal feedback, you may need to follow up with verbal communication in the form of paraphrased messages and clarifying questions.

As active listeners, we want to be excited and engaged, but don't let excitement manifest itself in interruptions. Being an active listener means knowing when to maintain our role as listener and resist the urge to take a conversational turn. Research shows that people with higher social status are more likely to interrupt others, so keep this in mind and be prepared for it if you are speaking to a high- status person, or try to resist it if you are the high-status person in an interaction.[xxviii]

Note-taking can also indicate active listening. Translating information through writing into our own cognitive structures and schemata allows us to better interpret and assimilate information. Of course, note-taking isn't always a viable option. It would be fairly awkward to take notes during a first date or a casual exchange between new coworkers. But in some situations where we wouldn't normally consider taking notes, a little awkwardness might be worth it for the sake of understanding and recalling the information. For example, many people don't think about taking notes when getting information from their doctor or banker. I actually invite students to take notes during informal meetings because I think they sometimes don't think about it or don't think it's appropriate. But many people would rather someone jot down notes instead of having to respond to follow-up questions on information that was already clearly conveyed. To help facilitate your note-taking, you might say something like "Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important."

In summary, active listening is exhibited through verbal and nonverbal cues, including steady eye contact with the speaker; smiling; slightly raised eyebrows; upright posture; body position that is leaned in toward the speaker; nonverbal back-channel cues such as head nods; verbal back- channel cues such as "OK," "mmhum," or "oh"; and a lack of distracting mannerisms like doodling or fidgeting.[xxix]

Listening in Relational Contexts

Listening plays a central role in establishing and maintaining our relationships.[xxx] Without some listening competence, we wouldn't be able to engage in the self-disclosure process, which is essential for the establishment of relationships. Newly acquainted people get to know each other through increasingly personal and reciprocal disclosures of personal information. In order to reciprocate a conversational partner's disclosure, we must process it through listening. Once relationships are formed, listening to others provides a psychological reward, through the simple act of recognition, that helps maintain our relationships. Listening to our relational partners and being listened to in return is part of the give-and-take of any interpersonal relationship. Our thoughts and experiences "back up" inside of us, and getting them out helps us maintain a positive balance.[xxxi] So something as routine and seemingly pointless as listening to our romantic partner debrief the events of his or her day or our roommate recount his or her weekend back home shows that we are taking an interest in their lives and are willing to put our own needs and concerns aside for a moment to attend to their needs. Listening also closely ties to conflict, as a lack of listening often plays a large role in creating conflict, while effective listening helps us resolve it. Listening has relational implications throughout our lives, too. Parents who engage in competent listening behaviors with their children from a very young age make their children feel worthwhile and appreciated, which affects their development in terms of personality and character.[xxxii]

A lack of listening leads to feelings of loneliness, which results in lower self-esteem and higher degrees of anxiety. In fact, by the age of four or five years old, the empathy and recognition shown by the presence or lack of listening has molded children's personalities in noticeable ways.[xxxiii] Children who have been listened to grow up expecting that others will be available and receptive to them. These children are therefore more likely to interact confidently with teachers, parents, and peers in ways that help develop communication competence that will be built on throughout their lives. Children who have not been listened to may come to expect that others will not want to listen to them, which leads to a lack of opportunities to practice, develop, and hone foundational communication skills. Fortunately for the more-listened-to children and unfortunately for the less-listened-to children, these early experiences become predispositions that don't change much as the children get older and may actually reinforce themselves and become stronger.

Listening and Culture

Some cultures place more importance on listening than other cultures. In general, collectivistic cultures tend to value listening more than individualistic cultures that are more speaker oriented. The value placed on verbal and nonverbal meaning also varies by culture and influences how we communicate and listen. A low-context communication style is one in which much of the meaning generated within an interaction comes from the verbal communication used rather than nonverbal or contextual cues. Conversely, much of the meaning generated by a high-context communication style comes from nonverbal and contextual cues.[xxxiv] For example, US Americans of European descent generally use a low-context communication style, while people in East Asian and Latin American cultures use a high-context communication style.

Contextual communication styles affect listening in many ways. Cultures with a high-context orientation generally use less verbal communication and value silence as a form of communication, which requires listeners to pay close attention to nonverbal signals and consider contextual influences on a message. Cultures with a low-context orientation must use more verbal communication and provide explicit details, since listeners aren't expected to derive meaning from the context. Note that people from low-context cultures may feel frustrated by the ambiguity of speakers from high-context cultures,

while speakers from high-context cultures may feel overwhelmed or even insulted by the level of detail used by low-context communicators. Cultures with a low-context communication style also tend to have a monochronic orientation toward time, while high-context cultures have a polychronic time orientation, which also affects listening.

Monochronic cultures like the United States value time and action-oriented listening styles, especially in professional contexts, because time is seen as a commodity that is scarce and must be managed.[xxxv] This is evidenced by leaders in businesses and organizations who often request "executive summaries" that only focus on the most relevant information and who use statements like "Get to the point." Polychronic cultures, which have more flexible listening styles, value people and content-oriented listening styles, which makes sense when we consider that polychronic cultures also tend to be more collectivistic and use a high-context communication style. In collectivistic cultures, indirect communication is preferred in cases where direct communication would be considered a threat to the other person's face (desired public image). For example, flatly turning down a business offer would be too direct, so a person might reply with a "maybe" instead of a "no." The person making the proposal, however, would be able to draw on contextual clues that they implicitly learned through socialization to interpret the "maybe" as a "no."

Listening and Gender

Research on gender and listening has produced mixed results. As we've already learned, much of the research on gender differences and communication has been influenced by gender stereotypes and falsely connected to biological differences. More recent research has found that people communicate in ways that conform to gender stereotypes in some situations and not in others, which shows that our communication is more influenced by societal expectations than by innate or gendered "hard-wiring." For example, through socialization, men are generally discouraged from expressing emotions in public. A woman sharing an emotional experience with a man may perceive the man's lack of emotional reaction as a sign of inattentiveness, especially if he typically shows more emotion during private interactions. The man, however, may be listening but withholding nonverbal expressiveness because of social norms. He may not realize that withholding those expressions could be seen as a lack of empathetic or active listening. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters.[xxxvi] So men may interrupt each other more in same-gender interactions as a conscious or subconscious attempt to establish dominance because such behaviors are expected, as men are generally socialized to be more competitive than women. However, this type of competitive interrupting isn't as present in cross-gender interactions because the contexts have shifted.

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Chapter 8
Building and Maintaining Relationships

Over the course of our lives, we will enter into and out of many different relationships. When it comes to dating, the average person has seven relationships before getting married.[i] According to a study conduct- ed by OnePoll in conjunction with Evite, the average American has:

- Three best friends
- Five good friends
- Eight people they like but don't spend one-on-one time with
- 50 acquaintances
- 91 social media friends[ii]

In this chapter, we are going to discuss how we go about building and maintaining our interpersonal relationships.

The Nature of Relationships

We've all been in a wide range of relationships in our lives. This section is going to explore relationships by examining specific relationship characteristics and the nature of significant relationships.

Relationship Characteristics

We all know that all relationships are not the same. We have people in our lives that we enjoy spending time with, like to support us, and/or assist us when needed. We will typically distance ourselves from people who do not provide positive feelings or outcomes for us. Thus, there are many characteristics in relationships that we have with others. These characteristics are: duration, contact frequency, sharing, support, interaction variability, and goals.[iii]

       Some friendships last a lifetime, others last a short period. The length of any relationship is referred to as that relationship's duration. People who grew up in small towns might have had the same classmate till graduation. This is due to the fact that duration with each person is different. Some people we meet in college and we will never see them again. Hence, our duration with that person is short. Duration is related to the length of your relationship with that person.

       Second, contact frequency is how often you communicate with the other person. There are people in our lives we have known for years but only talk to infrequently. The more we communicate with others, the closer our bond becomes to the other person. Sometimes people think duration is the real test of a relationship, but it also depends on how often you communicate with the other person.

       The third relationship trait is sharing. The more we spend time with other people and interact with them, the more we are likely to share information about ourselves. This type of sharing involves information that is usually our private and very intimate details of our thoughts and feelings. We typically don't share this information with a stranger. Once we develop a sense of trust and support with this person, we can begin to share more details.

       The fourth characteristic is support. Think of the people in your life and who you would be able

to call in case of an emergency. The ones that come to mind are the ones you know who would be supportive of you. They would support you if you needed help, money, time, or advice. Support is another relationship trait because we know that not everyone can support us in the same manner. For instance, if you need relationship advice, you would probably pick someone who has relationship knowledge and would support you in your decision. Support is so important. A major difference found between married and dating couples is that married couples were more likely to provide supportive communication behaviors to their partners than dating couples.[iv]

The fifth defining characteristic of relationships is the interaction variability. When we have a relationship with another person, it is not defined by your interaction with them, rather on the different types of conversations you can have with that person. When you were little, you probably knew that if you were to approach your mom, she might respond a certain way as opposed to your dad, who might respond differently. Hence, you knew that your interaction would vary. The same thing happens with your classmates because you don't just talk about class with them. You might talk about other events on campus or social events. Therefore, our interactions with others are defined by the greater variability that we have with one person as opposed to another.

The last relationship characteristic is goals. In every relationship we enter into, we have certain expectations about that relationship. For instance, if your goal is to get closer to another person through communication, you might share your thoughts and feelings and expect the other person to do the same. If they do not, then you will probably feel like the goals in your relationship were not met because they didn't share information. The same goes for other types of relationships. We typically expect that our significant other will be truthful, supportive, and faithful. If they break that goal, then it causes problems in the relationship and could end the relationship. Hence, in all our relationships, we have goals and expectations about how the relationship will function and operate.

Think about all the relationships that you have in your life. Which ones are the most meaningful and significant for you? Why do you consider these relationships as the most notable one(s) for you? Your parents/guardians, teachers, friends, family members, and love interests can all serve as significant relationships for you. Significant relationships have a huge impact on our communication behaviors and our interpretation of these conversations. Significant relationships impact who we are and help us grow. These relationships can serve a variety of purposes in our lives.

Purposes of Relationships

Relationships can serve a variety of purposes: work, task, and social. First, relationships can be work-related. We might have a significant work relationship that helps us advance our professional career. We might have work relationships that might support us in gaining financial benefits or better work opportunities. Second, we might have significant relationships that are task-related. We may have a specific task that we need to accomplish with this other person. It might be a project or a mentorship. After the task is completed, then the relationship may end. For instance, a high school coach may serve as a significant relationship. You and your coach might have a task or plan to go to the state competition. You and your coach will work on ways to help you. However, after you complete high school and your task has ended, then you might keep in contact with the coach, or you may not since your competition (task) has ended. The last purpose is for social reasons. We may have social reasons for pursuing a relationship. These can include pleasure, inclusion, control, and/or affection. Each relationship that we have with another person has a specific purpose. We may like to spend time with a particular friend because we love talking to them; at the same time, we might like spending time with another friend because we know that they can help us become more involved with extracurricular

activities.

Elements of a Good Relationship

In summary, relationships are meaningful and beneficial. Relationships allow us to grow psychologically, emotionally, and physically. We can connect with others and truly communicate. The satisfaction of our relationships usually determines our happiness and health.

Relationship Formation

Have you ever wondered why people pick certain relationships over others? We can't pick our family members, although I know some people wish they could. We can, however, select who our friends and significant others are in our lives. Throughout our lives, we pick and select people that we build a connection to and have an attraction towards. We tend to avoid certain people who we don't find attractive.

Understanding Attraction

Researchers have identified three primary types of attraction: physical, social, and task. Physical attraction refers to the degree to which you find another person aesthetically pleasing. What is deemed aesthetically pleasing can alter greatly from one culture to the next. We also know that pop culture can greatly define what is considered to be physically appealing from one era to the next. Think of the curvaceous ideal of Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor in the 1950s as compared to the thin Halle Barry or Anne Hathaway. Although discussions of male physical attraction occur less often, they are equally impacted by pop culture. In the 1950s, you had solid men like Robert Mitchum and Marlon Brando as compared to the heavily muscled men of today like Joe Manganiello or Zac Efron.

The second type of attraction is social attraction, or the degree to which an individual sees another person as entertaining, intriguing, and fun to be around. We all have finite sources when it comes to the amount of time we have in a given day. We prefer to socialize with people that we think are fun. These people may entertain us or they may just fascinate us. No matter the reason, we find some people more socially desirable than others. Social attraction can also be a factor of power, for example, in situations where there are kids in the "in-group" and those that are not. In this case, those that are considered popular hold more power and are perceived as being more socially desirable to associate with. This relationship becomes problematic when these individuals decide to use this social desirability as a tool or weapon against others.

The final type of attraction is task attraction, or people we are attracted to because they possess specific knowledge and/or skills that help us accomplish specific goals. The first part of this definition requires that the target of task attraction possess specific knowledge and/or skills. Maybe you have a friend who is good with computers who will always fix your computer when something goes wrong. Maybe you have a friend who is good in math and can tutor you. Of course, the purpose of these relationships is to help you accomplish your own goals. In the first case, you have the goal of not having a broken down computer. In the second case, you have the goal of passing math. This is not to say that an individual may only be viewed as task attractive, but many relationships we form are because of task attraction in our lives.

Reasons for Attraction

Now that we've looked at the basics of what attraction is, let's switch gears and talk about why we are attracted to each other. There are several reasons researchers have found for our attraction to others, including proximity, physicality, perceived gain, similarities and differences, and disclosure.

Physical Proximity

When you ask some people how they met their significant other, you will often hear proximity is a factor in how they met. Perhaps, they were taking the same class or their families went to the same grocery store. These common places create opportunities for others to meet and mingle. We are more likely to talk to people that we see frequently.

Physical Attractiveness

In day-to-day interactions, you are more likely to pay attention to someone you find more attractive than others. Research shows that males place more emphasis on physical attractiveness than females.[v] Appearance is very important at the beginning of the relationship.

Perceived Gain

This type of relationship might appear to be like an economic model and can be explained by exchange theory.[vi] In other words, we will form relationships with people who can offer us rewards that outweigh the costs. Rewards are the things we want to acquire. They could be tangible (e.g., food, money, clothes) or intangible (support, admiration, status). Costs are undesirable things that we don't want to expend a lot of energy to do. For instance, we don't want to have to constantly nag the other person to call us or spend a lot of time arguing about past items. A good relationship will have fewer costs and more rewards. A bad relationship will have more costs and fewer rewards. Often, when people decide to stay or leave a relationship, they will consider the costs and rewards in the relationship.

Costs and rewards are not the only factors in a relationship. Partners also consider alternatives in the relationship. For instance, Becky and Alan have been together for a few years. Becky adores Alan and wants to marry him, but she feels that there are some problems in the relationship. Alan has a horrible temper; he is pessimistic; and he is critical of her. Becky has gained some weight, and Alan has said some hurtful things to her. Becky knows that every relationship will have issues. She doesn't know whether to continue this relationship and take it further or if she should end it.

Her first alternative is called the comparison level (CL), which is the minimum standard that she is willing to tolerate. If Becky believes that it is ok for a person to say hurtful things to her or get angry, then Alan is meeting or exceeding her CL. However, if past romantic partners have never said anything hurtful towards her, then she would have a lower CL.

Becky will also consider another alternative, which is the comparison level of alternatives (CLalt), or the comparison between current relationship rewards and what she might get in another relationship. If she doesn't want to be single, then she might have a lower CL of alternatives. If she has another potential mate who would probably treat her better, then she would have a higher level of alternatives. We use this calculation all the time in relationships. Often when people are considering the possibility to end a relationship, they will consider all alternatives rather than just focusing on costs and rewards.

It feels comforting when someone who appears to like the same things you like also has other similarities to you. Thus, you don't have to explain yourself or give reasons for doing things a certain way. People with similar cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds are typically drawn to each other for

this reason. It is also known as similarity thesis. The similarity thesis basically states that we are attracted to and tend to form relationships with others who are similar to us.[vii] There are three reasons why similarity thesis works: validation, predictability, and affiliation. First, it is validating to know that someone likes the same things that we do. It confirms and endorses what we believe. In turn, it increases support and affection.

Second, when we are similar to another person, we can make predictions about what they will like and not like. We can make better estimations and expectations about what the person will do and how they will behave. The third reason is due to the fact that we like others that are similar to us and thus they should like us because we are the same. Hence, it creates affiliation or connection with that other person.

However, there are some people who are attracted to someone completely opposite from who they are. This is where differences come into play. Differences can make a relationship stronger, especially when you have a relationship that is complementary. In complementary relationships, each person in the relationship can help satisfy the other person's needs. For instance, one person likes to talk, and the other person likes to listen. They get along great because they can be comfortable in their communication behaviors and roles. In addition, they don't have to argue over who will need to talk. Another example might be that one person likes to cook, and the other person likes to eat. This is a great relationship because both people are getting what they like, and it complements each other's talents. Usually, friction will occur when there are differences of opinion or control issues. For example, if you have someone who loves to spend money and the other person who loves to save money, it might be very hard to decide how to handle financial issues.

Disclosure

Sometimes we form relationships with others after we have disclosed something about ourselves to others. Disclosure increases liking because it creates support and trust between you and this other person. We typically don't disclose our most intimate thoughts to a stranger. We do this behavior with people we are close to because it creates a bond with the other person.

Disclosure is not the only factor that can lead to forming relationships. Disclosure needs to be appropriate and reciprocal.[viii] In other words, if you provide information, it must be mutual. If you reveal too much or too little, it might be regarded as inappropriate and can create tension. Also, if you disclose information too soon or too quickly in the relationship, it can create some negative outcomes.

Foundations of Relationships

We can begin to classify key relationships we have by distinguishing between our personal and our social relationships.[ix] Personal relationships meet emotional, relational, and instrumental needs, as they are intimate, close, and interdependent relationships such as those we have with best friends, partners, or immediate family. Social relationships are relationships that occasionally meet our needs and lack the closeness and interdependence of personal relationships. Examples of social relationships include coworkers, distant relatives, and acquaintances. Another distinction useful for categorizing relationships is whether or not they are voluntary. For example, some personal relationships are voluntary, like those with romantic partners, and some are involuntary, like those with close siblings. Likewise, some social relationships are voluntary, like those with acquaintances, and some are involuntary, like those with neighbors or distant relatives. You can see how various relationships fall into each of these dimensions in Figure 8.1"Types of Relationships". Now that we have a better understanding of how we define relationships, we'll examine the stages that most of our relationships go through as they move from

formation to termination.

Involuntary to Voluntary

| Voluntary and Personal Partners/Spouses Best Friends | Voluntary Social Acquaintances Activity Partner (workout buddy) |
| Involuntary and Personal Parent-Child Siblings Grandparent/Godparent-Child Colleagues | Involuntary Social Distant Relatives Co-Workers Neighbors Classmate Teacher-Student |

(Left axis label: Personal Relationship to Social Relationship)

Figure 8.1 Types of Relationships. Adapted from C. Arthur VanLear, Ascan Koerner, and Donna M. Allen, "Relationship Typologies," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 95.

Stages of Relational Interaction

Communication is at the heart of forming our interpersonal relationships. We reach the achievement of relating through the everyday conversations and otherwise trivial interactions that form the fabric of our relationships. It is through our communication that we adapt to the dynamic nature of our relational worlds, given that relational partners do not enter each encounter or relationship with compatible expectations. Communication allows us to test and be tested by our potential and current relational partners. It is also through communication that we respond when someone violates or fails to meet those expectations.[x] There are ten established stages of interaction that can help us understand how relationships come together and come apart.[xi] We will discuss each stage in more detail, but in Table 8.1 "Relationship Stages" you will find a list of the communication stages. We should keep the following things in mind about this model of relationship development: relational partners do not always go through the stages sequentially, some relationships do not experience all the stages, we do not always consciously move between stages, and coming together and coming apart are not inherently good or bad. As we have already discussed, relationships are always changing—they are dynamic. Although this model has been applied most often to romantic relationships, most relationships follow a similar pattern that may be adapted to a particular context.

Table 8.1 Relationship Stages[xii]

Process	Stage	Representative Communication
Coming Together	Initiating	"My name's Rich. It's nice to meet you."
	Experimenting	"I like to cook and refinish furniture in my spare time. What about you?"
	Intensifying	"I feel like we've gotten a lot closer over the past couple months."
	Integrating	(To friend) "We just opened a joint bank account."
	Bonding	"I can't wait to tell my parents that we decided to get married!"
Coming Apart	Differentiating	"I'd really like to be able to hang out with my friends sometimes."
	Circumscribing	"Don't worry about problems I'm having at work. I can deal with it."
	Stagnating	(To self) "I don't know why I even asked him to go out to dinner. He never wants to go out and have a good time."
	Avoiding	"I have a lot going on right now, so I probably won't be home as much."
	Terminating	"It's important for us both to have some time apart. I know you'll be fine."

Stages of Coming Together

Initiating
In the initiating stage, people size each other up and try to present themselves favorably. It is a brief stage. Whether you run into someone in the hallway at school or in the produce section at the grocery store, you scan the person and consider any previous knowledge you have of them, expectations for the situation, and so on. Initiating is influenced by several factors.
If you encounter a stranger, you may say, "Hi, my name's Rich." If you encounter a person you already know, you've already gone through this before, so you may just say, "What's up?" Time constraints also affect initiation. A quick passing calls for a quick hello, while a scheduled meeting may entail a more formal start. If you already know the person, the length of time that's passed since your last encounter will affect your initiation. For example, if you see a friend from high school while home for winter break, you may set aside a long block of time to catch up; however, if you see someone at work that you just spoke to ten minutes earlier, you may skip initiating communication. The setting also affects how we initiate conversations, as we communicate differently at a crowded bar than we do on an airplane. Even with all this variation, people typically follow typical social scripts for interaction at this stage.

Experimenting
The scholars who developed these relational stages have likened the experimenting stage, where people

exchange information and often move from strangers to acquaintances, to the "sniffing ritual" of animals.[xiii] A basic exchange of information is typical as the experimenting stage begins. For example, on the first day of class, you may chat with the person sitting beside you and take turns sharing your year in school, hometown, residence hall, and major. Then you may branch out and see if there are any common interests that emerge. Finding out you're both St. Louis Cardinals fans could then lead to more conversation about baseball and other hobbies or interests; however, sometimes the experiment may fail. If your attempts at information exchange with another person during the experimenting stage are met with silence or hesitation, you may interpret their lack of communication as a sign that you shouldn't pursue future interaction.

Experimenting continues in established relationships. Small talk, a hallmark of the experimenting stage, is common among young adults catching up with their parents when they return home for a visit or committed couples when they recount their day while preparing dinner. Small talk can be annoying sometimes, especially if you feel like you have to do it out of politeness. I have found, for example, that strangers sometimes feel the need to talk to me at the gym (even when I have ear buds in). Although I'd rather skip the small talk and just work out, I follow social norms of cheerfulness and politeness and engage in small talk. Small talk serves important functions, such as creating a communicative entry point that can lead people to uncover topics of conversation that go beyond the surface level, helping us audition someone to see if we'd like to talk to them further, and generally creating a sense of ease and community with others. And even though small talk isn't viewed as very substantive, the authors of this model of relationships indicate that most of our relationships do not progress far beyond this point.[xiv]

Intensifying

As we enter the intensifying stage, we indicate that we would like or are open to more intimacy, and then we wait for a signal of acceptance before we attempt more intimacy. This incremental intensification of intimacy can occur over a period of weeks, months, or years and may involve inviting a new friend to join you at a party, then to your place for dinner, then to go on vacation with you. It would be seen as odd, even if the experimenting stage went well, to invite a person who you're still getting to know on vacation with you without engaging in some less intimate interaction beforehand. In order to save face and avoid making ourselves overly vulnerable, steady progression is key in this stage. Aside from sharing more intense personal time, requests for and granting favors may also play into intensification of a relationship. For example, one friend helping the other prepare for a big party on their birthday can increase closeness. However, if one person asks for too many favors or fails to reciprocate favors granted, then the relationship can become unbalanced, which could result in a transition to another stage, such as differentiating.

Other signs of the intensifying stage include creation of nicknames, inside jokes, and personal idioms; increased use of we and our; increased communication about each other's identities (e.g., "My friends all think you are really laid back and easy to get along with"); and a loosening of typical restrictions on possessions and personal space (e.g., you have a key to your best friend's apartment and can hang out there if your roommate is getting on your nerves). Navigating the changing boundaries between individuals in this stage can be tricky, which can lead to conflict or uncertainty about the relationship's future as new expectations for relationships develop. Successfully managing this increasing closeness can lead to relational integration.

Integrating

In the integrating stage, two people's identities and personalities merge, and a sense of interdependence

develops. Even though this stage is most evident in romantic relationships, there are elements that appear in other relationship forms. Some verbal and nonverbal signals of the integrating stage are when the social networks of two people merge; those outside the relationship begin to refer to or treat the relational partners as if they were one person (e.g., always referring to them together—"Let's invite Olaf and Bettina"); or the relational partners present themselves as one unit (e.g., both signing and sending one holiday card or opening a joint bank account). Even as two people integrate, they likely maintain some sense of self by spending time with friends and family separately, which helps balance their needs for independence and connection.

Bonding

The bonding stage includes a public ritual that announces formal commitment. These types of rituals include weddings, commitment ceremonies, and civil unions. Obviously, this stage is almost exclusively applicable to romantic couples. In some ways, the bonding ritual is arbitrary, in that it can occur at any stage in a relationship. In fact, bonding rituals are often later annulled or reversed because a relationship doesn't work out, perhaps because there wasn't sufficient time spent in the experimenting or integrating phases. However, bonding warrants its own stage because the symbolic act of bonding can have very real effects on how two people communicate about and perceive their relationship. For example, the formality of the bond may lead the couple and those in their social network to more diligently maintain the relationship if conflict or stress threatens it.

Stages of Coming Apart

Differentiating

Individual differences can present a challenge at any given stage in the relational interaction model; however, in the differentiating stage, communicating these differences becomes a primary focus. At this stage, people discover their differences. Differentiating is the reverse of integrating, as we and our may revert back to I and my. People may try to put boundaries back from some aspects of their life prior to the integrating of the current relationship, including other relationships or possessions. For example, Carrie may reclaim friends who became "shared" as she got closer to her roommate Julie and their social networks merged by saying, "I'm having my friends over to the apartment and would like to have privacy for the evening." Differentiating may onset in a relationship that bonded before the individuals knew each other in enough depth and breadth. Even in relationships where the bonding stage is less likely to be experienced, such as a friendship, unpleasant discoveries about the other person's past, personality, or values during the integrating or experimenting stage could lead a person to begin differentiating.

Circumscribing

To circumscribe means to draw a line around something or put a boundary around it.[xv] So in the circumscribing stage, communication becomes restricted in terms of subjects and depth as individuals verbally close themselves off from each other. People may search for safe topics to talk about. They may say things like "I don't want to talk about that anymore" or "You mind your business and I'll mind mine." If one person was more interested in differentiating in the previous stage, or the desire to end the relationship is one-sided, verbal expressions of commitment may go unechoed—for example, when one person's statement, "I know we've had some problems lately, but I still like being with you," is met with silence. Passive-aggressive behavior and the demand-withdrawal conflict pattern may occur more frequently in this stage. Once the increase in boundaries and decrease in communication becomes a pattern, the relationship further deteriorates toward stagnation.

Stagnating

During the stagnating stage, the relationship may come to a standstill, as individuals basically wait for the relationship to end. Outward communication may be avoided, but internal communication may be frequent. The relational conflict flaw of mindreading takes place as a person's internal thoughts lead them to avoid communication. For example, a person may think, "There's no need to bring this up again, because I know exactly how he'll react!" This stage can be prolonged in some relationships. Parents and children who are estranged, couples who are separated and awaiting a divorce, or friends who want to end a relationship but don't know how to do it may have extended periods of stagnation. Short periods of stagnation may occur right after a failed exchange in the experimental stage, where you may be in a situation that's not easy to get out of, but the person is still there. Although most people don't like to linger in this unpleasant stage, some may do so to avoid potential pain from termination, some may still hope to rekindle the spark that started the relationship, or some may enjoy leading their relational partner on.

Avoiding

Moving to the avoiding stage may be a way to end the awkwardness that comes with stagnation, as people signal that they want to close down the lines of communication. Communication in the avoiding stage can be very direct—"I don't want to talk to you anymore"—or more indirect—"I have to meet someone in a little while, so I can't talk long." While physical avoidance such as leaving a room or requesting a schedule change at work may help clearly communicate the desire to terminate the relationship, we don't always have that option. In a parent-child relationship, where the child is still dependent on the parent, or in a roommate situation, where a lease agreement prevents leaving, people may engage in cognitive dissociation, which means they mentally shut down and ignore the other person even though they are still physically co-present.

Terminating

The terminating stage of a relationship can occur shortly after initiation or after a ten- or twenty- year relational history has been established. Termination can result from outside circumstances such as geographic separation or internal factors such as changing values or personalities that lead to a weakening of the bond. Termination exchanges involve some typical communicative elements and may begin with a summary message that recaps the relationship and provides a reason for the termination (e.g., "We've had some ups and downs over our three years together, but I'm getting ready to go to college, and I either want to be with someone who is willing to support me, or I want to be free to explore who I am."). The summary message may be followed by a distance message that further communicates the relational drift that has occurred (e.g., "We've really grown apart over the past year"), which may be followed by a disassociation message that prepares people to be apart by projecting what happens after the relationship ends (e.g., "I know you'll do fine without me. You can use this time to explore your options and figure out if you want to go to college too or not."). There is often a message regarding the possibility for future communication in the relationship (e.g., "I think it would be best if we don't see each other for the first few months, but text me if you want to.").[xvi] Finally, sudden death is a way that a relationship ends without warning. In cases like this, one individual did not see it coming. Your partner may say "it's over." The most confusing and sad way that a person could experience this is to come home one day and find that their partner had moved out. Sudden death is very difficult to grapple with emotionally because there is often no resolution.

Final Thoughts on Coming Together

These ten stages of relational development provide insight into the complicated processes that affect relational formation and deterioration. It is important to keep in mind that there is no absolute way in which people move around the stages of coming together and coming apart. If a relationship is not working, and people work through it, they will return to a stage in coming together. Keep in mind that

after life experiences we would not return to the exact same place because we are not the exact same person anymore. Also keep in mind that if a relationship starts to come apart, it does not mean automatic doom. Communication can help a relationship get back on track.

Not every relationship will go through each of the ten stages. Several relationships do not go past the experimenting stage. Some remain happy at the intensifying or bonding stage. When both people agree that their relationship is satisfying and each person has their needs met, then stabilization occurs. Some relationships go out of order as well. For instance, in some arranged marriages, the bonding occurs first, and then the couple goes through various phases. Some people jump from one stage into another. When partners disagree about what is optimal stabilization, then disagreements and tensions will occur.

In today's world, romantic relationships can take on a variety of different meanings and expectations. For instance, "hooking up" or having "friends with benefits" are terms that people might use to describe the status of their relationship. Many people might engage in a variety of relationships but not necessarily get married. We know that relationships vary from couple to couple. No matter what the relationship type, couples decided to come together or come apart.

Relationship Maintenance

You may have heard that relationships are hard work. Relationships need maintenance and care. Just like your body needs food and your car needs gasoline to run, your relationships need attention as well. When people are in a relationship with each other, what makes a difference to keep people together is how they feel when they are with each other. Maintenance can make a relationship more satisfying and successful. Daniel Canary and Laura Stafford stated that "most people desire long-term, stable, and satisfying relationships."[xvii] To keep a satisfying relationship, individuals must utilize relationship maintenance behaviors. They believed that if individuals do not maintain their relationships, the relationships will weaken and/or end. "It is naïve to assume that relationships simply stay together until they fall apart or that they happen to stay together."[xviii]

Joe Ayres studied how individuals maintain their interpersonal relationships.[xix] Through factor analysis, he identified three types of strategies. First, avoidance strategies are used to evade communication that might threaten the relationship. Second, balance strategies are used to maintain equality in the relationship so that partners do not feel underbenefited or overbenefited from being in the relationship. Third, direct strategies are used to evaluate and remind the partner of relationship objectives. It is worth noting that Joe Ayers found that relationship intent had a major influence on the perceptions of the relationship partners. If partners wanted to stay together, they would make more of an effort to employ maintenance strategies than deterioration strategies.

Laura Stafford and Daniel Canary (1991) found five key relationship maintenance behaviors (Figure 8.2). First, positivity is a relational maintenance factor used by communicating with their partners in a happy and supportive manner. Second, openness occurs when partners focus their communication on the relationship. Third, assurances are words that emphasize the partners' commitment to the duration of the relationship. Fourth, networking is communicating with family and friends. Lastly, sharing tasks is doing work or household tasks. Later, Canary and his colleagues found two more relationship maintenance behaviors: conflict management and advice.[xx]

Additionally, Canary and Stafford also posited four propositions that serve as a conceptual framework for relationship maintenance research.[xxi] The first proposition is that relationships will worsen if they are not maintained. The second proposition is that both partners must feel that there are equal benefits and sacrifices in the relationship for it to sustain. The third proposition states that

maintenance behaviors depend on the type of relationship. The fourth proposition is that relationship maintenance behaviors can be used alone or as a mixture to affect perceptions of the relationship. Overall, these propositions illustrate the importance and effect that relationship maintenance behaviors can have on relationships.

Relationship maintenance is the stabilization point between relationship initiation and potential relationship destruction.[xxii] There are two elements to relationship maintenance. First, strategic plans are intentional behaviors and actions used to maintain the relationship. Second, everyday interactions help to sustain the relationship. Talk is the most important element in relationship maintenance.[xxiii]

Communication in Relationships

Relationship Dialectics

We know that all relationships go through change. The changes in a relationship are usually dependent on communication. When a relationship starts, there is a lot of positive and ample communication between the parties. However, sometimes couples go through a redundant problem, and it is important to learn how to deal with this problem. Partners can't always know what their significant other desires or needs from them.

Dialectics had been a concept known well to many scholars for many years. They are simply the pushes and pulls that can be found every day in relationships of all types. Conversation involves people who must learn to adapt to each other while still maintaining their individuality.[xxiv] The theory emphasizes interactions allowing for more flexibility to explain how couples maintain a satisfactory, cohesive union. This perspective views relationships as simply managing the tensions that arise because they cannot be fully resolved. The management of the tensions is usually based on past experiences; what worked for a person in the past will be what they decide to use in the future. These tensions are both contradictory and interdependent because without one, the other is not understood. Leslie A. Baxter, the scholar who developed this theory, pulled from as many outside sources as she could to better understand the phenomenon of dialectical tensions within relationships. The development began by closely studying the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, who was a Russian scholar of culture, literature, philosophy, and language. Baxter was interested in his life's work; the theory often was referred to as dialogism. Bakhtin argued that life is a social process of dialogue that is characterized by the concurrent coming together and separating of individual perspectives.

Early in Baxter's career, she noticed that while she was interested in the termination of relationships, her colleagues were interested in the beginnings. Although her colleagues were interested in disclosure, she was interested in non-disclosure. At this point, it still had not occurred to her that these opposing interests in research would lead her to the understanding of dialectical tensions. She continued to research these subjects and read as much as she could on Marxist and Hegelian dialectics as she found these writings to be both fascinating and frustrating. She processed these writings slowly, and the concepts slowly began to show up in her work. In 1993, Baxter and Montgomery began writing a book on dialectics called Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics. This was her first official work done on dialectics and its conversational effects. She continued writing about dialectics and continued to expand the concepts as she further researched families, romantic relationships, and friendships. Since then, Baxter has continually changed and shifted her studies to find new and better ways to use the theory.

After conducting a series of in-depth interviews, both Baxter and Montgomery began to see themes in the tensions experienced in romantic relationships. Their overarching research premise (which is applicable to all relationships, including mother/daughter relationships) is that all personal ties and relationships are always in a state of constant flux and contradiction. Relational dialectics highlight a

"dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies."[xxv] The concept of contradiction is crucial to understanding relational dialectics. The contradiction is when there are opposing sides to a situation. These contradictions tend to arise when both parties are considered interdependent. Dialectical tension is natural and inevitable. All relationships are complex because human beings are complex, and this fact is reflected in our communicative processes. Baxter and Montgomery argue that tension arises because we are drawn to the antitheses of opposing sides. These contradictions must be met with a "both/and" approach as opposed to the "either/ or" mindset. However, the "both/and" approach lends to tension and pressure, which almost always guarantees that relationships are not easy.

Dialectical tension is how individuals deal with struggles in their relationship. There are opposing forces or struggles that couples have to deal with. It is based on Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery's Relational Dialectics Theory in 1996. Below are some different relational dialectics.[xxvi]

Separation-Integration

This is where partners seek involvement but are not willing to sacrifice their entire identity. For instance, in a marriage, some women struggle with taking their partner's last name, keeping their maiden name or combining the two. Often when partners were single, they might have engaged in a girl's night out or a guy's night out. When in a committed relationship, one partner might feel left out and want to be more involved. Thus, struggles and conflict occur until the couple can figure out a way to deal with this issue.

Predictability–Novelty

This deals with rituals/routines compared to novelty. For instance, for some mothers, it is tough to accept that their child is an adult. They want their child to grow up, at the same time it is difficult to recognize how their child has grown up.

Openness–Closedness

Disclosure is necessary, but there is a need for privacy. For some couples, diaries work to keep things private. Yet, there are times when their partner needs to know what can't be expressed directly through words. This tension deals with self vs. others. Some couples are very similar in their thinking and beliefs. This is good because it makes communication easier and conflict resolution smoother. Yet, if partners are too similar, then they cannot grow. Differences can help couples mature and create stimulation.

Ideal-Real

Couples will perceive some things as good and some things as bad. Their perceptions of what is real may interfere with or inhibit perceptions of what is real. For instance, a couple may think that their relationship is perfect. But from an outsider, they might think that the relationship is abusive and devastating.

Another example might be that a young dating couple thinks that they do not have to marry each other because it is the ideal and accepted view of taking the relationship to the next phase. Thus, the couples move in together and raise a family without being married. They have deviated from what is an ideal normative cultural script.[xxvii] Every relationship is fraught with these dialectical tensions. There's no way around them. However, there are different ways of managing dialectical tensions:

- Denial is where we respond to one end.

- Disorientation is where we feel overwhelmed. We fight, freeze, or leave.
- Alternation is where we choose one end on different occasions.
- Recalibration is reframing the situation or perspective.
- Segmentation is where we compartmentalize different areas.
- Balance is where we manage and compromise our needs.
- Integration is blending different perspectives.
- Reaffirmation is having the knowledge & accepting our differences.

Not every couple deals with dialectical tensions in the same way. Some will use a certain strategy during specific situations, and others will use the same strategy every time there is tension. You have to decide what is best for you based on the situation.

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Chapter 9
Conflict in Relationships

Conflict is a normal and natural part of life. However, learning how to manage conflict in our interpersonal relationships is very important for long-term success in those relationships. This chapter is going to look at how conflict functions and provide several strategies for managing interpersonal conflict.

Understanding Conflict

Who do you have the most conflict with right now? Your answer to this question probably depends on the various contexts in your life. If you still live at home with a parent or parents, you may have daily conflicts with your family as you try to balance your autonomy, or desire for independence, with the practicalities of living under your family's roof. If you've recently moved away to go to college, you may be negotiating roommate conflicts as you adjust to living with someone you may not know at all. You probably also have experiences managing conflict in romantic relationships and in the workplace. So think back and ask yourself, "How well do I handle conflict?" As with all areas of communication, we can improve if we have the background knowledge to identify relevant communication phenomena and the motivation to reflect on and enhance our communication skills.

Interpersonal conflict occurs in interactions where there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. Interpersonal conflict may be expressed verbally or nonverbally along a continuum ranging from a nearly imperceptible cold shoulder to a very obvious blowout. Interpersonal conflict is, however, distinct from interpersonal violence, which goes beyond communication to include abuse. Domestic violence is a serious issue.

Conflict is an inevitable part of close relationships and can take a negative emotional toll. It takes effort to ignore someone or be passive aggressive, and the anger or guilt we may feel after blowing up at someone are valid negative feelings. However, conflict isn't always negative or unproductive. In fact, numerous research studies have shown that quantity of conflict in a relationship is not as important as how the conflict is handled. Additionally, when conflict is well managed, it has the potential to lead to more rewarding and satisfactory relationships.[i]

Language and Conflict

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

Common Types of Unsupportive Messages

- **Global labels**. "You're a liar." Labeling someone irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy calls his or her whole identity as a person into question. Such sweeping judgments and generalizations are sure to only escalate a negative situation.
- **Sarcasm**. "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Even though sarcasm is often disguised as humor, it usually represents passive-aggressive behavior through which a person indirectly communicates negative feelings.
- **Dragging up the past**. "I should have known not to trust you when you never paid me back that $100 I let you borrow." Bringing up negative past experiences is a tactic used by people when they don't want to discuss a current situation. Sometimes people have built up negative feelings that are suddenly let out by a seemingly small thing in the moment.
- **Negative comparisons**. "Jade graduated from college without any credit card debt. I guess you're just not as responsible as her." Holding a person up to the supposed standards or characteristics of another person can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.
- **Judgmental "you" messages**. "You're never going to be able to hold down a job." Accusatory messages are usually generalized overstatements about another person that go beyond labeling but still do not describe specific behavior in a productive way.
- **Threats**. "If you don't stop texting back and forth with your ex, both of you are going to regret it." Threatening someone with violence or some other negative consequence usually signals the end of productive communication. Aside from the potential legal consequences, threats usually overcompensate for a person's insecurity.

These types of messages can lead to conflict. It is important to understand how you respond to conflict so that you can work toward a more productive style if it is warranted.

Conflict Management Styles

Would you describe yourself as someone who prefers to avoid conflict? Do you like to get your way? Are you good at working with someone to reach a solution that is mutually beneficial? Odds are that you have been in situations where you could answer yes to each of these questions, which underscores the important role context plays in conflict and conflict management styles in particular. The way we view and deal with conflict is learned and contextual. Is the way you handle conflicts similar to the way your parents handle conflict? If you're of a certain age, you are likely predisposed to answer this question with a certain "No!" It wasn't until my late twenties and early thirties that I began to see how similar I am to my parents, even though I, like many, spent years trying to distinguish myself from them. Research does show that there is intergenerational transmission of traits related to conflict management. As children, we test out different conflict resolution styles we observe in our families with our parents and siblings. Later, as we enter adolescence and begin developing platonic and romantic relationships outside the family, we begin testing what we've learned from our parents in other settings. If a child has observed and used negative conflict management styles with siblings or parents, he or she is

likely to exhibit those behaviors with non–family members.[iii]

There has been much research done on different types of conflict management styles, which are communication strategies that attempt to avoid, address, or resolve a conflict. Keep in mind that we don't always consciously choose a style. We may instead be caught up in emotion and become reactionary. The strategies for more effectively managing conflict that will be discussed later may allow you to slow down the reaction process, become more aware of it, and intervene in the process to improve your communication. A powerful tool to mitigate conflict is information exchange. Asking for more information before you react to a conflict- triggering event is a good way to add a buffer between the trigger and your reaction. Another key element is whether or not a communicator is oriented toward self-centered or other-centered goals. For example, if your goal is to "win" or make the other person "lose," you show a high concern for self and a low concern for other. If your goal is to facilitate a "win/win" resolution or outcome, you show a high concern for self and other. In general, strategies that facilitate information exchange and include concern for mutual goals will be more successful at managing conflict.[iv]

The five strategies for managing conflict we will discuss are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Each of these conflict styles accounts for the concern we place on self versus other (see Figure 9.1 "Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management").

Figure 9.1 Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management. Adapted from M. Afzalur Rahim, "A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict," Academy of Management Journal 26, no. 2 (1983): 368–76.

In order to better understand the elements of the five styles of conflict management, we will apply each to the follow scenario. Rosa and D'Shaun have been partners for seventeen years. Rosa is growing frustrated because D'Shaun continues to give money to their teenage daughter, Casey, even though they decided to keep the teen on a fixed allowance to try to teach her more responsibility. While conflicts regarding money and child rearing are very common, we will see the numerous ways that Rosa and D'Shaun could address this problem.

Competing

The competing style indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for other. When we compete, we are striving to "win" the conflict, potentially at the expense or "loss" of the other person. One way we may gauge our win is by being granted or taking concessions from the other

person. For example, if D'Shaun gives Casey extra money behind Rosa's back, he is taking an indirect competitive route resulting in a "win" for him because he got his way. The competing style also involves the use of power, which can be noncoercive or coercive.v Noncoercive strategies include requesting and persuading. When requesting, we suggest the conflict partner change a behavior. Requesting doesn't require a high level of information exchange. When we persuade, however, we give our conflict partner reasons to support our request or suggestion, meaning there is more information exchange, which may make persuading more effective than requesting. Rosa could try to persuade D'Shaun to stop giving Casey extra allowance money by bringing up their fixed budget or reminding him that they are saving for a summer vacation. Coercive strategies violate standard guidelines for ethical communication and may include aggressive communication directed at rousing your partner's emotions through insults, profanity, and yelling, or through threats of punishment if you do not get your way. If Rosa is the primary income earner in the family, she could use that power to threaten to take D'Shaun's ATM card away if he continues giving Casey money. In all these scenarios, the "win" that could result is only short term and can lead to conflict escalation. Interpersonal conflict is rarely isolated, meaning there can be ripple effects that connect the current conflict to previous and future conflicts. D'Shaun's behind-the-scenes money giving or Rosa's confiscation of the ATM card could lead to built-up negative emotions that could further test their relationship.

 Competing has been linked to aggression, although the two are not always paired. If assertiveness does not work, there is a chance it could escalate to hostility. There is a pattern of verbal escalation: requests, demands, complaints, angry statements, threats, harassment, and verbal abuse.vi Aggressive communication can become patterned, which can create a volatile and hostile environment. The reality television show The Bad Girls Club is a prime example of a chronically hostile and aggressive environment. If you do a Google video search for clips from the show, you will see yelling, screaming, verbal threats, and some examples of physical violence. The producers of the show choose houseguests who have histories of aggression, and when the "bad girls" are placed in a house together, they fall into typical patterns, which creates dramatic television moments. Obviously, living in this type of volatile environment would create stressors in any relationship, so it's important to monitor the use of competing as a conflict resolution strategy to ensure that it does not lapse into aggression.

 The competing style of conflict management is not the same thing as having a competitive personality. Competition in relationships isn't always negative, and people who enjoy engaging in competition may not always do so at the expense of another person's goals. In fact, research has shown that some couples engage in competitive shared activities like sports or games to maintain and enrich their relationship.vii And although we may think that competitiveness is gendered, research has often shown that women are just as competitive as men.viii

Avoiding

The avoiding style of conflict management often indicates a low concern for self and a low concern for other, and no direct communication about the conflict takes place. However, as we will discuss later, in some cultures that emphasize group harmony over individual interests, and even in some situations in the United States, avoiding a conflict can indicate a high level of concern for the other. In general, avoiding doesn't mean that there is no communication about the conflict. Remember, you cannot not communicate. Even when we try to avoid conflict, we may intentionally or unintentionally give our feelings away through our verbal and nonverbal

communication. Rosa's sarcastic tone as she tells D'Shaun that he's "Soooo good with money!" and his subsequent eye roll both bring the conflict to the surface without specifically addressing it. The avoiding style is either passive or indirect, meaning there is little information exchange, which may make this strategy less effective than others. We may decide to avoid conflict for many different reasons, some of which are better than others. If you view the conflict as having little importance to you, it may be better to ignore it. If the person you're having conflict with will only be working in your office for a week, you may perceive a conflict to be temporary and choose to avoid it and hope that it will solve itself. If you are not emotionally invested in the conflict, you may be able to reframe your perspective and see the situation in a different way, therefore resolving the issue. In all these cases, avoiding doesn't really require an investment of time, emotion, or communication skill, so there is not much at stake to lose.

Avoidance is not always an easy conflict management choice, because sometimes the person we have conflict with isn't a temp in our office or a weekend houseguest. While it may be easy to tolerate a problem when you're not personally invested in it or view it as temporary, when faced with a situation like Rosa and D'Shaun's, avoidance would just make the problem worse. For example, avoidance could first manifest as changing the subject, then progress from avoiding the issue to avoiding the person altogether, to even ending the relationship.

Indirect strategies of hinting and joking also fall under the avoiding style. While these indirect avoidance strategies may lead to a buildup of frustration or even anger, they allow us to vent a little of our built-up steam and may make a conflict situation more bearable. When we hint, we drop clues that we hope our partner will find and piece together to see the problem and hopefully change, thereby solving the problem without any direct communication. In almost all the cases of hinting that I have experienced or heard about, the person dropping the hints overestimates their partner's detective abilities. For example, when Rosa leaves the bank statement on the kitchen table in hopes that D'Shaun will realize how much extra money he is giving Casey, D'Shaun may simply ignore it or even get irritated with Rosa for not putting the statement with all the other mail. We also overestimate our partner's ability to decode the jokes we make about a conflict situation. It is more likely that the receiver of the jokes will think you're genuinely trying to be funny or feel provoked or insulted than realize the conflict situation that you are referencing. So more frustration may develop when the hints and jokes are not decoded, which often leads to a more extreme form of hinting/joking: passive-aggressive behavior.

Passive-aggressive behavior is a way of dealing with conflict in which one person indirectly communicates their negative thoughts or feelings through nonverbal behaviors, such as not completing a task. For example, Rosa may wait a few days to deposit money into the bank so D'Shaun can't withdraw it to give to Casey, or D'Shaun may cancel plans for a romantic dinner because he feels like Rosa is questioning his responsibility with money. Although passive-aggressive behavior can feel rewarding in the moment, it is one of the most unproductive ways to deal with conflict. These behaviors may create additional conflicts and may lead to a cycle of passive-aggressiveness in which the other partner begins to exhibit these behaviors as well, while never actually addressing the conflict that originated the behavior. In most avoidance situations, both parties lose. However, as noted above, avoidance can be the most appropriate strategy in some situations—for example, when the conflict is temporary, when the stakes are low or there is little personal investment, or when there is the potential for violence or retaliation.

Accommodating

The accommodating conflict management style indicates a low concern for self and a high concern for other and is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that someone complies with or obliges another without providing personal input. The context for and motivation behind accommodating play an important role in whether or not it is an appropriate strategy. Generally, we accommodate because we are being generous, we are obeying, or we are yielding.[ix] If we are being generous, we accommodate because we genuinely want to; if we are obeying, we don't have a choice but to accommodate (perhaps due to the potential for negative consequences or punishment); and if we yield, we may have our own views or goals but give up on them due to fatigue, time constraints, or because a better solution has been offered. Accommodating can be appropriate when there is little chance that our own goals can be achieved, when we don't have much to lose by accommodating, when we feel we are wrong, or when advocating for our own needs could negatively affect the relationship.[x] The occasional accommodation can be useful in maintaining a relationship—remember earlier we discussed putting another's needs before your own as a way to achieve relational goals. For example, Rosa may say, "It's OK that you gave Casey some extra money; she did have to spend more on gas this week since the prices went up." However, being a team player can slip into being a pushover, which people generally do not appreciate. If Rosa keeps telling D'Shaun, "It's OK this time," they may find themselves short on spending money at the end of the month. At that point, Rosa and D'Shaun's conflict may escalate as they question each other's motives, or the conflict may spread if they direct their frustration at Casey and blame it on her irresponsibility.

Research has shown that the accommodating style is more likely to occur when there are time restraints and less likely to occur when someone does not want to appear weak.[xi] If you're standing outside the movie theatre and two movies are starting, you may say, "Let's just have it your way," so you don't miss the beginning. If you're a new manager at an electronics store and an employee wants to take Sunday off to watch a football game, you may say no to set an example for the other employees. As with avoiding, there are certain cultural influences we will discuss later that make accommodating a more effective strategy.

Compromising

The compromising style shows a moderate concern for self and other and may indicate that there is a low investment in the conflict and/or the relationship. Even though we often hear that the best way to handle a conflict is to compromise, the compromising style isn't a win/win solution; it is a partial win/lose. In essence, when we compromise, we give up some or most of what we want. It's true that the conflict gets resolved temporarily, but lingering thoughts of what you gave up could lead to a future conflict. Compromising may be a good strategy when there are time limitations or when prolonging a conflict may lead to relationship deterioration. Compromise may also be good when both parties have equal power or when other resolution strategies have not worked.[xii] A negative of compromising is that it may be used as an easy way out of a conflict. The compromising style is most effective when both parties find the solution agreeable. Rosa and D'Shaun could decide that Casey's allowance does need to be increased and could each give ten more dollars a week by committing to taking their lunch to work twice a week instead of eating out. They are both giving up something, and if neither of them have a problem with taking their lunch to work, then the compromise was equitable. If the couple agrees that the twenty extra dollars a week should come out of D'Shaun's golf budget, the compromise

isn't as equitable, and D'Shaun, although he agreed to the compromise, may end up with feelings of resentment. Wouldn't it be better to both win?

Collaborating

The collaborating style involves a high degree of concern for self and other and usually indicates investment in the conflict situation and the relationship. Although the collaborating style takes the most work in terms of communication competence, it ultimately leads to a win/win situation in which neither party has to make concessions because a mutually beneficial solution is discovered or created. The obvious advantage is that both parties are satisfied, which could lead to positive problem solving in the future and strengthen the overall relationship. For example, Rosa and D'Shaun may agree that Casey's allowance needs to be increased and may decide to give her twenty more dollars a week in exchange for her babysitting her little brother one night a week. In this case, they didn't make the conflict personal but focused on the situation and came up with a solution that may end up saving them money. The disadvantage is that this style is often time consuming, and only one person may be willing to use this approach while the other person is eager to compete to meet their goals or willing to accommodate.

Here are some tips for collaborating and achieving a win/win outcome:[xiii]
- Do not view the conflict as a contest you are trying to win.
- Remain flexible and realize there are solutions yet to be discovered.
- Distinguish the people from the problem (don't make it personal).
- Determine what the underlying needs are that are driving the other person's demands (needs can still be met through different demands).
- Identify areas of common ground or shared interests that you can work from to develop solutions.
- Ask questions to allow them to clarify and to help you understand their perspective.
- Listen carefully and provide verbal and nonverbal feedback.

Culture and Conflict

Culture is an important context to consider when studying conflict, and recent research has called into question some of the assumptions of the five conflict management styles discussed so far, which were formulated with a Western bias.[xiv] For example, while the avoiding style of conflict has been cast as negative, with a low concern for self and other or as a lose/lose outcome, this research found that participants in the United States, Germany, China, and Japan all viewed avoiding strategies as demonstrating a concern for the other. While there are some generalizations we can make about culture and conflict, it is better to look at more specific patterns of how interpersonal communication and conflict management are related. We can better understand some of the cultural differences in conflict management by further examining the concept of face.

What does it mean to "save face?" This saying generally refers to preventing embarrassment or preserving our reputation or image, which is similar to the concept of face in interpersonal and intercultural communication. Our face is the projected self we desire to put into the world, and facework refers to the communicative strategies we employ to project, maintain, or repair our face or maintain, repair, or challenge another's face. Face negotiation theory argues

that people in all cultures negotiate face through communication encounters, and that cultural factors influence how we engage in facework, especially in conflict situations.[xv] These cultural factors influence whether we are more concerned with self-face or other-face and what types of conflict management strategies we may use. One key cultural influence on face negotiation is the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

The distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures is an important dimension across which all cultures vary. Individualistic cultures like the United States and most of Europe emphasize individual identity over group identity and encourage competition and self-reliance. Collectivistic cultures like Taiwan, Colombia, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Peru value in-group identity over individual identity and value conformity to social norms of the in-group.[xvi] However, within the larger cultures, individuals will vary in the degree to which they view themselves as part of a group or as a separate individual, which is called self-construal. Independent self- construal indicates a perception of the self as an individual with unique feelings, thoughts, and motivations. Interdependent self- construal indicates a perception of the self as interrelated with others.[xvii] Not surprisingly, people from individualistic cultures are more likely to have higher levels of independent self-construal, and people from collectivistic cultures are more likely to have higher levels of interdependent self- construal. Self-construal and individualistic or collectivistic cultural orientations affect how people engage in facework and the conflict management styles they employ.

Self-construal alone does not have a direct effect on conflict style, but it does affect face concerns, with independent self-construal favoring self-face concerns and interdependent self-construal favoring other-face concerns. There are specific facework strategies for different conflict management styles, and these strategies correspond to self-face concerns or other-face concerns.

- Accommodating. Giving in (self-face concern).
- Avoiding. Pretending conflict does not exist (other-face concern).
- Competing. Defending your position, persuading (self-face concern).
- Collaborating. Apologizing, having a private discussion, remaining calm (other-face concern).[xviii]

Research done on college students in Germany, Japan, China, and the United States found that those with independent self-construal were more likely to engage in competing, and those with interdependent self-construal were more likely to engage in avoiding or collaborating.[xix] And in general, this research found that members of collectivistic cultures were more likely to use the avoiding style of conflict management and less likely to use the integrating or competing styles of conflict management than were members of individualistic cultures. The following examples bring together facework strategies, cultural orientations, and conflict management style: Someone from an individualistic culture may be more likely to engage in competing as a conflict management strategy if they are directly confronted, which may be an attempt to defend their reputation (self-face concern). Someone in a collectivistic culture may be more likely to engage in avoiding or accommodating in order not to embarrass or anger the person confronting them (other-face concern) or out of concern that their reaction could reflect negatively on their family or cultural group (other-face concern). While these distinctions are useful for categorizing large- scale cultural patterns, it is important not to essentialize or arbitrarily group countries together, because there are measurable differences within cultures.

For example, expressing one's emotions was seen as demonstrating a low concern for other-face in Japan, but this was not so in China, which shows there is variety between similarly collectivistic cultures. Culture always adds layers of complexity to any communication phenomenon, but experiencing and learning from other cultures also enriches our lives and makes us more competent communicators.

Dealing with Conflict

Conflict is inevitable and it is not inherently negative. A key part of developing interpersonal communication competence involves being able to effectively manage the conflict you will encounter in all your relationships. One key part of handling conflict better is to notice patterns of conflict in specific relationships and to generally have an idea of what causes you to react negatively and what your reactions usually are.

Identifying Conflict Patterns

Much of the research on conflict patterns has been done on couples in romantic relationships, but the concepts and findings are applicable to other relationships. Four common triggers for conflict are criticism, demand, cumulative annoyance, and rejection.[xx]

Criticism

We all know from experience that criticism, or comments that evaluate another person's personality, behavior, appearance, or life choices, may lead to conflict. Comments do not have to be meant as criticism to be perceived as such. If Gary comes home from college for the weekend and his mom says, "Looks like you put on a few pounds," she may view this as a statement of fact based on observation. Gary, however, may take the comment personally and respond negatively back to his mom, starting a conflict that will last for the rest of his visit. A simple but useful strategy to manage the trigger of criticism is to follow the old adage "Think before you speak." In many cases, there are alternative ways to phrase things that may be taken less personally, or we may determine that our comment doesn't need to be spoken at all. I've learned that a majority of the thoughts that we have about another person's physical appearance, whether positive or negative, do not need to be verbalized. Ask yourself, "What is my motivation for making this comment?" and "Do I have anything to lose by not making this comment?" If your underlying reasons for asking are valid, perhaps there is another way to phrase your observation. If Gary's mom is worried about his eating habits and health, she could wait until they're eating dinner and ask him how he likes the food choices at school and what he usually eats.

Demands

Demands also frequently trigger conflict, especially if the demand is viewed as unfair or irrelevant. It's important to note that demands rephrased as questions may still be or be perceived as demands. Tone of voice and context are important factors here. When you were younger, you may have asked a parent, teacher, or elder for something and heard back "Ask nicely." As with criticism, thinking before you speak and before you respond can help manage demands and minimize conflict episodes. As we discussed earlier, demands are sometimes met with withdrawal rather than a verbal response. If you are doing the demanding, remember a higher

level of information exchange may make your demand clearer or more reasonable to the other person. If you are being demanded of, responding calmly and expressing your thoughts and feelings are likely more effective than withdrawing, which may escalate the conflict.

Cumulative Annoyance

Cumulative annoyance is a building of frustration or anger that occurs over time, eventually resulting in a conflict interaction. For example, your friend shows up late to drive you to class three times in a row. You didn't say anything the previous times, but on the third time you say, "You're late again! If you can't get here on time, I'll find another way to get to class." Cumulative annoyance can build up like a pressure cooker, and as it builds up, the intensity of the conflict also builds. Criticism and demands can also play into cumulative annoyance. We have all probably let critical or demanding comments slide, but if they continue, it becomes difficult to hold back, and most of us have a breaking point. The problem here is that all the other incidents come back to your mind as you confront the other person, which usually intensifies the conflict. You've likely been surprised when someone has blown up at you due to cumulative annoyance or surprised when someone you have blown up at didn't know there was a problem building. A good strategy for managing cumulative annoyance is to monitor your level of annoyance and occasionally let some steam out of the pressure cooker by processing through your frustration with a third party or directly addressing what is bothering you with the source.

Rejection

No one likes the feeling of rejection. Rejection can lead to conflict when one person's comments or behaviors are perceived as ignoring or invalidating the other person. Vulnerability is a component of any close relationship. When we care about someone, we verbally or nonverbally communicate. We may tell our best friend that we miss them, or plan a home-cooked meal for our partner who worked late. The vulnerability that underlies these actions comes from the possibility that our relational partner will not notice or appreciate them. When someone feels exposed or rejected, they often respond with anger to mask their hurt, which ignites a conflict. Managing feelings of rejection is difficult because it is so personal, but controlling the impulse to assume that your relational partner is rejecting you, and engaging in communication rather than reflexive reaction, can help put things in perspective. If your partner doesn't get excited about the meal you planned and cooked, it could be because he or she is physically or mentally tired after a long day. Before you jump to a conclusion, it is useful to examine why a person might be acting the way that they are. You can check to see if your perceptions are correct by first attributing different causes to their behaviors, and then asking them about what you perceive. If you did cook a nice meal for someone who worked late, and didn't let you know in advance, your initial reaction might be one of rejection. This is a good time to look for causes for their behavior other than rejection. Were they forced into working late by their boss? Did they have a deadline they had to meet? Finally, ask about the cause because the answer may indicate that being late had nothing to do with rejecting you.

What is Serial Arguing?

Interpersonal conflict may take the form of serial arguing, which is a repeated pattern of disagreement over an issue. Serial arguments do not necessarily indicate negative or troubled relationships, but any kind of patterned conflict is worth paying attention to. There are three

patterns that occur with serial arguing: repeating, mutual hostility, and arguing with assurances.[xxi] The first pattern is repeating, which means reminding the other person of your complaint (what you want them to start/stop doing). The pattern may continue if the other person repeats their response to your reminder. For example, if Marita reminds Kate that she doesn't appreciate her sarcastic tone, and Kate responds, "I'm soooo sorry, I forgot how perfect you are," then the reminder has failed to effect the desired change. A predictable pattern of complaint like this leads participants to view the conflict as irresolvable. The second pattern within serial arguments is mutual hostility, which occurs when the frustration of repeated conflict leads to negative emotions and increases the likelihood of verbal aggression. Again, a predictable pattern of hostility makes the conflict seem irresolvable and may lead to relationship deterioration.

Whereas the first two patterns entail an increase in pressure on the participants in the conflict, the third pattern offers some relief. If people in an interpersonal conflict offer verbal assurances of their commitment to the relationship, then the problems associated with the other two patterns of serial arguing may be ameliorated. Even though the conflict may not be solved in the interaction, the verbal assurances of commitment imply that there is a willingness to work on solving the conflict in the future, which provides a sense of stability that can benefit the relationship. If the pattern becomes more of a vicious cycle, it can lead to alienation, polarization, and an overall toxic climate, and the problem may seem so irresolvable that people feel trapped and terminate the relationship.[xxii]

Two Common Conflict Pitfalls

Two common conflict pitfalls are one-upping and mindreading.[xxiii] One-upping is a quick reaction to communication from another person that escalates the conflict. If Sam comes home late from work and Nicki says, "I wish you would call when you're going to be late" and Sam responds, "I wish you would get off my back," the reaction has escalated the conflict. Mindreading is communication in which one person attributes something to the other using generalizations. If Sam says, "You don't care whether I come home at all or not!" she is presuming to know Nicki's thoughts and feelings. Nicki is likely to respond defensively, perhaps saying, "You don't know how I'm feeling!" One-upping and mindreading are often reactions that are more reflexive than deliberate. Remember to stop and consider what may have caused the behavior. Nicki may have received bad news and was eager to get support from Sam when she arrived home. Although Sam perceives Nicki's comment as criticism and justifies her comments as a reaction to Nicki's behavior, Nicki's comment could actually be a sign of their closeness, in that Nicki appreciates Sam's emotional support. Sam could have said, "I know, I'm sorry, I was on my cell phone for the past hour with a client who had a lot of problems to work out." Taking a moment to respond mindfully rather than react with a knee-jerk reflex can lead to information exchange, which could deescalate the conflict.

Validate to Deescalate

Validating the person with whom you are in conflict can be an effective way to deescalate conflict. While avoiding or retreating may seem like the best option in the moment, one of the key negative traits found in research on married couples' conflicts was withdrawal, which as we learned before may result in a demand- withdrawal pattern of conflict. Often validation can be as simple as demonstrating good listening skills discussed earlier in this book by making eye contact and giving verbal and nonverbal back-channel cues like saying "mmm-hmm" or nodding

your head.[xxiv] This doesn't mean that you have to give up your own side in a conflict or that you agree with what the other person is saying; rather, you are hearing the other person out, which validates them and may also give you some more information about the conflict that could minimize the likelihood of a reaction rather than a response.

Conflict Management Strategies

Many researchers have attempted to understand how humans handle conflict with one another. The first researchers to create a taxonomy for understanding conflict management strategies were Richard E. Walton and Robert B. McKersie.[xxv] Walton and McKersie were primarily interested in how individuals handle conflict during labor negotiations. The Walton and McKersie model consisted of only two methods for managing conflict: integrative and distributive. **Integrative conflict** is a win-win approach to conflict; whereby, both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial. **Distributive conflict** is a win-lose approach; whereby, conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses. Most professional schools teach that integrative negotiation tactics are generally the best ones. Over the years, a number of different patterns for handling conflict have arisen in the literature, but most of them agree with the first two proposed by Walton and McKersie, but they generally add a third dimension of conflict: **avoidance**.

STLC Conflict Model

Ruth Anna Abigail and Dudley Cahn created a very simple model when thinking about how we communicate during conflict.[xxvi] They called the model the STLC Conflict Model because it stands for stop, think, listen, and then communicate.

Figure 9.2 STLC Conflict Model

Stop

The first thing an individual needs to do when interacting with another person during conflict is to take the time to be present within the conflict itself. Too often, people engaged in a conflict say whatever enters their mind before they've really had a chance to process the message and think of the best strategies to use to send that message. Others end up talking past one another during a conflict because they simply are not paying attention to each other and the competing needs within the conflict. Communication problems often occur during conflict because people tend to react to conflict situations when they arise instead of being mindful and present during the conflict itself. For this reason, it's always important to take a breath during a conflict and first stop.

Sometimes these "time outs" need to be physical. Maybe you need to leave the room and go for a brief walk to calm down, or maybe you just need to get a glass of water. Whatever you need to do, it's important to take this break. This break takes you out of a "reactive stance into a proactive one."[xxvii]

Think

Once you've stopped, you now have the ability to really think about what you are communicating. You want to think through the conflict itself. What is the conflict really about? Often people engage in conflicts about superficial items when there are truly much deeper issues that are being avoided. You also want to consider what possible causes led to the conflict and what possible courses of action you think are possible to conclude the conflict. Cahn and Abigail argue that there are four possible outcomes that can occur: do nothing, change yourself, change the other person, or change the situation.

First, you can simply sit back and avoid the conflict. Maybe you're engaging in a conflict about politics with a family member, and this conflict is actually just going to make everyone mad. For this reason, you opt just to stop the conflict and change topics to avoid making people upset. One of our coauthors was at a funeral when an uncle asked our coauthor about our coauthor's impression of the current President. Our coauthor's immediate response was, "Do you really want me to answer that question?" Our coauthor knew that everyone else in the room would completely disagree, so our coauthor knew this was probably a can of worms that just didn't need to be opened.

Second, we can change ourselves. Often, we are at fault and start conflicts. We may not even realize how our behavior caused the conflict until we take a step back and really analyze what is happening. When it comes to being at fault, it's very important to admit that you've done wrong. Nothing is worse (and can stoke a conflict more) than when someone refuses to see their part in the conflict.

Third, we can attempt to change the other person. Let's face it, changing someone else is easier said than done. Just ask your parents/guardians! All of our parents/guardians have attempted to change our behaviors at one point or another, and changing people is very hard. Even with the powers of punishment and reward, a lot of time change only lasts as long as the punishment or the reward. One of our coauthors was in a constant battle with our coauthors' parents about thumb sucking as a child. Our coauthor's parents tried everything to get the thumb sucking to stop. They finally came up with an ingenious plan. They agreed to buy a toy electric saw if their child didn't engage in thumb sucking for the entire month. Well, for a whole month, no thumb sucking occurred at all. The child got the toy saw, and immediately inserted the thumb back into our coauthor's mouth. This short story is a great illustration of the problems that can be

posed by rewards. Punishment works the same way. As long as people are being punished, they will behave in a specific way. If that punishment is ever taken away, so will the behavior.

Lastly, we can just change the situation. Having a conflict with your roommates? Move out. Having a conflict with your boss? Find a new job. Having a conflict with a professor? Drop the course. Admittedly, changing the situation is not necessarily the first choice people should take when thinking about possibilities, but often it's the best decision for long-term happiness. In essence, some conflicts will not be settled between people. When these conflicts arise, you can try and change yourself, hope the other person will change (they probably won't, though), or just get out of it altogether.

Listen

The third step in the STLC model is listen. Humans are not always the best listeners. As we discussed in Chapter 7, listening is a skill. Unfortunately, during a conflict situation, this is a skill that is desperately needed and often forgotten. When we feel defensive during a conflict, our listening becomes spotty at best because we start to focus on ourselves and protecting ourselves instead of trying to be empathic and seeing the conflict through the other person's eyes. One mistake some people make is to think they're listening, but in reality, they're listening for flaws in the other person's argument. We often use this type of selective listening as a way to devalue the other person's stance. In essence, we will hear one small flaw with what the other person is saying and then use that flaw to demonstrate that obviously everything else must be wrong as well.

The goal of listening must be to suspend your judgment and really attempt to be present enough to accurately interpret the message being sent by the other person. When we listen in this highly empathic way, we are often able to see things from the other person's point-of-view, which could help us come to a better-negotiated outcome in the long run.

Communicate

Lastly, but certainly not least, we communicate with the other person. Notice that Cahn and Abigail put communication as the last part of the STLC model because it's the hardest one to do effectively during a conflict if the first three are not done correctly. When we communicate during a conflict, we must be hyper-aware of our nonverbal behavior (eye movement, gestures, posture, etc.). Nothing will kill a message faster than when it's accompanied by bad nonverbal behavior. For example, rolling one's eyes while another person is speaking is not an effective way to engage in conflict. One of our coauthors used to work with two women who clearly despised one another. They would never openly say something negative about the other person publicly, but in meetings, one would roll her eyes and make these non-word sounds of disagreement. The other one would just smile, slow her speech, and look in the other woman's direction. Everyone around the conference table knew exactly what was transpiring, yet no words needed to be uttered at all.

During a conflict, it's important to be assertive and stand up for your ideas without becoming verbally aggressive. Conversely, you have to be open to someone else's use of assertiveness as well without having to tolerate verbal aggression. We often end up using mediators to help call people on the carpet when they communicate in a fashion that is verbally aggressive or does not further the conflict itself. As Cahn and Abigail note, "People who are assertive with one another have the greatest chance of achieving mutual satisfaction and growth in their relationship."[xxviii]

As with all the aspects of communication competence we have discussed so far, you cannot expect that everyone you interact with will have the same knowledge of communication that you have after reading this book. But it often only takes one person with conflict management skills to make an interaction more effective. Remember that it's not the quantity of conflict that determines a relationship's success; it's how the conflict is managed, and one person's competent response can deescalate a conflict.

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Chapter 10
Preparing Your Oral Presentation

Even though public speaking principles have been around for thousands of years and have been taught to millions of students, it's still a challenge to get students to see the value of public speaking. Some students think they already know everything they need to know about speaking in public. Even the best speakers still don't know everything there is to know about public speaking. Other students don't think they'll engage in public speaking very often, if at all. Oral communication and presentation skills are integral to professional and personal success. Last, some students are anxious or even scared by the thought of speaking in front of an audience. Speaking anxiety is common and can be addressed. Learning about and practicing public speaking fosters transferable skills that will help you organize your thoughts, outline information, do research, and adapt to various audiences. These skills will be useful in other college classes, your career, your personal relationships, and your civic life.

There are many steps that go into the speech-making process. Many people do not approach speech preparation in an informed and systematic way, which results in many poorly planned or executed speeches that are not pleasant to sit through as an audience member and don't reflect well on the speaker. Good speaking skills can help you stand out from the crowd in increasingly competitive environments. While a polished delivery is important and will be discussed later in this chapter, good speaking skills must be practiced much earlier in the speech-making process.

Analyze Your Audience

Audience analysis is key for a speaker to achieve his or her speech goal. One of the first questions you should ask yourself is "Who is my audience?" While there are some generalizations you can make about an audience, a competent speaker always assumes there is a diversity of opinion and background among his or her listeners. You can't assume from looking that everyone in your audience is the same age, race, sexual orientation, religion, or many other factors. Even if you did have a fairly homogenous audience, with only one or two people who don't match up, you should still consider those one or two people. A good speaker shouldn't intentionally alienate even one audience member. Speakers should think critically about what content they include in the speech and the effects it may have.

Determine Your Purpose and Thesis Statements

General Purpose

Your speeches will usually fall into one of three categories. In some cases we speak to inform, meaning we attempt to teach our audience using factual objective evidence. **Your oral presentation falls into this category of inform.** In other cases, we speak to persuade, as we try to influence an audience's beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors. Last, we may speak to entertain or amuse our audience. In summary, the general purpose of your speech will be **to inform**, to persuade, or to entertain.

Specific Purpose

Once you have brainstormed, narrowed, and chosen your topic, you can begin to draft your specific purpose statement. Your specific purpose is a one-sentence statement that includes the objective you want to accomplish in your speech. You do not speak aloud your specific purpose during your speech; you use it to guide your researching, organizing, and writing. A good specific purpose statement is audience centered, agrees with the general purpose, addresses one main idea, and is realistic.

An audience-centered specific purpose statement usually contains an explicit reference to the audience—for example, "my audience" or "the audience." Since a speaker may want to see if he or she effectively met his or her specific purpose, the objective should be written in such a way that it could be measured or assessed, and since a speaker actually wants to achieve his or her speech goal, the specific purpose should also be realistic. The following is a good example of a good specific purpose statement for an informative speech: "By the end of my speech, the audience will be better informed about the effects the green movement has had on schools." The statement is audience centered and matches with the general purpose by stating, "the audience will be better informed."

Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement is a one-sentence summary of the central idea of your speech that you will explain in your informative speech. The thesis statement is different from the specific purpose in two main ways. First, the thesis statement is content centered, while the specific purpose statement is audience centered. Second, the thesis statement is incorporated into the spoken portion of your speech, while the specific purpose serves as a guide for your research and writing and an objective that you can measure.

A good thesis statement is declarative, agrees with the general and specific purposes, and focuses and narrows your topic. Although you will likely end up revising and refining your thesis as you research and write, it is good to draft a thesis statement soon after drafting a specific purpose to help guide your progress. As with the specific purpose statement, your thesis helps ensure that your research, organizing, and writing are focused so you don't end up wasting time with irrelevant materials. Keep your specific purpose and thesis statement handy (drafting them at the top of your working outline is a good idea) so you can reference them often.

Research Your Topic

We live in an age where access to information is more convenient than ever before. The days of photocopying journal articles in the stacks of the library or looking up newspaper articles on microfilm are over for most. Yet, even though we have all this information at our fingertips, research skills are more important than ever. Our challenge now is not accessing information but discerning what information is credible and relevant. Even though it may sound inconvenient to have to physically go to the library, students who did research before the digital revolution did not have to worry as much about discerning. If you found a source in the library, you could be assured of its credibility because a librarian had subscribed to or purchased that content. When you use Internet resources like Google or Wikipedia, you have no guarantees about some of the content that comes up.

Your first step for research in college should be library resources, not Google or Bing or other general search engines. In most cases, you can still do your library research from the comfort of a computer, which makes it as accessible as Google but gives you much better results. Excellent and underutilized resources at college and university libraries are reference librarians. Reference librarians

are not like the people who likely staffed your high school library. They are information-retrieval experts. At most colleges and universities, you can find a reference librarian who has at least a master's degree in library and information sciences, and at some larger or specialized schools, reference librarians have doctoral degrees. I liken research to a maze, and reference librarians can help you navigate the maze. There may be dead ends, but there's always another way around to reach the end goal. Unfortunately, many students hit their first dead end and give up or assume that there's not enough research out there to support their speech. Trust me, if you've thought of a topic to do your speech on, someone else has thought of it, too, and people have written and published about it. Reference librarians can help you find that information. I recommend that you meet with a reference librarian face-to-face and take your assignment sheet and topic idea with you. In most cases, students report that they came away with more information than they needed, which is good because you can then narrow that down to the best information. If you can't meet with a reference librarian face-to-face, many schools now offer the option to do a live chat with a reference librarian, and you can also contact them by e-mail or phone.

Aside from the human resources available in the library, you can also use electronic resources such as library databases. Library databases help you access more credible and scholarly information than what you will find using general Internet searches. These databases are quite expensive, and you can't access them as a regular citizen without paying for them. Luckily, some of your tuition dollars go to pay for subscriptions to these databases that you can then access as a student.

Through these databases, you can access newspapers, magazines, journals, and books from around the world. Of course, libraries also house stores of physical resources like DVDs, books, academic journals, newspapers, and popular magazines. You can usually browse your library's physical collection through an online catalog search. A trip to the library to browse is especially useful for books. Since most university libraries use the Library of Congress classification system, books are organized by topic. That means if you find a good book using the online catalog and go to the library to get it, you should take a moment to look around that book, because the other books in that area will be topically related. On many occasions, I have used this tip and gone to the library for one book but left with several.

Although Google is not usually the best first stop for conducting college-level research, Google Scholar is a separate search engine that narrows results down to scholarly materials. This version of Google has improved much over the past few years and has served as a good resource for my research, even for this book. A strength of Google Scholar is that you can easily search for and find articles that aren't confined to a particular library database. Basically, the pool of resources you are searching is much larger than what you would have using a library database.

The challenge is that you have no way of knowing if the articles that come up are available to you in full-text format. As noted earlier, most academic journal articles are found in databases that require users to pay subscription fees. So you are often only able to access the abstracts of articles or excerpts from books that come up in a Google Scholar search. You can use that information to check your library to see if the article is available in full-text format, but if it isn't, you have to go back to the search results. When you access Google Scholar on a campus network that subscribes to academic databases, however, you can sometimes click through directly to full-text articles. Although this resource is still being improved, it may be a useful alternative or backup when other search strategies are leading to dead ends.

To summarize, there are three types of research:
- **Online** (using the internet – websites, online articles, databases…)

- o [Google Scholar](#) is a Google search engine that just looks through "scholarly" sources like academic books and peer-reviewed journals. *If you can't access a source directly from Google Scholar, you can often find it through the BCC Library.*
- **Library** (books [including ebooks], databases, journals, newspapers, librarians…)
  - o Databases hold collections of articles and other sources. You can access them through the [BCC Library](#).
    - ▪ What about the other perspective? – [Opposing Viewpoints](#) is a database that explores multiple perspectives on issues
  - o [Ebook Central](#) is a collection of ebooks that you can access through BCC's library.
- **Field** (interviews, surveys, observations [*including your experience*])

Each type of research is credible. While you may be tempted to rely totally on online research, don't forget that the other types are also useful. Indeed, sometimes you can only find information in the library or through an interview.

Don't get frightened by research! One of the ironic drawbacks of the internet is there is SO MUCH information out there it can be overwhelming! Try to narrow your search focus as this helps reduce the amount of data you're going through. For example, if your paper is about self-monitoring, don't just search "self-monitoring", try different searches related to improving communication skills until you find information that helps you narrow down your topic to something manageable (e.g. "ways to become a stronger communicator", "self-reflection and communication").

Credibility of Sources

It would be nice to say that judging the credibility of sources comes down to common sense, but it involves using your critical thinking skills as well as knowing what to look for in order to ensure your research is credible.

How do you know the source you're using is **credible** (trustworthy, reliable)? There are a variety of factors when determining if the research you've found is credible. Here are some things to consider:
- Don't rely on just one source. *Even if it's a really good source, you need more perspectives than just one source.*
- Is the information recent (within the last 5 years) or older? *If you are researching a person from the 18th century or an event that happened 100 years ago, the need for more recent research may not apply, but if you're talking about something from a year ago or something that changes over time, recency is very important. And even with something from the distant past, new information may provide a new and useful perspective on that person, event, group, place, or idea.*
- Who is the source? *Look at what else the source has written. Are they an expert in this area? If it's an organization, is the information biased towards what they believe?*
- From where did the source get their information? Do you trust those sources?
- Figuring out good sources is also knowing what you're looking for as sometimes, for example, a blog may be your best source, but you need to look at the credentials of the blogger, what else have they written about, etc. to determine credibility.

For example, with websites, non-profit websites (e.g., .gov) are more trustworthy than commercial/for-profit websites that make money the more visitors they have, whether their information is accurate or not. ☹ When it comes to websites, you want to check the credibility of the organization running the site. You can check their "about us' (or similar type) section as well as do research on the organization.

Also remember that there are credible organizations in every field that you can turn to in order to help you find information. The US Government, for example, has many great organizations: CDC, NIH

(National Institutes of Health), NOAA, etc. The History channel's website, history.com, is a great place to start when your topic is from history. National Geographic is great for information on nature. Make life easier for yourself and find reputable, well-known sources to use. This will save you from trying to figure out if a post on "Hey Read My Blog" is credible or not 😊.

It's also important to remember that we are all influenced by our past experiences and knowledge. This can bias us when researching – blind us to information that goes against what we believe, for example, or lead us to only look at information that confirms our beliefs.

If you need to include a Works Cited, know that this is provided so your reader has more information on your sources. Your Works Cited includes the full references for all sources you've cited in the body of your paper. You can check out the MLA Style website for more information.

Now let's explore each of the various types of library and online research a bit more in-depth.

Periodicals

Periodicals include magazines and journals, as they are published periodically. There are many library databases that can access periodicals from around the world and from years past. A common database is Academic Search Premiere (a similar version is Academic Search Complete). Many databases, like this one, allow you to narrow your search terms, which can be very helpful as you try to find good sources that are relevant to your topic. You may start by typing a key word into the first box and searching. Sometimes a general search like this can yield thousands of results, which you obviously wouldn't have time to look through. In this case you may limit your search to results that have your keyword in the abstract, which is the author-supplied summary of the source. If there are still too many results, you may limit your search to results that have your keyword in the title. At this point, you may have reduced those ten thousand results down to a handful, which is much more manageable.

Within your search results, you will need to distinguish between magazines and academic journals. In general, academic journals are considered more scholarly and credible than magazines because most of the content in them is peer reviewed. The peer-review process is the most rigorous form of review, which takes several months to years and ensures that the information that is published has been vetted and approved by numerous experts on the subject. Academic journals are usually affiliated with professional organizations rather than for-profit corporations, and neither authors nor editors are paid for their contributions. For example, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* is one of the oldest journals in communication studies and is published by the National Communication Association.

If your instructor wants you to have sources from academic journals, you can often click a box to limit your search results to those that are "peer reviewed." There are also subject-specific databases you can use to find periodicals. For example, Communication and Mass Media Complete is a database that includes articles from hundreds of journals related to communication studies. It may be acceptable for you to include magazine sources in your speech, but you should still consider the credibility of the source. Magazines like *Scientific American* and *Time* are generally more credible and reliable than sources like *People* or *Entertainment Weekly*.

Newspapers and Books

Newspapers and books can be excellent sources but must still be evaluated for relevance and credibility. Newspapers are good for topics that are developing quickly, as they are updated daily. While there are well-known newspapers of record like the *New York Times*, smaller local papers can also be credible and relevant if your speech topic doesn't have national or international reach. You can access local, national, and international newspapers through electronic databases like LexisNexis. If a search result comes up that doesn't have a byline with an author's name or an organization like the Associated Press or Reuters

cited, then it might be an editorial. Editorials may also have bylines, which make them look like traditional newspaper articles even though they are opinion based. It is important to distinguish between news articles and editorials because editorials are usually not objective and do not go through the same review process that a news story does before it's published. It's also important to know the background of your paper. Some newspapers are more tabloid focused or may be published by a specific interest group that has an agenda and biases. So it's usually better to go with a newspaper that is recognized as the newspaper of record for a particular area.

Books are good for a variety of subjects and are useful for in-depth research that you can't get as regularly from newspapers or magazines. Edited books with multiple chapters by different authors can be especially good to get a variety of perspectives on a topic.

To evaluate the credibility of a book, you'll want to know some things about the author. You can usually find this information at the front or back of the book. If an author is a credentialed and recognized expert in his or her area, the book will be more credible. But just because someone wrote a book on a subject doesn't mean he or she is the most credible source. For example, a quick search online brings up many books related to public speaking that are written by people who have no formal training in communication or speech. While they may have public speaking experience that can help them get a book deal with a certain publisher, that alone wouldn't qualify them to write a textbook, as textbook authors are expected to be credentialed experts—that is, people with experience and advanced training/degrees in their area. The publisher of a book can also be an indicator of credibility. Books published by university/academic presses (University of Chicago Press, Duke University Press) are considered more credible than books published by trade presses (Penguin, Random House), because they are often peer reviewed and they are not primarily profit driven.

Reference Tools

The transition to college-level research means turning more toward primary sources and away from general reference materials. Primary sources are written by people with firsthand experiences with an event or researchers/scholars who conducted original research. Unfortunately, many college students are reluctant to give up their reliance on reference tools like dictionaries and encyclopedias. While reference tools like dictionaries and encyclopedias are excellent for providing a speaker with a background on a topic, they should not be the foundation of your research unless they are academic and/or specialized.

Dictionaries are handy tools when we aren't familiar with a particular word. However, citing a dictionary like Webster's as a source in your speech is often unnecessary. I tell my students that *Webster's Dictionary* is useful when you need to challenge a Scrabble word, but it isn't the best source for college-level research. You will inevitably come upon a word that you don't know while doing research. Most good authors define the terms they use within the content of their writing. In that case, it's better to use the author's definition than a dictionary definition. Also, citing a dictionary doesn't show deep research skills; it only shows an understanding of alphabetical order. So ideally you would quote or paraphrase the author's definition rather than turning to a general dictionary like Webster's. If you must turn to a dictionary, I recommend an academic dictionary like *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), which is the most comprehensive dictionary in the English language, with more than twenty volumes. You can't access the OED for free online, but most libraries pay for a subscription that you can access as a student or patron. While the OED is an academic dictionary, it is not specialized, and you may need a specialized dictionary when dealing with very specific or technical terms. *The Dictionary of Business and Economics* is an example of an academic and specialized dictionary.

Many students have relied on encyclopedias for research in high school, but most encyclopedias, like *World Book, Encarta*, or *Britannica*, are not primary sources. Instead, they are examples of

secondary sources that compile research done by others in a condensed summary. As I noted earlier, reference sources like encyclopedias are excellent resources to get you informed about the basics of a topic, but at the college level, primary sources are expected. Many encyclopedias are Internet based, which makes them convenient, but they are still not primary sources, and their credibility should be even more scrutinized.

Wikipedia revolutionized how many people retrieve information and pioneered an open-publishing format that allowed a community of people to post, edit, and debate content. While this is an important contribution to society, Wikipedia is not considered a scholarly or credible source. Like other encyclopedias, Wikipedia should not be used in college-level research, because it is not a primary source. In addition, since its content can be posted and edited by anyone, we cannot be sure of the credibility of the content. Even though there are self-appointed "experts" who monitor and edit some of the information on Wikipedia, we cannot verify their credentials or the review process that information goes through before it's posted.

Organizing Your Oral Presentation

When organizing your speech, you want to start with the body. Even though most students want to start with the introduction, I explain that it's difficult to introduce and preview something that you haven't yet developed. A well-structured speech includes an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Think of this structure as a human body. This type of comparison dates back to Plato, who noted, "every speech ought to be put together like a living creature."[i] The introduction is the head, the body is the torso and legs, and the conclusion is the feet. The information you add to this structure from your research and personal experience is the organs and muscle. The transitions you add are the connecting tissues that hold the parts together, and a well-practiced delivery is the skin and clothing that makes everything presentable.

Organizing the Body of Your Speech

Writing the body of your speech takes the most time in the speech-writing process. Your thesis statement should guide the initial development of the body, which will then be more informed by your research process. You will determine main points that help achieve your purpose and match your thesis. You will then fill information into your main points by incorporating the various types of supporting material discussed previously. Before you move on to your introduction and conclusion, you will connect the main points together with transitions.

Determining Your Main Points

Think of each main point as a miniature speech within your larger speech. Each **main point** will have a central idea, meet some part of your specific purpose, and include supporting material from your research that relates to your thesis. Reviewing the draft of your thesis and specific purpose statements can lead you to research materials. As you review your research, take notes on and/or highlight keyideas that stick out to you as useful, effective, relevant, and interesting. It is likely that these key ideas will become the central ideas of your main points, or at least subpoints. Once you've researched your speech enough to achieve your specific purpose, support your thesis, and meet the research guidelines set forth by your instructor, boss, or project guidelines, you can distill the research down to a series of central ideas.

After distilling your research materials down, you may have several central idea statements. You will have only three main point for this 3-minute speech. All the central ideas may not get converted into main points; some may end up becoming subpoints and some may be discarded. Once you get your series of central ideas drafted, you will then want to consider how you might organize them, which will help you narrow your list down to what may actually end up becoming the body of your speech.

Organizing Your Main Points

There are several ways you can organize your main points, and some patterns correspond well to a particular subject area or speech type. Determining which pattern you will use helps filter through your list of central ideas generated from your research and allows you to move on to the next step of inserting supporting material into your speech. Here are some common organizational patterns.

Topical Pattern

When you use the topical pattern, you are breaking a large idea or category into smaller ideas or subcategories. In short you are finding logical divisions to a whole. While you may break something down into smaller topics that will make two, three, or more main points, people tend to like groups of three. In a speech about the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, for example, you could break the main points down to (1) the musicians who performed, (2) the musicians who declined to perform, and (3) the audience. You could also break it down into three specific performances—(1) Santana, (2) The Grateful Dead, and (3) Creedence Clearwater Revival—or three genres of music—(1) folk, (2) funk, and (3) rock.

Chronological Pattern

A chronological pattern helps structure your speech based on time or sequence. If you order a speech based on time, you may trace the development of an idea, product, or event. A speech on Woodstock could cover the following: (1) preparing for the event, (2) what happened during the event, and (3) the aftermath of the event. Ordering a speech based on sequence is also chronological and can be useful when providing directions on how to do something or how a process works. This could work well for a speech on baking bread at home, refinishing furniture, or harvesting corn. The chronological pattern is often a good choice for speeches related to history or demonstration speeches.

Spatial Pattern

The spatial pattern arranges main points based on their layout or proximity to each other. A speech on Woodstock could focus on the layout of the venue, including (1) the camping area, (2) the stage area, and (3) the musician/crew area. A speech could also focus on the components of a typical theater stage or the layout of the new 9/11 memorial at the World Trade Center site.

Incorporating Supporting Material

So far, you have learned several key steps in the speech creation process. Now you will begin to incorporate more specific information from your supporting materials into the body of your speech. You can place the central ideas that fit your organizational pattern at the beginning of each main point and then plug supporting material in as subpoints.

Remember that you want to include a variety of supporting material (examples, analogies, statistics, explanations, etc.) within your speech. The information that you include as subpoints helps

back up the central idea that started the main point. Depending on the length of your speech and the depth of your research, you may also have sub- subpoints that back up the claim you are making in the subpoint. Each piece of supporting material you include eventually links back to the specific purpose and thesis statement. This approach to supporting your speech is systematic and organized and helps ensure that your content fits together logically and that your main points are clearly supported and balanced.

One of the key elements of academic and professional public speaking is verbally citing your supporting materials so your audience can evaluate your credibility and the credibility of your sources. You should include citation information in three places: verbally in your speech, on any paper or electronic information (outline, PowerPoint), and on a separate reference sheet. Since much of the supporting material you incorporate into your speech comes directly from your research, it's important that you include relevant citation information as you plug this information into your main points. Don't wait to include citation information once you've drafted the body of your speech. At that point it may be difficult to retrace your steps to locate the source of a specific sentence or statistic. As you paraphrase or quote your supporting material, work the citation information into the sentences; do not clump the information together at the end of a sentence, or try to cite more than one source at the end of a paragraph or main point. It's important that the audience hear the citations as you use the respective information so it's clear which supporting material matches up with which source.

Writing key bibliographic information into your speech will help ensure that you remember to verbally cite your sources and that your citations will be more natural and flowing and less likely to result in fluency hiccups. At minimum, you should include the author, date, and source in a verbal citation. Sometimes more information is necessary. When citing a magazine, newspaper, or journal article, it is more important to include the source name than the title of the article, since the source name—for example, *Newsweek*—is what the audience needs to evaluate the speaker's credibility. For a book, make sure to cite the title and indicate that the source is a book. When verbally citing information retrieved from a website, you do not want to try to recite a long and cumbersome URL in your speech. Most people don't even make it past the "www." before they mess up. It is more relevant to audiences for speakers to report the sponsor/author of the site and the title of the web page, or section of the website, where they obtained their information. When getting information from a website, it is best to use "official" organization websites or government websites. When you get information from an official site, make sure you state that in your citation to add to your credibility. For an interview, state the interviewee's name, their credentials, and when the interview took place. Advice for verbally citing sources and examples from specific types of sources follow:

1. **Magazine article**

   ◦ "According to an article by Niall Ferguson in the January 23, 2012,issue of *Newsweek*, we can expect much discussion about 'class warfare' in the upcoming presidential and national election cycle.Ferguson reports that…"
   ◦ "As reported by Niall Ferguson, in the January 23, 2012, issue of*Newsweek*, many candidates denounce talking points about economic inequality…"

2. **Newspaper article**

   ◦ "On November 26, 2011, Eithne Farry of *The Daily Telegraph* ofLondon reported that…"
   ◦ "An article about the renewed popularity of selling products in people's own homes

appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on November 26, 2011. Eithne Farry explored a few of these 'blast-from-the-past' styled parties…"

3. **Website**

◦ "According to information I found at ready.gov, the website of theUS Department of Homeland Security, US businesses and citizens…"
◦ "According to information posted on the US Department ofHomeland Security's official website…"
◦ "Helpful information about business continuity planning can befound on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's official website, located at ready.gov…"

4. **Journal article**

◦ "An article written by Dr. Nakamura and Dr. Kikuchi, at Meiji University in Tokyo, found that the Fukushima disaster was complicated by Japan's high nuclear consciousness. Their 2011 article published in the journal *Public Administration Today* reported that…"
◦ "In a 2012 article published in *Public Administration Review*, Professors Nakamura and Kikuchi reported that the Fukushimadisaster was embarrassing for a country with a long nuclear history…"
◦ "Nakamura and Kikuchi, scholars in crisis management and publicpolicy, authored a 2011 article about the failed crisis preparation atthe now infamous Fukushima nuclear plant. Their *Public Administration Review* article reports that…"
◦ **Bad example** (doesn't say where the information came from). "A 2011 study by Meiji University scholars found the crisis preparations at a Japanese nuclear plant to be inadequate…"

5. **Book**

◦ "In their 2008 book *At War with Metaphor*, Steuter and Wills describe how we use metaphor to justify military conflict. Theyreport…"
◦ "Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, experts in sociology and media studies, describe the connections between metaphor and warfare in their 2008 book *At War with Metaphor*. They both contend that…"
◦ "In their 2008 book *At War with Metaphor*, Steuter and Willsreveal…"

6. **Interview**

◦ "On February 20 I conducted a personal interview with Dr. LindaScholz, a communication studies professor at Eastern Illinois University, to learn more about Latina/o Heritage Month. Dr. Scholz told me that…"
◦ "I conducted an interview with Dr. Linda Scholz, a communicationstudies professor here at Eastern, and learned that there are more than a dozen events planned for

Latina/o Heritage Month.”
◦ “In a telephone interview I conducted with Dr. Linda Scholz, acommunication studies professor, I learned…”

Introduction

We all know that first impressions matter. First impressions are quickly formed, sometimes spontaneous, and involve little to no cognitive effort. Despite the fact that first impressions aren't formed with much conscious effort, they form the basis of inferences and judgments about a person's personality.[ii] For example, the student who approaches the front of the class before their speech wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt, looks around blankly, and lets out a sigh before starting hasn't made a very good first impression. Even if the student is prepared for the speech and delivers it well, the audience has likely already associated what they observed with personality traits of the student (i.e., lazy, indifferent), and those associations now have staying power in the face of contrary evidence that comes later.

Your introduction is only a fraction of your speech, but in that first minute or so, your audience decides whether or not they are interested in listening to the rest of the speech. There are four objectives that you should accomplish in your introduction. They include getting your audience's attention, introducing your topic (including stating your thesis statement), establishing credibility and relevance, and previewing your main points.

Getting Your Audience's Attention

There are several strategies you can use to get your audience's attention. Although each can be effective on its own, combining these strategies is also an option. A speaker can get their audience's attention negatively, so think carefully about your choice. The student who began his speech on Habitat for Humanity by banging on the table with a hammer definitely got his audience's attention during his 8:00 a.m. class, but he also lost credibility in that moment because many in the audience probably saw him as a joker rather than a serious speaker. The student who started her speech about animal testing with a little tap dance number ended up stumbling through the first half of her speech when she was thrown off by the confused looks the audience gave her when she finished her “attention getter.” These cautionary tales point out the importance of choosing an attention getter that is appropriate, meaning that it's unusual enough to get people interested and relevant to your speech topic.

Cite a Startling Fact or Statistic

As you research your topic, take note of any information that defies your expectations or surprises you. If you have a strong reaction to something you learn, your audience may, too. When using a startling fact or statistic as an attention getter, it's important to get the most bang for your buck. You can do this by sharing more than one fact or statistic that builds up the audience's interest. When using numbers, it's also good to repeat and/or repackage the statistics so they stick in the audience's mind, which you can see in the following example:

In 1994, sixteen states reported that 15–19 percent of their population was considered obese. Every other state reported obesity rates less than that. In 2010, no states reported obesity rates in that same category of 15–19 percent, because every single state had at least a 20 percent obesity rate. In just six years, we went from no states with an obesity rate higher than 19 percent, to fifty. Currently, the national obesity rate for adults is nearly 34 percent. This dramatic rise in obesity is charted on the

> *Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website, and these rates are expected to continue to rise.*

The speaker could have just started by stating that nearly 34 percent of the US adult population was obese in 2011. But statistics aren't meaningful without context. So sharing how that number rose dramatically over six years helps the audience members see the trend and understand what the current number means. The fourth sentence repackages and summarizes the statistics mentioned in the first three sentences, which again sets up an interesting and informative contrast. Last, the speaker provides a verbal citation for the source of the statistic.

Use a Quotation

Some quotations are attention getting and some are boring. Some quotations are relevant and moving and some are abstract and stale. If you choose to open your speech with a quotation, choose one that is attention getting, relevant, and moving. The following example illustrates some tips for using a quote to start a speech: *"'The most important question in the world is 'Why is the child crying?'' This quote from author Alice Walker is at the heart of my speech today. Too often, people see children suffering at the hands of bullies and do nothing about it until it's too late. That's why I believe that all public schools should adopt a zero-tolerance policy on bullying."*

Notice that the quote is delivered first in the speech, then the source of the quote is cited. Since the quote, like a starting fact or statistic just discussed, is the attention- getting part, it's better to start with that than the citation. Next, the speaker explains why the quote is relevant to the speech. Just because a quote seems relevant to you doesn't mean the audience will also pick up on that relevance, so it's best to make that explicit right after you use and cite the quote. Also evaluate the credibility of the source on which you found the quote. Many websites that make quotations available care more about selling pop-up ads than the accuracy of their information. Students who don't double-check the accuracy of the quote may end up attributing the quote to the wrong person or citing a made-up quote.

Ask a Question

Starting a speech with a question is a common attention getter, but in reality many of the questions that I have heard start a speech are not very attention getting. It's important to note that just because you use one of these strategies, that doesn't make it automatically appealing to an audience. A question can be mundane and boring just like a statistic, quotation, or story can. A rhetorical question is different from a direct question. When a speaker asks a direct question, they actually want a response from their audience. A rhetorical question is designed to elicit a mental response from the audience, not a verbal or nonverbal one. In short, a rhetorical question makes an audience think. Asking a direct question of your audience is warranted only if the speaker plans on doing something with the information they get from the audience. I can't recall a time in which a student asked a direct question to start their speech and did anything with that information. Let's say a student starts the speech with the direct question "By a show of hands, how many people have taken public transportation in the past week?" and sixteen out of twenty students raise their hands. If the speaker is arguing that more students should use public transportation and she expected fewer students to raise their hands, is she going to change her speech angle on the spot? Since most speakers move on from their direct question without addressing the response they got from the audience, they have not made their attention getter relevant to their topic. So, if you use a direct question, make sure you have a point to it and some way to incorporate the responses into the speech.

A safer bet is to ask a rhetorical question that elicits only a mental response. A good rhetorical

question can get the audience primed to think about the content of the speech. When asked as a series of questions and combined with startling statistics or facts, this strategy can create suspense and hook an audience. The following is a series of rhetorical questions used in a speech against the testing of cosmetics on animals: *"Was the toxicity of the shampoo you used this morning tested on the eyes of rabbits? Would you let someone put a cosmetic in your dog's eye to test its toxicity level? Have you ever thought about how many products that you use every day are tested on animals?"* Make sure you pause after your rhetorical question to give the audience time to think. Don't pause for too long, though, or an audience member may get restless and think that you're waiting for an actual response and blurt out what he or she was thinking.

Tell a Story

When you tell a story, whether in the introduction to your speech or not, you should aim to paint word pictures in the minds of your audience members. You might tell a story from your own life or recount a story you found in your research. You may also use a hypothetical story, which has the advantage of allowing you to use your creativity and help place your audience in unusual situations that neither you nor they have actually experienced. When using a hypothetical story, you should let your audience know it's not real, and you should present a story that the audience can relate to. Speakers often let the audience know a story is not real by starting with the word imagine. As I noted, a hypothetical example can allow you to speak beyond the experience of you and your audience members by having them imagine themselves in unusual circumstances. These circumstances should not be so unusual that the audience can't relate to them. I once had a student start her speech by saying, *"Imagine being held as a prisoner of war for seven years."* While that's definitely a dramatic opener, I don't think students in our class were able to really get themselves into that imagined space in the second or two that we had before the speaker moved on. It may have been better for the speaker to say, *"Think of someone you really care about. Visualize that person in your mind. Now, imagine that days and weeks go by and you haven't heard from that person. Weeks turn into months and years, and you have no idea if they are alive or dead."* The speaker could go on to compare that scenario to the experiences of friends and family of prisoners of war. While we may not be able to imagine being held captive for years, we all know what it's like to experience uncertainty regarding the safety of a loved one.

Introducing the Topic

Introducing the topic of your speech is the most obvious objective of an introduction, but speakers sometimes forget to do this or do not do it clearly. As the author of your speech, you may think that what you're talking about is obvious.

Sometimes a speech topic doesn't become obvious until the middle of a speech. By that time, however, it's easy to lose an audience that didn't get clearly told the topic of the speech in the introduction. Introducing the topic is done before the preview of main points and serves as an introduction to the overall topic.

Establishing Credibility and Relevance

The way you write and deliver your introduction makes an important first impression on your audience. But you can also take a moment in your introduction to explicitly set up your credibility in relation to your speech topic. If you have training, expertise, or credentials (e.g., a degree, certificate, etc.) relevant to your topic, you can share that with your audience. It may also be appropriate to mention firsthand experience, previous classes you have taken, or even a personal interest related to your topic. For example, I had a student deliver a speech persuading the audience that the penalties for texting and

driving should be stricter. In his introduction, he mentioned that his brother's girlfriend was killed when she was hit by a car driven by someone who was texting. His personal story shared in the introduction added credibility to the overall speech.

I ask my students to imagine that when they finish their speech, everyone in the audience will raise their hands and ask the question "Why should I care about what you just said?" So make sure you've addressed why this topic will be of interest to your audience.

Previewing Your Main Points

The preview of main points is usually the last sentence of your introduction and serves as a map of what's to come in the speech. The preview narrows your introduction of the topic down to the main ideas you will focus on in the speech. Your preview should be one sentence, should include wording that is parallel to the key wording of your main points in the body of your speech, and should preview your main points in the same order you discuss them in your speech. Make sure your wording is concise so your audience doesn't think there will be four points when there are only three. The following example previews the main points for a speech on childhood obesity: *"Today I'll convey the seriousness of the obesity epidemic among children by reviewing some of the causes of obesity, common health problems associated with it, and steps we can take to help ensure our children maintain a healthy weight."*

Conclusion

How you conclude a speech leaves an impression on your audience. There are three important objectives to accomplish in your conclusion. They include summarizing the importance of your topic, reviewing your main points, and closing your speech.

Summarizing the Importance of Your Topic

After you transition from the body of your speech to the conclusion, you will summarize the importance of your topic. This is the "take-away" message, or another place where you can answer the "so what?" question. This can often be a rewording of your thesis statement.

Reviewing Your Main Points

Once you have summarized the overall importance of your speech, you review the main points. The review statement in the conclusion is very similar to the preview statement in your introduction. You don't have to use the exact same wording, but you still want to have recognizable parallelism that connects the key idea of each main point to the preview, review, and transitions.

Closing Your Speech

Like the attention getter, your closing statement is an opportunity for you to exercise your creativity as a speaker. Many students have difficulty wrapping up the speech with a sense of closure and completeness. In terms of closure, a well- written and well-delivered closing line signals to your audience that your speech is over, which cues their applause. You should not have to put an artificial end to your speech by saying "thank you" or "that's it" or "that's all I have." In terms of completeness, the closing line should relate to the overall speech and should provide some "take-away" message that may leave an audience thinking or propel them to action. You can also create what I call the "ribbon and bow" for your speech by referring back to the introduction in the closing of your speech. For example, you may finish an illustration or answer a rhetorical question you started in the introduction.

Although the conclusion is likely the shortest part of the speech, I suggest that students practice

it often. Even a well-written conclusion can be ineffective if the delivery is not good. Conclusions often turn out bad because they weren't practiced enough. If you only practice your speech starting from the beginning, you may not get to your conclusion very often because you stop to fix something in one of the main points, get interrupted, or run out of time. Once you've started your speech, anxiety may increase as you near the end and your brain becomes filled with thoughts of returning to your seat, so even a well-practiced conclusion can fall short. Practicing your conclusion by itself several times can help prevent this.

Outlining Your Speech

If you are asked to create an outline for your oral presentation (you may only have to submit a proposal that takes the place of the outline), here is some information. You can also find outline templates online.

Once you have started collecting information from your research, you can start putting it into an **outline**. An outline is the blueprint of your speech and helps you map out the structure of it.

Your outline should include the following four sections (as well as, of course, your name, the date, and the title of your speech):

- Introduction: attention getter, thesis statement, preview statement
- Body: 3 main points with supporting material (citations)
- Conclusion
- Works Cited

In your outline, each line should contain a single piece of information. This helps you better organize your information as well as keep each piece of data clear. *It also helps you see if you have too much information!* Outlines are formatted in a specific way including the use of indenting that helps your eye better follow the information.

Delivering Your Speech

In addition to the information discussed below, there are tips we will discuss in class and that you can find doing research for how to best deliver your oral presentation, but the greatest thing you can do to help improve your delivery is practice your speech out loud many, many times. It's also helpful to record yourself so you can review your performance and then make adjustments.

Should I memorize my speech? No, please don't. Seriously, don't. You also shouldn't simply read your speech from a paper that has the speech written out. Speakers who do this tend to disconnect from the audience. It's harder to make eye contact with the audience when you're reading from a page.

The recommended delivery approach is **extemporaneous**. In extemporaneous speaking, the speaker has **speaking notes** that include the key elements of the speech to help the speaker remember what they are talking about and the order in which they are sharing that information. The key to a successful extemporaneous speech is lots and lots of **practice**! The more you practice your speech, the more comfortable you will be with the material. Extemporaneous speaking is more conversational. Just like in a conversation, you know what you want to talk about, but you can adjust your words and other aspects of your delivery to best meet your audience's needs. *If it helps, most professors use an extemporaneous delivery when teaching.*

In terms of your **verbal delivery**, there are three main areas to focus on: **volume, rate,** and **tone.** Think of your delivery as an elevated conversation. Everyone in the room should be able to hear your speech (volume). You want to make sure you're talking at a good pace (rate) so that everyone can understand you. If you have an **accent**, the easiest way to help your audience understand you is to speak more slowly. As for tone, make sure to vary your tone so your audience hears your interest in your speech through how you speak.

With respect to **nonverbal delivery**, you want to maintain **eye contact** with your audience. This doesn't mean creepily staring at the audience members, but merely scanning the room as you give the speech. This allows you to connect with the audience as well as get a sense of if your speech is making sense. For example, if the audience looks confused, you might need to slow down or clarify a term you just used.

You don't need to **dress** up for your speech, but definitely take a look at what you're wearing. I had a student once give a speech on the Dominican Republic while wearing a Puerto Rico t-shirt. Oops! And another student who talked about the seriousness of date rape while wearing a Nike shirt that said, "Just do it!" Ouch! *And yes, the audience noticed!*

If you're someone who likes to move around a lot when you talk, make sure to add places in your speaking notes where you move from one side of the room to the other. In other words, be intentional with your movement.

It is the delivery of the speech that seems to bring the most anxiety to speakers. It's important to remember that you should feel a bit nervous when giving a speech as that's your body's way of giving you a bit more energy to help you present the speech. Unfortunately, many people mistake that energy burst as nerves and use it to fall apart rather than use it to help them focus on delivering the speech.

What about **speaking notes**? Many people recommend using index cards and they are very useful. They are sturdier than regular paper so don't crinkle while you talk plus they are easier to keep hold of while speaking. As for what you should include on your speaking notes, most recommend having bullet points with specific topics or thoughts on your notes. For many of you, this will work well. However, it might not work for all of you. Indeed, I find I'm really weird with my speaking notes – I need full sentences in large-print (18 or 20-point font) on my notes even though I don't actually read those full sentences. *Weird, I know*. I recommend you create your speaking notes, then practice your speech. If the notes work well, great! If they don't, then revise them until you find a method that works for you.

What about a **visual aid**? You can have a visual aid, if you like, but it's not required. If you decide to include one, a visual aid could be an image, a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation, an object, or a very brief (no more than 36-seconds) video clip. If you are doing a presentation about an event, it might be nice to have a slideshow of pictures from the event so your audience gets a better understanding of it. If you're using an unfamiliar word, showing the word in a PowerPoint slide can be useful.

Below, let's review each of these areas in a bit more detail with some tips on note-taking near the end of this section.

Vocal Delivery

Vocal delivery includes components of speech delivery that relate to your voice. These include rate, volume, pitch, articulation, pronunciation, and fluency. Our voice is important to consider when delivering our speech for two main reasons. First, vocal delivery can help us engage and interest the audience. Second, vocal delivery helps ensure that our ideas are communicated clearly. If you have an accent, speak more slowly and this will help the audience better understand you.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech, and it is important that your facial expressions stay consistent with your message. To set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile. A smile is a simple but powerful facial expression that can communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Facial expressions communicate a range of emotions and are

also associated with various moods or personality traits. For example, combinations of facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored, among other things. Even if you aren't bored, for example, a slack face with little animation may lead an audience to think that you are bored with your own speech, which isn't likely to motivate them to be interested. So make sure your facial expressions are communicating an emotion, mood, or personality trait that you think your audience will view favorably. Also make sure your facial expressions match with the content of your speech. When delivering something lighthearted or humorous, a smile, bright eyes, and slightly raised eyebrows will nonverbally enhance your verbal message. When delivering something serious or somber, a furrowed brow, a tighter mouth, and even a slight head nod can enhance that message. If your facial expressions and speech content are not consistent, your audience could become confused by the conflicting messages, which could lead them to question your honesty and credibility.

Tips for Having Effective Eye Contact

- Once in front of the audience, establish eye contact before you speak.
- Make slow and deliberate eye contact, sweeping through the whole audience from left to right.
- Despite what high school speech teachers or others might have told you, do not look over the audience's heads, at the back wall, or the clock. Unless you are in a huge auditorium, it will just look to the audience like you are looking over their heads.
- Do not just make eye contact with one or a few people that you know or that look friendly. Also, do not just make eye contact with your instructor or boss. Even if it's comforting for you as the speaker, it is usually awkward for the audience member.
- Try to memorize your opening and closing lines so you can make full eye contact with the audience. This will strengthen the opening and closing of your speech and help you make a connection with the audience.

Posture

In a formal speaking situation, it's important to have an erect posture that communicates professionalism and credibility. In informal settings, it may be appropriate to lean on a table or lectern, or even sit among your audience members. Head position is also part of posture. In most speaking situations, it is best to keep your head up, facing your audience. A droopy head doesn't communicate confidence. Consider the occasion important, as an inappropriate posture can hurt your credibility.

Gestures

Our hands and arms are often the most reliable and easy-to-use visual aids a speaker can have. While it can be beneficial to plan a key gesture or two in advance, it is generally best to gesture spontaneously in a speech, just as you would during a regular conversation. While the best beginning strategy is to gesture naturally, you also want to remain a high self-monitor and take note of your typical patterns of gesturing. If you notice that you naturally gravitate toward one particular gesture, make an effort to vary your gestures more. You also want your gestures to be purposeful, not limp or lifeless.

Movement

I recommend that beginning speakers hold off trying to incorporate body movement from the waist down until they've gotten at least one speech done. This allows you to concentrate on managing anxiety

and focus on more important aspects of delivery like vocal variety, avoiding fluency hiccups and verbal fillers, and improving eye contact. When students are given the freedom to move around, it often ends up becoming floating or pacing, which are both movements that comfort a speaker by expending nervous energy but only serve to distract the audience. Floating refers to speakers who wander aimlessly around, and pacing refers to speakers who walk back and forth in the same path. To prevent floating or pacing, make sure that your movements are purposeful. Many speakers employ the triangle method of body movement where they start in the middle, take a couple steps forward and to the right, then take a couple steps to the left, then return back to the center. Obviously you don't need to do this multiple times in a three-minute speech, as doing so, just like floating or pacing, tends to make an audience dizzy. To make your movements appear more natural, time them to coincide with a key point you want to emphasize or a transition between key points. Minimize other movements from the waist down when you are not purposefully moving for emphasis. Speakers sometimes tap or shuffle their feet, rock, or shift their weight back and forth from one leg to the other. Keeping both feet flat on the floor, and still, will help avoid these distracting movements.

Personal Appearance

Looking like a credible and prepared public speaker will make you feel more like one and will make your audience more likely to perceive you as such.

Some "Dos" and "Don'ts" for Effective Speech Practice Sessions

- Do start practicing sections of your speech early, as you draft your outline.
- Do practice with someone acting as your audience for feedback.
- Do time yourself once a draft of the speech is completed and adjust the speech as needed to conform to time limits.
- Do deliver the speech the way you want it to be when you deliver it for your audience (use the rate, volume, vocal variety, pauses, and emphasis you plan to use on speech day).
- Don't only practice in front of a mirror (practicing once in front of a mirror can help you gauge your facial expressions and other aspects of delivery, but that shouldn't be the only way you practice).

Extemporaneous delivery entails memorizing the overall structure and main points of a speech and then speaking from keyword/key-phrase notes. Since you only internalize and memorize the main structure of a speech, you don't have to worry as much about the content and delivery seeming stale. Extemporaneous delivery brings in some of the spontaneity of impromptu delivery but still allows a speaker to carefully plan the overall structure of a speech and incorporate supporting materials that include key facts, quotations, and paraphrased information. You can also more freely adapt your speech to fit various audiences and occasions, since every word and sentence isn't predetermined.

Tips for Note Cards

1. The 4×6 inch index cards provide more space and are easier to hold and move than 3.5×5 inch cards.
2. Find a balance between having so much information on your cards that you are tempted to read

from them and so little information that you have fluency hiccups and verbal fillers while trying to remember what to say.
3. Use bullet points on the left-hand side rather than writing in paragraph form, so your eye can easily catch where you need to pick back up after you've made eye contact with the audience. Skipping a line between bullet points may also help.
4. Include all parts of the introduction/conclusion and signposts for backup.
5. Include key supporting material and wording for verbal citations.
6. Only write on the front of your cards.
7. Do not have a sentence that carries over from one card to the next (can lead to fluency hiccups).
8. If you have difficult-to-read handwriting, you may type your speech and tape or glue it to your cards. Use a font that's large enough for you to see and be neat with the glue or tape so your cards don't get stuck together.
9. Include cues that will help with your delivery. Highlight transitions, verbal citations, or other important information. Include reminders to pause, slow down, breathe, or make eye contact.
10. Your cards should be an extension of your body, not something to play with. Don't wiggle, wring, flip through, or slap your note cards.

Delivering Presentations Online

As many people and organizations are trying to do more with smaller budgets, and new software becomes available, online presentations are becoming more common. Whether using a Webinar format, Zoom, Skype, Teams, FaceTime, or some other program, the live, face-to-face audience is now mediated through a computer screen. Despite this change in format, many of the same basic principles of public speaking apply when speaking to people virtually. Yet many business professionals seem to forget the best practices of public speaking when presenting online or don't get that they apply in both settings. The website TheVirtualPresenter.com offers many tips for presenting online that we've covered in this book, including be audience focused, have engaging delivery, and use visual aids effectively.[iii] Yet speakers need to think about some of these things differently when presenting online. We have natural ways to engage an audience when presenting face-to-face, but since many online presentations are only one-way in terms of video, speakers have to rely on technology like audience polls, live chat, or options for audience members to virtually raise their hand when they have a question to get feedback while speaking. Also, in some formats, the audience can only see the presenter's computer desktop or slide show, which pulls attention away from physical delivery and makes vocal delivery and visual aids more important.

Extemporaneous delivery and vocal variety are still key when presenting online. Reading from your slides or having a monotone voice will likely not make a favorable impression on your audience. The lesson to take away is that presenting online requires the same skills as presenting in person, so don't let the change in format lead you to make mistakes that will make you a less effective speaker.

Managing Anxiety

If you feel fear, anxiety, or discomfort when confronted with the task of speaking in front of an audience, you are not alone. National polls consistently show that public speaking is among Americans' top fears.[iv] Yet, since we all have to engage in some form of public speaking, this is a fear that many people must face regularly. Effectively managing speaking anxiety has many positive effects on your speech. One major area that can improve with less anxiety is delivery. Although speaking anxiety is natural and normal, it can interfere with verbal and nonverbal delivery, which makes a speech less

effective. In this chapter, we will explore causes of speaking anxiety, ways to address it, and best practices of vocal and physical delivery.

Top Ten Ways to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

1. Remember, you are not alone. Public speaking anxiety is common, so don't ignore it—confront it.
2. Remember, you can't literally "die of embarrassment." Audiences are forgiving and understanding.
3. Remember, it always feels worse than it looks.
4. Take deep breaths. It releases endorphins, which naturally fight the adrenaline that causes anxiety.
5. Look the part. Dress professionally to enhance confidence.
6. Channel your nervousness into positive energy and motivation.
7. Start your outline and research early. Better information = higher confidence.
8. Practice and get feedback from a trusted source. (Don't just practice for your cat.)
9. Visualize success through positive thinking.
10. Prepare, prepare, prepare! Practice is a speaker's best friend.

Using a Visual Aid?

Visual aids play an important role in conveying supporting material to your audience. They also tie to delivery, since using visual aids during a speech usually requires some physical movements. It is important not to let your use of visual aids detract from your credibility. I've seen many good speeches derailed by posters that fall over, videos with no sound, and uncooperative PowerPoint presentations.

The following tips can help you ensure that your visual aids enhance, rather than detract, from your message and credibility:

- Only have your visual aid displayed when it is relevant to what you are saying: insert black slides in PowerPoint, hide a model or object in a box, flip a poster board around, and so on.
- Make sure to practice with your visual aids so there aren't any surprises on speech day.
- Don't read from your visual aids. Put key information from your PowerPoint or Prezi on your speaking outline and only briefly glance at the screen to make sure you are on the right slide. You can also write information on the back of a poster or picture that you're going to display so you can reference it while holding the visual aid up, since it's difficult to hold a poster or picture and note cards at the same time.
- Triple check your technology to make sure it's working: electricity, Internet connection, wireless clicker, sound, and so on.
- Proofread all your visual aids to find spelling/grammar errors and typos.
- Bring all the materials you may need to make your visual aid work: tape/tacks for posters and pictures, computer cables/adaptors, and so on. Don't assume these materials will be provided.
- Have a backup plan in case your visual aid doesn't work properly.

Other Information on Informative Speeches

Many people would rather go see an impassioned political speech or a comedic monologue than a lecture. Although informative speaking may not be the most exciting form of public speaking, it is the most common. Reports, lectures, training seminars, and demonstrations are all examples of informative

speaking. That means you are more likely to give and listen to informative speeches in a variety of contexts. Some organizations, like consulting firms, and career fields, like training and development, are solely aimed at conveying information. College alumni have reported that out of many different speech skills, informative speaking is most important.[v] Since your exposure to informative speaking is inevitable, why not learn how to be a better producer and consumer of informative messages?

Choosing Your Topic

Being a successful informative speaker starts with choosing a topic that can engage and educate the audience. For this class, you've already been given an assigned subject from which to narrow down into a topic that is appropriate both for the assignment and your audience. Informative speeches can emerge from a range of categories, which include objects, people, events, processes, concepts, and issues. Your oral presentation assignment has a very specific focus and thus you'll be able to see which of the types listed below best fits your assignment.

Speeches about objects convey information about any nonhuman material things. Mechanical objects, animals, plants, and fictional objects are all suitable topics of investigation. Given that this is such a broad category, strive to pick an object that your audience may not be familiar with or highlight novel relevant and interesting facts about a familiar object.

Speeches about people focus on real or fictional individuals who are living or dead. These speeches require in-depth biographical research; an encyclopedia entry is not sufficient. Introduce a new person to the audience or share little-known or surprising information about a person we already know. Although we may already be familiar with the accomplishments of historical figures and leaders, audiences often enjoy learning the "personal side" of their lives.

Speeches about concepts are less concrete than speeches about objects or people, as they focus on ideas or notions that may be abstract or multifaceted. A concept can be familiar to us, like equality, or could literally be a foreign concept like qi (or chi), which is the Chinese conception of the energy that flows through our bodies. Use the strategies discussed in this book for making content relevant and proxemic to your audience to help make abstract concepts more concrete.

Speeches about events focus on past occasions or ongoing occurrences. A particular day in history, an annual observation, or a seldom occurring event can each serve as interesting informative topics. As with speeches about people, it's important to provide a backstory for the event, but avoid rehashing commonly known information.

Informative speeches about processes provide a step-by-step account of a procedure or natural occurrence. Speakers may walk an audience through, or demonstrate, a series of actions that take place to complete a procedure, such as making homemade cheese. Speakers can also present information about naturally occurring processes like cell division or fermentation.

Last, informative speeches about issues provide objective and balanced information about a disputed subject or a matter of concern for society. It is important that speakers view themselves as objective reporters rather than commentators to avoid tipping the balance of the speech from informative to persuasive. Rather than advocating for a particular position, the speaker should seek to teach or raise the awareness of the audience.

Researching an Informative Speech Topic

Having sharp research skills is a fundamental part of being a good informative speaker. Since informative speaking is supposed to convey factual information, speakers should take care to find sources that are objective, balanced, and credible. Periodicals, books, newspapers, and credible websites

can all be useful sources for informative speeches, and you can use the guidelines for evaluating supporting materials discussed earlier to determine the best information to include in your speech. Aside from finding credible and objective sources, informative speakers also need to take time to find engaging information. This is where sharp research skills are needed to cut through all the typical information that comes up in the research process to find novel information. Novel information is atypical or unexpected, but it takes more skill and effort to locate. Even seemingly boring informative speech topics like the history of coupons can be brought to life with information that defies the audience's expectations. A student recently delivered an engaging speech about coupons by informing us that coupons have been around for 125 years, are most frequently used by wealthier and more educated households, and that a coupon fraud committed by an Italian American businessman named Charles Ponzi was the basis for the term Ponzi scheme, which is still commonly used today.

Finding relevant information and examples is typically a good way to be engaging. The basic information may not change quickly, but the way people use it and the way it relates to our lives changes. Finding current, relevant examples and finding novel information are both difficult, since you, as the researcher, probably don't know this information exists. Here is where good research skills become necessary to be a good informative speaker. Using the earlier advice should help you begin to navigate through the seas of information to find hidden treasure that excites you and will in turn excite your audience.

Organizational Patterns

Three organizational patterns that are particularly useful for informative speaking are topical, chronological, and spatial. As you'll recall, to organize a speech topically, you break a larger topic down into logical subdivisions. An informative speech about labor unions could focus on unions in three different areas of employment, three historically significant strikes, or three significant legal/ legislative decisions. Speeches organized chronologically trace the development of a topic or overview the steps in a process. An informative speech could trace the rise of the economic crisis in Greece or explain the steps in creating a home compost pile. Speeches organized spatially convey the layout or physical characteristics of a location or concept. An informative speech about the layout of a fire station or an astrology wheel would follow a spatial organization pattern.

Effective Informative Speaking

There are several challenges to overcome to be an effective informative speaker. They include avoiding persuasion, avoiding information overload, and engaging your audience.

Avoiding Persuasion

We should avoid thinking of informing and persuading as either one or the other. It's more accurate to think of informing and persuading as two poles on a continuum, as in Figure 10.1 "Continuum of Informing and Persuading".[vi] Most persuasive speeches rely on some degree of informing to support the reasoning. And informative speeches, although meant to secure the understanding of an audience, may influence audience members' beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors.

Figure 10.1 Continuum of Informing and Persuading

Speakers can look to three areas to help determine if their speech is more informative or persuasive: speaker purpose, function of information, and audience   perception.[vii] First, for informative speaking, a speaker's purpose should be to create understanding by sharing objective, factual information. Specific purpose and thesis statements help establish a speaker's goal and purpose and can serve as useful reference points to keep a speech on track. When reviewing your specific purpose and thesis statement, look for words like *should/shouldn't, good/bad*, and *right/wrong*, as these often indicate a persuasive slant in the speech.

Second, information should function to clarify and explain in an informative speech. Supporting materials shouldn't function to prove a thesis or to provide reasons for an audience to accept the thesis, as they do in persuasive speeches. Although informative messages can end up influencing the thoughts or behaviors of audience members, that shouldn't be the goal.

Third, an audience's perception of the information and the speaker helps determine whether a speech is classified as informative or persuasive. The audience must perceive that the information being presented is not controversial or disputed, which will lead audience members to view the information as factual. The audience must also accept the speaker as a credible source of information. Being prepared, citing credible sources, and engaging the audience help establish a speaker's credibility. Last, an audience must perceive the speaker to be trustworthy and not have a hidden agenda. Avoiding persuasion is a common challenge for informative speakers, but it is something to consider, as violating the speaking occasion may be perceived as unethical by the audience. Be aware of the overall tone of your speech by reviewing your specific purpose and thesis to make sure your speech isn't tipping from informative to persuasive.

Avoiding Information Overload

Many informative speakers have a tendency to pack short speech with as much information as possible. This can result in information overload, which is a barrier to effective listening that occurs when a speech contains more information than an audience can process. Audience members cannot conduct their own review while listening to a speaker live. Unlike readers, audience members can't review words over and over.[viii] Therefore competent speakers, especially informative speakers who are trying to teach their audience something, should adapt their message to a listening audience.

Avoiding information overload requires a speaker to be a good translator of information. To be a good translator, you can compare an unfamiliar concept with something familiar, give examples from real life, connect your information to current events or popular culture, or supplement supporting material like statistics with related translations of that information. These are just some of the strategies a good speaker can use. While translating information is important for any oral presentation, it is especially important when conveying technical information.

Following the guidelines established earlier for organizing a speech can also help a speaker avoid information overload. Good speakers build in repetition and redundancy to make their content more memorable and their speech more consumable. Preview statements, section transitions, and review statements are some examples of orienting material that helps focus an audience's attention and facilitates the process of informing.[ix] Keeping your words simple – save the big vocabulary words for

your written work – will also help your audience.

Engaging Your Audience

Getting an audience engaged and then keeping their attention is a challenge for any speaker, but it can be especially difficult when speaking to inform. As was discussed earlier, once you are in the professional world, you will most likely be speaking informatively about topics related to your experience and expertise. Some speakers fall into the trap of thinking that their content knowledge is enough to sustain them through an informative speech or that their position in an organization means that an audience will listen to them and appreciate their information despite their delivery. Content expertise is not enough to be an effective speaker. A person must also have speaking expertise.[x] Effective speakers, even renowned experts, must still translate their wealth of content knowledge into information that is suited for oral transmission, audience centered, and well organized. I'm sure we're all familiar with the stereotype of the absentminded professor or the genius who thinks elegantly in his or her head but can't convey that same elegance verbally. Having well-researched and organized supporting material is an important part of effective informative speaking, but having good content is not enough.

Audience members are more likely to stay engaged with a speaker they view as credible. So complementing good supporting material with a practiced and fluent delivery increases credibility and audience engagement. In addition, as we discussed earlier, good informative speakers act as translators of information.

Repackaging information into concrete familiar examples is also a strategy for making your speech more engaging. Understanding relies on being able to apply incoming information to life experiences. Repackaging information is also a good way to appeal to different learning styles, as you can present the same content in various ways, which helps reiterate a point.

[i] James A. Winans, *Public Speaking* (New York: Century, 1917), 411.

[ii] Johanna Lass-Hennemann, Linn K. Kuehl, André Schulz, Melly S. Oitzl, and Hartmut Schachinger, "Stress Strengthens Memory of First Impressions of Others' Positive Perosnality Traits," *PLoS ONE 6*, no. 1 (2011): 1.

[iii] Roger Courville, "Delivery," TheVirtualPresenter.com, accessed November 5, 2012, http://thevirtualpresenter.com/category/delivery.

[iv] Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," *Communication Education* 59, no. 1 (2010): 70.

[v] Rudolph Verderber, *Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 3.

[vi] Thomas H. Olbricht, *Informative Speaking* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1968), 14.

[vii] Rudolph Verderber, *Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 5–6.

[viii] Rudolph Verderber, *Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 10.

[ix] Rudolph Verderber, *Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 12.

[x] Rudolph Verderber, *Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Context*s (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 4.