

# Connecting and Relating: Why Interpersonal Communication Matters



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Edited for COMS244 at the University of Kansas by

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# Connecting and Relating: Why Interpersonal Communication Matters



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# INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION

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## Learning Objectives

- Describe reasons to study communication.
- Identify needs that communication fulfills.
- Name six principles of communication.
- Differentiate among the elements of communication processes and communication models.
- Define eight types of communication.
- Understand and apply the nine statements of communication ethics.

## Communication Defined

If you're like most people taking their first course or reading their first book in communication, you may be wondering what it is that you're going to be studying. Academics like interpersonal communication scholars are notorious for not agreeing on definitions of concepts. We like to think of **communication** as the process by which messages representing information, meaning, and emotion are sent and received between two or more people. **Interpersonal communication**, is communication between a small number of people that is the essence of relationships and often face-to-face and synchronous.

Mark Knapp and John Daly have identified several issues of contention commonly found in attempts to define and delineate interpersonal communication: number of communicators involved, the physical proximity of the communicators, and degree of formality and structure.<sup>1</sup>

## Number of Communicators Involved

Some scholars argue that interaction within one dyad is the best representation of interpersonal communication as it promotes clear distinction from small group or organizational communication. But most

agree that interpersonal communication involves “at least two communicators.” It does not seem right to include a negotiation between brothers as an example and then exclude it if a sister gets involved, too.

## Physical Proximity of the Communicators

In a lot of early writing on the subject of interpersonal communication, researchers argued that interpersonal communication is a face-to-face endeavor. However, with the range of mediated technologies we have in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 break up happens face-to-face?

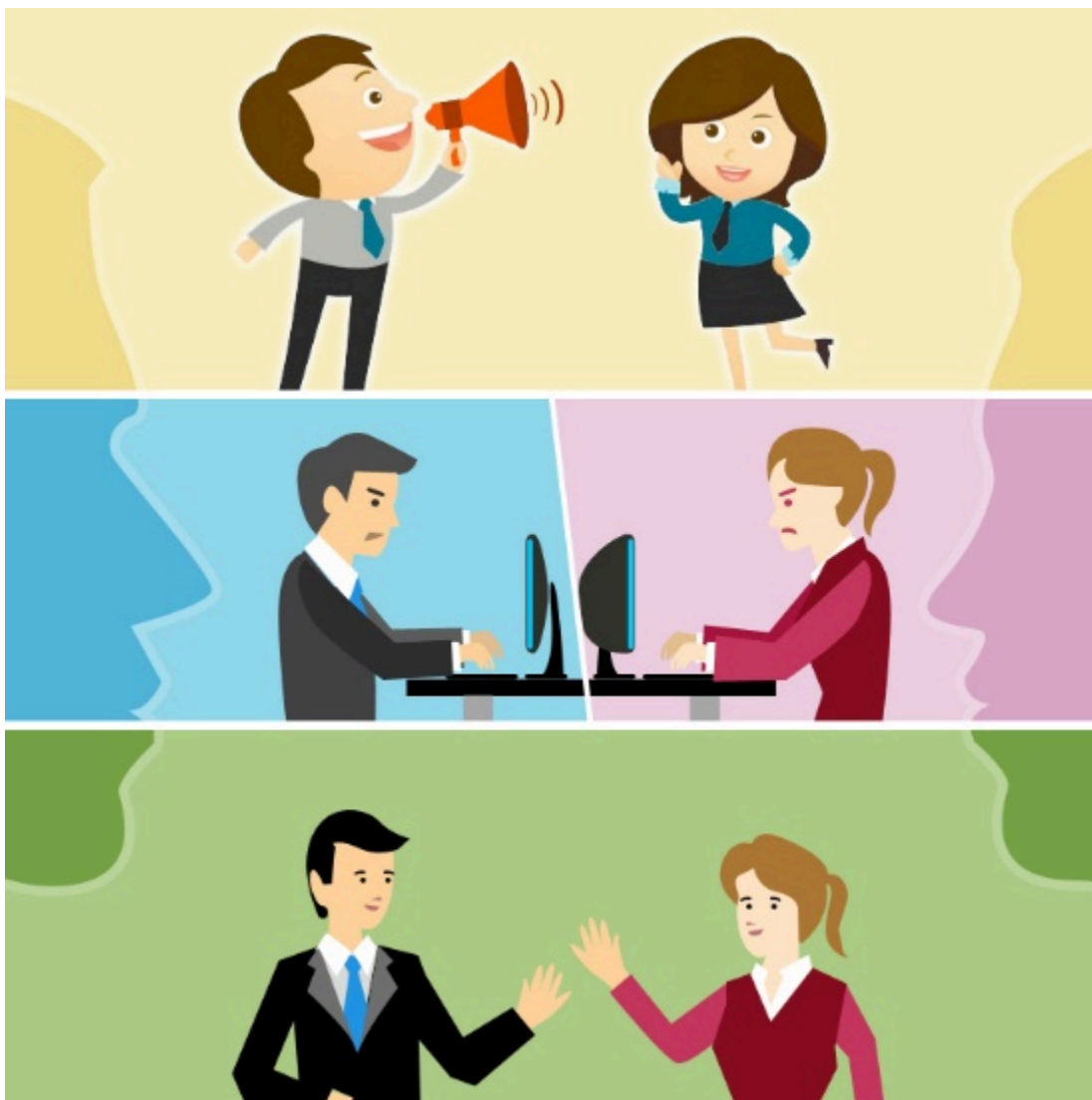


Figure 1. Interpersonal Communication. “[Interpersonal Communication.](#)” by Bovee and Thill. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).

## Degree 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, etc.). However, many interpersonal interactions have a greater degree of formality and structure associated with them. For example, meeting with your physician at the student health center or with your supervisor at work calls for many interpersonal communication skills and behaviors, though these interactions have more norms and restrictions than chatting with a buddy.

## Why Study Communication?

Most people think they are great communicators. However, very few people are “naturally” good at it. 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 at it? Do they say things that are inappropriate, rude, or hostile? Are you confused when they get done talking? This text is designed to give you the skills to be a better communicator.

## Reasons to Study Communication

There are several great rationales for learning about, researching, teaching, and studying communication. Morreale and Pearson believe that there are three main reasons why we need to study communication.<sup>2</sup> First is that we spend a very large portion of our time communicating with other people. Within this book, we make the claim that we cannot not communicate. It is practically pervasive in our lives. Human beings are social creatures and we crave, or even need, relationships and interaction, with others.

The second reason is that when you study communication it gives you a new perspective on something you might otherwise take for granted. Communication majors are often asked why they study communication when it is something everybody knows how to do naturally. In fact, when subjected to scrutiny, the ways that people choose to communicate can be surprising and fascinating. How is your professor so good at speaking for an hour without notes and seemingly without fear? Why can't your boss see that demeaning and berating their employees reduces their productivity?

Third, since most people do not realize how often they are ineffective at communicating, or how many choices they have for doing it, a great reason to study communication is to improve at it!

## Communication Needs

What does it mean to say that we need communication with others? We benefit from communication in ways that protect and improve: our physical, mental, emotional, and social health; our identities; and, our accomplishment of everyday and longer range goals.

### Health

Interaction with others can bring joy and fulfillment, which contribute positively to our social lives and general well being. Relationships, especially those well-steeped in communication, generally improve our emotional and social health. KU alumnus Joy Koesten analyzed family communication patterns and found that people who grew up in higher conversation oriented families were more likely to have better relationships than people who grew up in lower conversation oriented families.<sup>3</sup> In another study, Stafford and Canary illustrated the importance of communication in dating relationships.<sup>4</sup>

Adler and colleagues found that communication decreases:<sup>5</sup>

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

Studies show that people who encounter negative experiences and communicate about them with others are more likely to have better mental and physical health.<sup>6</sup> Social psychologist James Pennebaker's entire research paradigm demonstrates that putting our stresses, upsets, and fears into words, even if we are merely imagining an audience for them, is likely to heighten moods, reduce health care visits, and even improve immune system responses!<sup>7</sup>

Finally, when you feel that your health is diminished or threatened, you can attempt to restore or maintain it by soliciting help from others, like friends or doctors, by telling them and seeking help.

### Identity

Communication helps us discover who we are. From a very young age, you were probably presented with a variety of characteristics about your physical appearance and your personality. You might have been told that you are funny, intelligent, pretty, friendly, talented, or insightful. Others may hear that they are not very smart, out of shape, or lazy. Charles Cooley's concept of the **looking glass self** recognizes our self-images are shaped

by how others act around, and speak to, us as well as by what we inherently know about ourselves.<sup>8</sup> It is as though the people we are surrounded by provide us information about ourselves just like a mirror we look into.



*Figure 2. Looking Glass Self. “Man takes a picture of himself and wife in a mirror.” by simpleinsomnia. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

## Success

There is a nearly infinite number of goals that we pursue in social settings. At any one time, you might look to influence a customer to buy, inform a colleague about an event, soothe an upset nephew, or resolve a conflict between your current and former romantic partners. Communication is the means for accomplishing such goals as we operate socially.

By studying communication, we learn to assess situations, analyze others, and choose appropriate messages to attain success. We also learn about the cornucopia of tactics and strategies for designing the messages. To deal with your partner’s jealousy, some of your many options include to bring it up directly, ask questions about it, share a related story, wait until they are less upset, or even choose to not bring it up at all.

Those who are especially skilled communicators may be able to deliver messages that are responsive to

multiple goals they have for an interaction. An elementary school teacher often looks to keep her students engaged by being entertaining while also being sure to convey the information in a lesson plan.

### Exercises

- Why do you think it is important to study communication? Is this class required for you? Do you think it should be a requirement for everyone?
- Think about how your identity has been shaped by others. What is something that was said to you that impacted how you felt? How do you feel now about the comment?

## Basic Principles of Communication

Following are six basic principles about communication that illuminate what it is and how it happens. These include that communication is a process, purposeful, multidimensional, contextual, and cultural, and can be more or less competent.

### 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 crack up laughing. This level of familiarity and short-hand communication didn’t exist when you first met but has developed over time.

### Communication Is Purposeful

There are occasions where our interpersonal communication is not intentional. Sometimes, we are overheard by others without realizing it. Even though you did not mean to convey these meanings, people may ascertain

that you are sleepy in class, by observing your posture and narrowed eyelids, or excited at the poker table, due to your widely-opened eyes. These are examples of the nonverbal communication covered in a later chapter.

However, the vast majority of our communication is intentional and with purpose. As noted above, human beings communicate for different reasons, including the achievement of goals like relating, persuading, and comforting. We employ messages in the effort to create the desired outcomes.

Another perspective for considering communication as a means to ends is found with examination of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.<sup>10</sup> Following knowledge he learned while working with the Blackfoot Native Nation in Canada, Maslow argued that human needs emerge in order starting from the bottom of the pyramid shown in Figure 3. At the basic level, humans must have *physiological* needs met, such as breathing, food, water, and sleep. Once the physiological needs have been met, humans can attempt to meet *safety* needs, which involve security about maintaining employment, health, and access to resources. Having the first two levels satisfied, we strive for *love and belonging*, which encompasses friendship, intimacy, and membership in social structures like families and clubs. The higher-order needs begin with *esteem*, which includes self respect, achievement, and status within our social groups. Finally, *self-actualization* pertains to fulfilling potential and reaching ideals.

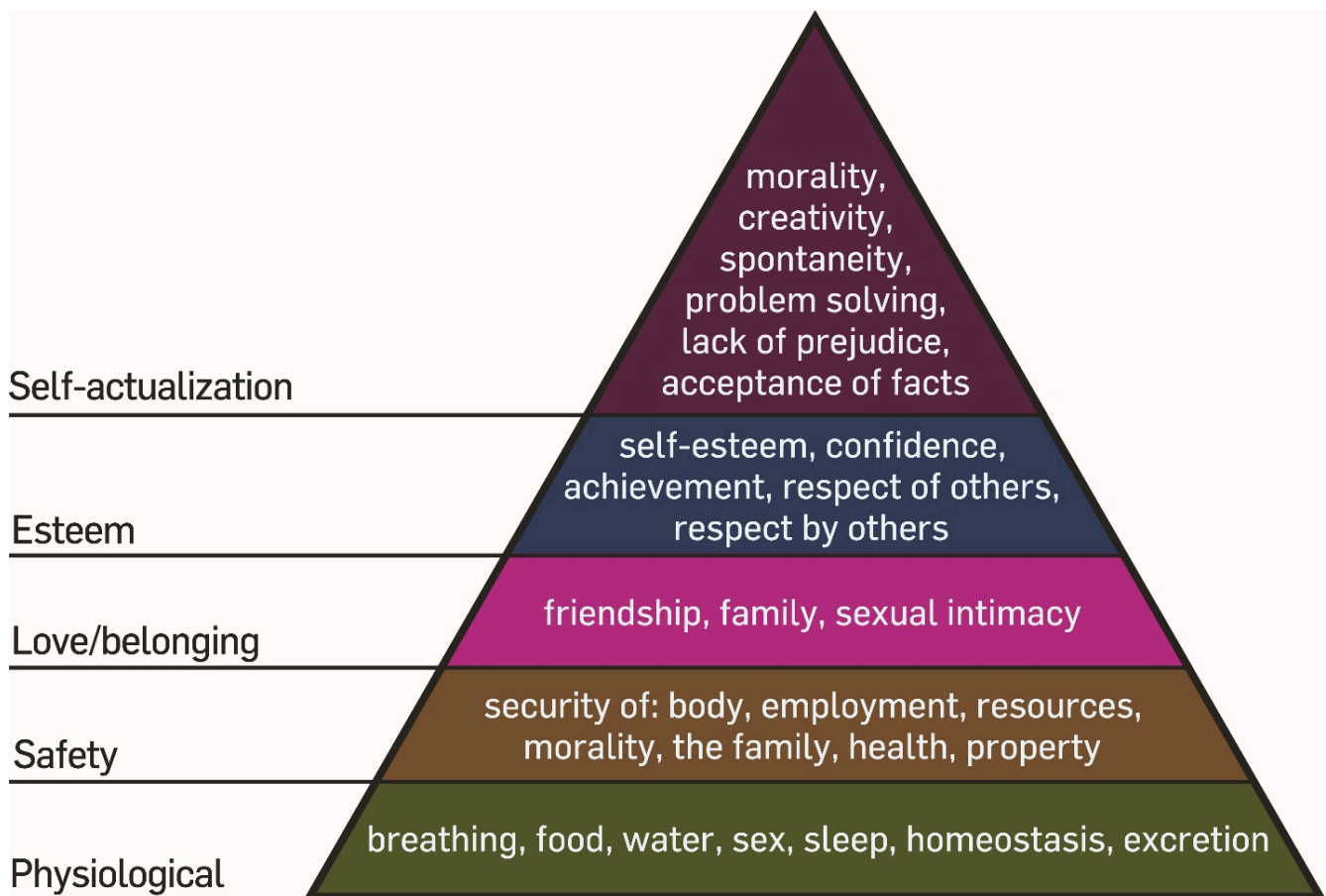


Figure 3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

With full consciousness or even in less explicit fashion, it is common for individuals to aid their ascension through Maslow's Hierarchy with communication. Whether you are pursuing a sexual encounter by using a pickup line, reaching out to a disappointed client to keep your job, or coaching your team to a winning record, your messages serve the climb up the pyramid. For two decades starting in 1980, the United States Army recruited soldiers by appealing to their visions of self-actualization with the slogan, "Army. Be All You Can Be."

## Communication Is Multidimensional

When we communicate with other people, our messages and meanings exist in multiple realms. Any given interaction or message, or even sentence, can be said to have three different sides to it. Those sides are the instrumental, relational, and identity dimensions.

The instrumental dimension refers to the most literal aspects such as informative content and goal-driven intent. The relational dimension includes ways in which this interaction is influenced by, and continues to shape, the nature of the relationship between the interactants. There are often also factors and impacts of our communication that affect how we are regarded and they make up the identity dimension. So, for instance, the message, "I can't handle this, so it's up to you to have the discussion with Dad about where he will live after Mom is gone," assigns a task to a sibling receiver (i.e., instrumental), leads the family dynamics in potentially negative directions (i.e., relational), and portrays the source as incapable in some way (i.e., identity).

## Communication Is Contextual

The circumstance, environment, setting, situation and/or history between parties surround an interaction. The choices made within, and impacts of, a conversation will be informed by all of these contextual elements. The calm measured instructions offered by a troop leader during training exercises may be replaced by their loud, urgent, and profane commands in the dangerous heat of battle. Having failed due to lack of preparation every time you appealed to Professor Smythe, you might approach them this time armed with far more examples and rationales for a grade change.

## Communication Is Cultural

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."<sup>11</sup> We learn culture from our families, our schools, our peers, our religions, and our nations. It ultimately influences what we believe, what we value, what we consider "normal," and what rules we live by. Each of these impact how we

interact and behave with others. This influence is often emphasized when we deal with someone from a culture that differs from ours, which is known as intercultural communication.

At a local Ethiopian restaurant, you express interest in some strips of meat or stew, so the server recommends tibs and doro wot. Your friend Merrill, seated next to you, suddenly blurts out their concern about the price of gasoline. A little embarrassed, you remark, “Gee, that came out of left field.” As Americans steeped in baseball culture, you get this idiom that refers to anything random or unanticipated. Your confused Ethiopian waiter, raised in rural Mosebo Village, asks, “Why cannot the gas come from the right or middle field?”

One of the most interesting things about studying communication is locating the origins of misunderstandings and intercultural differences are common culprits. Then again, interacting and relating with people different than yourself can be some of the most exciting and rewarding communication you will ever have.

## Communication Is Sometimes Competent

Brian Spitzberg claims that **communication competence** occurs when communication is both appropriate and effective.<sup>12</sup> **Appropriate communication** includes tactics and behaviors that most people would consider acceptable and ethical. **Effective communication** achieves the goal(s) at least one party had for an interaction.

Competent communicators are generally more likely to achieve their communication goals. They are more skilled than others at being able to listen, explain, comfort, persuade, etc. and better than most at selecting strategies and tactics that best fit situations. They are also adaptable so that they can change their approach when things aren’t going well, from a bored conversational partner to a technology failure during a presentation. Competent communicators understand the motivations and preferences of those they interact with so they can construct the most effective and appropriate messages. This may take extra effort such as researching, analyzing, and observing one’s audience.

To achieve communication competence usually takes some measure of **cognitive complexity**, which means seeing the world from multiple perspectives but with nuance, too. A cognitively complex person is good at identifying many characteristics about others and adopting others’ perspectives in order to adapt messages to them.<sup>13</sup> For instance a person who is cognitively complex would be likely to provide concern, comfort, and explanation to an employee they must let go, rather than just fire them outright. This is because they can imagine what it would be like to be in the other’s shoes, what that person might want most to hear, and how to formulate that into the most sensitive and useful messaging.

Perhaps as important for communication competence is **emotional intelligence** (EQ), the ability to recognize your own emotions and the emotions of others.<sup>14</sup> EQ is highly associated with empathy for others and workplace success.

Finally, producers of communication competence are probably accomplished and balanced self-monitors.

**Self-monitoring** is the ability to focus on and recognize your own behavior, including communication. Those who pay attention to what they say and do are more likely to act how they prefer to. Competent communicators have to achieve a balance of high and low self-monitoring, so that they realize how they are perceived without being too self-centered to also focus on others.

### Exercises

- Discuss the possibility that the levels of the pyramid indicating Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs could be sought simultaneously or even in reverse order.
- Who do you think are competent/incompetent communicators? Why?

## Elements of Communication

Some people think that communication is easy. In reality, more often than not, communication is hard to perform and difficult to understand. Have you ever tried to contact a company to dispute a subscription charge you never authorized? Good luck! With a large proportion of communicative attempts to achieve goals turning out to be ineffective or worse, it is highly instructive to figure out how and why interpersonal communication can go awry.

To understand and fix what is wrong with a sluggish car engine, a loud refrigerator, a pixelated TV screen, or a sick body, a diagnostic approach is best. We can study communication the same way we study other systems and processes. Just as a mechanic or a doctor would inspect the parts of the engine or the patient and figure out which ones were not operating properly, so can communication scholars. By analyzing the different elements of communication, we can understand how it works, why it sometimes fails to work, and what to diagnose to solve similar problems. The elements of communication, that are almost always present in any single interaction are: source, receiver, message, channel, environment, feedback, and noise.

### Source

The **source** is the person who decides to communicate, identifies the intent of the message (entertain, inform, distract), and constructs its content. Source is synonymous, and often used interchangeably, with **sender**. Senders or sources draw from feelings, thoughts, perceptions, language capabilities, past experiences, and

communication skill sets to design their messages. The process by which sources formulate their thoughts into verbal or nonverbal messages is known as “encoding.” As you experience your desire to add sodium chloride to your bland green beans, you might inquire, “Uncle Jim, could you please pass me the salt?”

Sources usually decide about ways to deliver their message such as softly or louder, quickly or slower, and either stoically or with elaborate gesturing.

## Receiver

The **receiver(s)** is the individual who decodes the message and tries to understand the source of the message and the meaning they intended. Receivers may use any of their five senses to detect and experience messages. They naturally filter messages based on their attitudes, beliefs, opinions, values, history, and prejudices. The process of perception, presented in the next chapter, is vital to the reception and interpretation of a source’s messages. Your eyesight allows you to see street maintenance workers waving at you near a manhole repair and decide that they would like you to drive around it. If you had never before been in a moving car, you might jump to some other incorrect conclusion.

## Message

A **message** is the information, meaning, and/or emotion conveyed by verbal or nonverbal means, the content of a communication interaction. People send messages intentionally (texting a friend to meet for coffee) or unintentionally (accidentally falling asleep during a live Ted Talk). Messages can be verbal (saying hello to your neighbors), nonverbal (gymnast McKayla Maroney smirking with indifference to winning only a silver medal), or text (an admirer sliding into your DMs). Messages are usually the basis of meaning, as they provide information and expressions of emotion, but the meaning intended by the source is not always the same as the meaning interpreted by the receiver. Messages come in many different forms and vary in characteristics such as length, formality, clarity, specificity, accuracy, comprehensiveness, valence (positive/negative), fairness (one-sided/two-sided), and a whole host of other variables.

## Channel

Messages are delivered to receivers by sources through some mode such as face-to-face, print, radio, telegram, public speech, television, or film. A **channel** is the mode, means or media that transmits a message. With advances in technology, cell phones act as many different channels simultaneously. Consider that smartphones allow us to talk and text. Also, we can receive communication through Tik Tok, Facebook, Twitter, Email, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, and Vox.

The selection of a channel can greatly affect how people receive the message. For instance, a professional

athlete proposed marriage to his girlfriend by sending her a ring through the postal mail service and recording a proposal message. His significant other declined his proposal and refused to return the ring.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, face-to-face would have been the better choice. In fact, a sample of college students indicated that they would communicate face-to-face if delivering a positive message, but prefer mediated channels for sharing negative news.<sup>16</sup>

## Environment

The context or situation where communication occurs 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; you are unlikely to talk to your overbearing boss the same way as you do to your annoying little brother. In a library, you lower your voice for other library patrons whereas nightclubs and bars necessitate high volume to be heard over the din.

The environment can be comprised of other factors besides physical location. Your amount of experience talking in front of your current classmates, the aftermath of a contested election, or an occasion such as a funeral or wedding, can make a great difference in determining appropriate content, delivery, and demeanor.

## Feedback

**Feedback** is the response to the message. Feedback is important because the source needs to know if the receiver gets the message and how they react to it. Receivers may nod in acknowledgement of, or even agreement with, a message. Feedback can be positive like an enthused “thank you” in response to a compliment, negative such as shaking a fist at a driver who just cut you off, or ambiguous as when you get a reaction of “hmmm” or “interesting.”

Feedback can be critical as it allows sources to appropriately adapt their content or delivery in real time or over time. A communicator constantly deprived of feedback would be at the same disadvantage as a blindfolded free throw shooter who never finds out which of their techniques are most often putting the ball in the basket.

## Noise

Anything that interferes with, hinders, or distorts a message is called **noise**. Noise keeps the message from being completely received and/or understood. A public speaking professor enjoyed accurately predicting early each semester that at least one of his student speakers would be drowned out by the appearance of “weed whacker man,” who would walk alongside the outside windows of the room creating an infernal racket. Less

predictable would be when the class found it impossible to refrain from searching for the source of sirens on the surrounding streets.

In addition to actual sounds is psychological noise (e.g., thinking about last night's terrific party or wishing for the end of class). Semantic noise involves jargon (a small business' "core competencies" and "sweat equity"), accents (a New York's pronunciations heard by listeners in the Midwest), or language use ("the party was lit"). The fourth and last type of noise is physiological. If an audience member is very hungry or suffering from abdominal distress, then they might pay less attention to receiving and interpreting messages.

## Additional Concept

### Gatekeeper

Though it does not regularly appear in collections of communication elements, the **gatekeeper** is a valuable addition to any list. We sometimes enlist a "middleman" who passes along a message somewhere between the source and the receiver. Middle schoolers too bashful to address their romantic crush may seek a common friend to indicate their interest. Organizations are commonly hierarchical so that messages must pass through people or units that separate original sources and final destinations.

The Gatekeeper is a mythical entity that decides on whether a traveler is granted passage across a bridge or through entrances into a restricted territory. You might also think of "bosses" in video games or the terrifying character, Zuul, in the original *Ghostbusters* film.

An important implication of the use of gatekeepers is that, though they provide convenience and extra access to receivers, with every extra stop in a message's route, opportunities for inaccuracies and omissions are magnified. The more people involved, the less likely that the message will escape some form of distortion. For evidence of the communicative danger, all you need to do is visit a child's birthday party and initiate a game of Telephone!

#### Exercises

- Think of a communicative task like breaking up with a romantic partner and take turns constructing messages to accomplish it, each for a different channel.
- Name as many different channels as you can in sixty seconds...Go!

## Models of Communication

A **model** is a simplified representation (often graphic) of a system that highlights the crucial components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real-world. Models of communication help us understand how the elements of communication interact and contribute to particular outcomes. They also help to highlight the source of many communication breakdowns.

There are three different types or categories of models that communication scholars have proposed to help us understand interpersonal communication episodes: action, interaction, and transaction.

### Action Models

The first type of model we'll be exploring is **action models**, a category of communication models that view communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver. In action models, the role of the receiver in creating meaning is minimized.

#### Aristotelian Model

The study of communication harkens back to the classical era of ancient Greek civilization which began around 500 BCE and started to give way to Roman dominance around 150 BCE. The city state of Athens was home to the great philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Athens was an early democracy in that it allowed its citizens the right to vote. Their responsibility to be well-informed was assisted by the great Greek tradition of influence by way of the public speech.

Aristotle was a keen student of the craft of public speaking and is considered by many to be the father of communication studies. He wrote a treatise on persuasion known as the *Rhetoric* that set the course for subsequent thinking about rhetorical studies, the examination of all things public speaking. Though not particularly graphic, and with no emphasis on interpersonal communication, a representation of Aristotle's view of communication is very much an action model:

**Speaker → Message → Audience [in a public setting]**

This depiction presents a view of communication as a one-way transmission of information that is delivered to an audience whose only job is to receive the message. Members of an audience are not treated as individuals nor are they given credit for interpreting the message. All are affected in the same way by the message and the effects are totally attributable to the speaker.

#### Lasswell Model

Harold Lasswell, a professor of law at Yale University with a background in political science and

communication theory, published an essay in 1948 that presented his model of communication.<sup>17</sup> Like Aristotle's, it was more verbal than visual. Unlike Aristotle's, it was presented in the form of what became a very famous question:

**WHO**  
**SAYS WHAT**  
**IN WHICH CHANNEL**  
**TO WHOM**  
**WITH WHAT EFFECT?**

Laswell's model is articulated in a style very familiar to the pre-existing training of print journalists that taught them to include the Five Ws and an H (who, what, when, where, why, and how) early in their news stories. But he uses similar words to stand in for important elements of communication (sources, messages, channels, receivers).

Critically, in his writing about the model, Lasswell emphasized the interdependence of the elements. For instance, if the whom is an audience of millions of Super Bowl fans across the country, the channel better be a mass media selection like television or radio. Also, that makes every one of the prior elements potentially crucial in determining the outcome or effect. If the channel for the Super Bowl was only face-to-face, the vast majority of fans unable to get to the game would be left out and disappointed. After all, there's a reason it's called a broadcast!

## Berlo's SMCR Model

Berlo created the SMCR model of communication in 1960.<sup>2</sup> SMCR stands for source, message, channel, receiver. Berlo identified variables about each of the four elements, as the elements vary for every individual

instance of communication (see Figure 4).

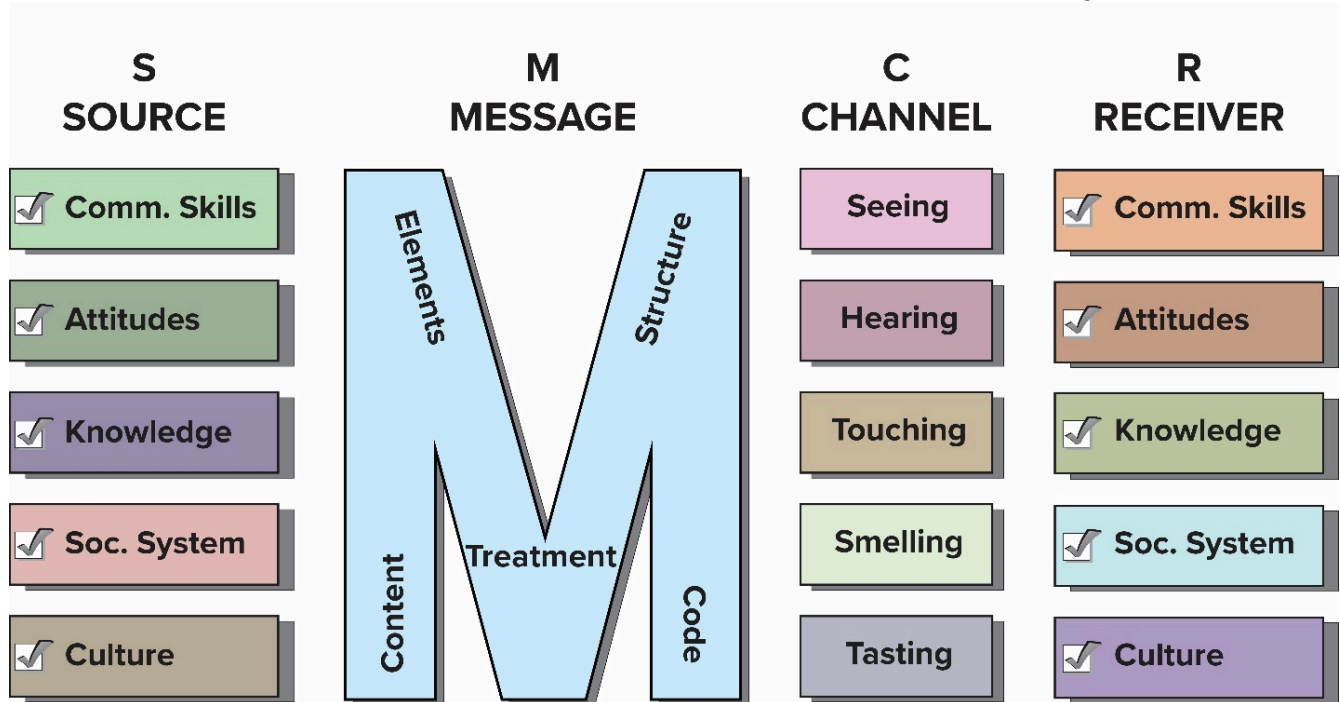


Figure 4. SMCR Model

Let's start in the middle of the SMCR. As compared to all the other messages in all the other interactions that have ever existed, a single message will have its own elements, structure, treatment, content, and code. It may have claims and quotations for evidence, be tightly intertwined, straightforward, and presented in English. Another message could be in Spanish, contain popular slogans as well as sarcasm, and deliver both sides of a controversy somewhat randomly.

Channels also vary between different interactions. While most conceptions of channel focus on the mode of message delivery (e.g., radio, blog post, carrier pigeon), Berlo chose to think of channel as the sense (i.e., sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) employed to receive the message. It is pretty obvious which channel or sense is at work for a radio broadcast as opposed to by a sign language interpreter.

The source or sender in any given interaction has their own set of communication skills (e.g., strong at arguing, weak at listening), attitude (e.g., conservative, religious), knowledge (e.g., communication studies major, bird watching enthusiast), social system (e.g., organizations, families), and culture (e.g., western European, Afghan). These variables assume different values for one sender as opposed to another.

Receivers also come into play wielding their own set of variable values. They, too, have communication skills, culture, etc.

Critically, while receivers are not posed as actively shaping the interpretation of messages, their characteristics may affect choices the source makes. Especially when sources detect differences between themselves and their receivers, they may smartly make appropriate adjustments to their message and/or channel. For instance, if a lecturer as source wishes to teach about the use of Boolean expressions (conditional if/then assignments) in computer programming languages, they would be advised to ascertain the level of

relevant knowledge their receivers possess. If they are nursing students rather than computer science majors, the message might be augmented with general context and definitions of terminology. It might also best be presented with visual aids in addition to spoken lecture. If the audience is likely to be math-phobic, a preface of cheerleading inspiration could be included within the larger message.

Berlo's is thus the first of our models to incorporate the revered principle of sources adapting and tailoring of messages to match their audiences. Nonetheless, it is still an action model that treats communication as a one-way transmission of information.

## Interaction Models

**Interaction models** portray both the sender AND the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication they share. One of the biggest differences between the action and interaction models is a heightened focus on feedback, the transfer of information back to sources from receivers.

## Shannon-Weaver Model

Shannon and Weaver were engineers for Bell Telephone Labs. Their job was to embody communication from a technical perspective. Telephone cables, radio waves, and television signals were technological coins of the realm in their 1960s era of electronic broadcasting and transmission. Their Shannon-Weaver model<sup>18</sup> privileges technologies with the inclusion of encoding during transmission and decoding within reception of messages (see Figure 5). Encoding and decoding are employed to enable the actual transfer of the information.

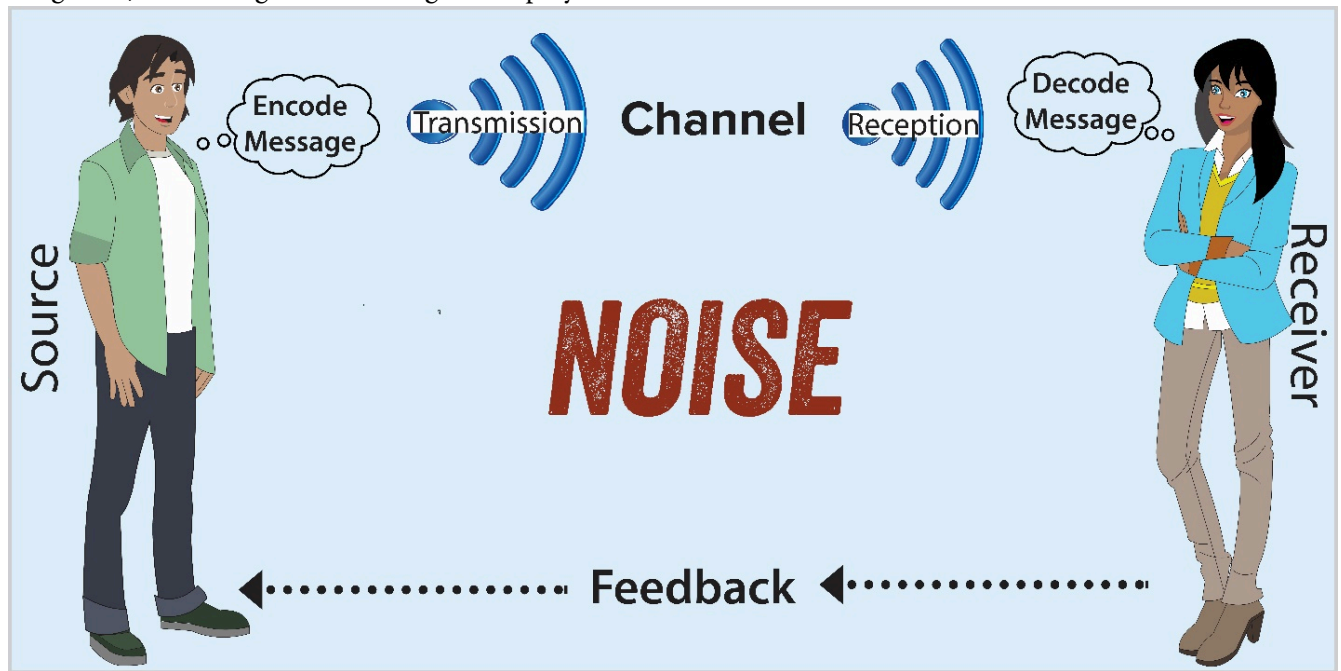


Figure 5. Shannon-Weaver Model

The salesperson at your local American Eagle store wants to let you know that your special order from

their Columbus store has arrived and you can now pick it up. They speak words into their Android phone and they are encoded into radio waves to travel through the air as channel to a cell tower and to your iPhone, which decodes the signal into sound waves for your hearing. Along the way, noise is anything that interrupts or distorts the transmission, such as you driving out of the cell tower's range. Feedback is information that travels back to the source from the receiver. You speak into your iPhone to acknowledge the request to show up at the shop.

Shannon-Weaver qualifies as an interactional type model as the receiver is playing a bigger role than in action models and the information flows both ways.

## Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson Model

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson emphasize the two-way nature of communication and the presence of feedback by visualizing it as a continuous process of sending and responding.<sup>19</sup> In their model, the interactants, Person A and Person B, take turns sending and receiving (see Figure 6), much like a pair of skilled tennis players, until someone stops the volley.

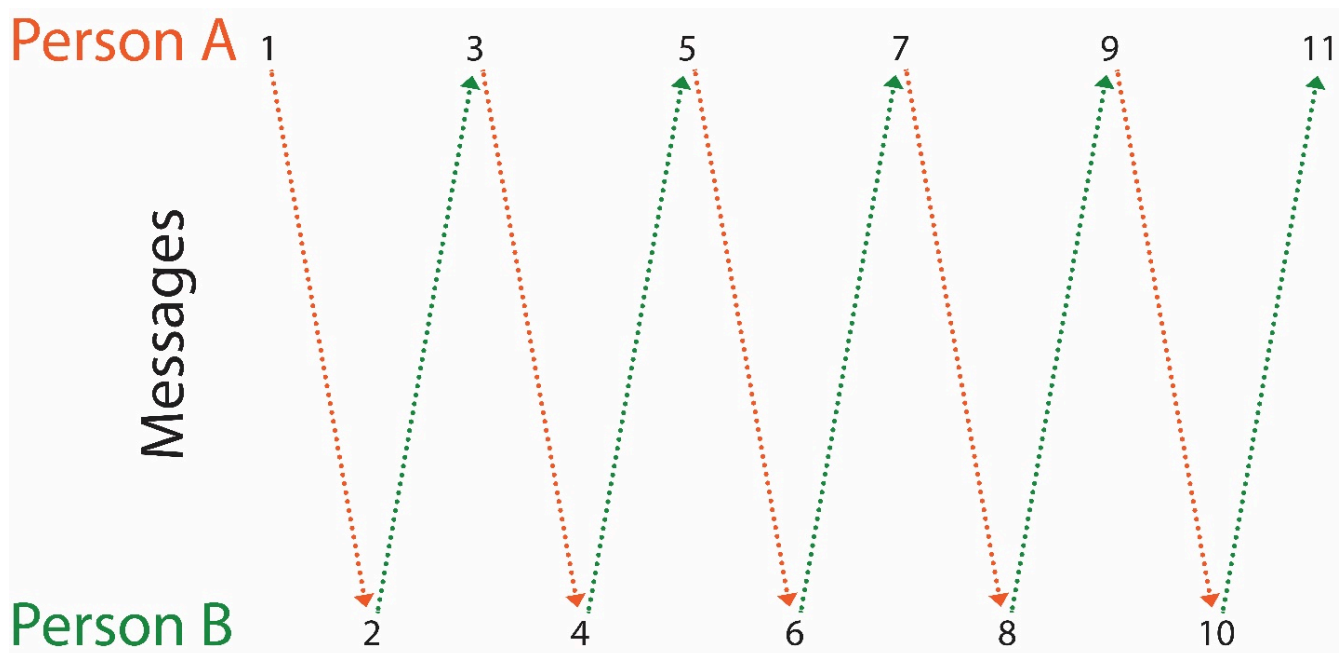


Figure 6. Watzlawick-Beavin-Jackson Model

Watzlawick and colleagues provide axioms, or self-evident principles, to accompany their model:

1. One cannot not communicate. Even if people do not talk to each other, that still communicates a desire not to.
2. Every message has content and relationship dimensions. Content is the informational subject of

discussion. The relationship dimension refers to how the two communicators feel about each other.

3. Communication is either symmetrical or complementary, in terms of power status, which is either equal or not. Public relations scholars suggest that organizations (ExxonMobil, Meta) share channels of communication with their target publics (drivers, Facebook users) for more symmetrical and satisfying relationships.

During his live concerts, superstar songwriter Ed Sheeran gets his audiences involved in the show. During the song, “Sing,” he asks the audience whether they are having a good time and they cheer their approval. He asks if they want to sing and they scream, “Yes!” He plays with call and response by feeding lyrics and vocal sounds like “Oh ah oh ah oh ah oh” for them to repeat. Then he encourages singing, even if they have to make up the words, without him as he holds out the microphone to the crowd. The relational dimension is probably greater than the content dimension in this joyous back-and-forth give-and-take between performer and audience.

## Transaction Models

**Transaction models** of communication differ from action and interaction ones by demonstrating how individuals often act as both senders and receivers at the same time. When parties are sending and receiving messages simultaneously, it is impossible to value only sources’ contributions to outcomes at the expense of receivers.

### Barnlund's Transactional Model

In 1970, Dean C. Barnlund created the transactional model of communication to counteract more linear action and interaction models.<sup>20</sup> He believed that during interpersonal interactions, we are both sending and receiving messages simultaneously. This is facilitated by a multi-layered feedback system that includes verbal and nonverbal responses to messages. As with other models we have examined, the possible occurrence and presence of noise in many forms poses a threat to the effective and satisfying exchange (see Figure 7).

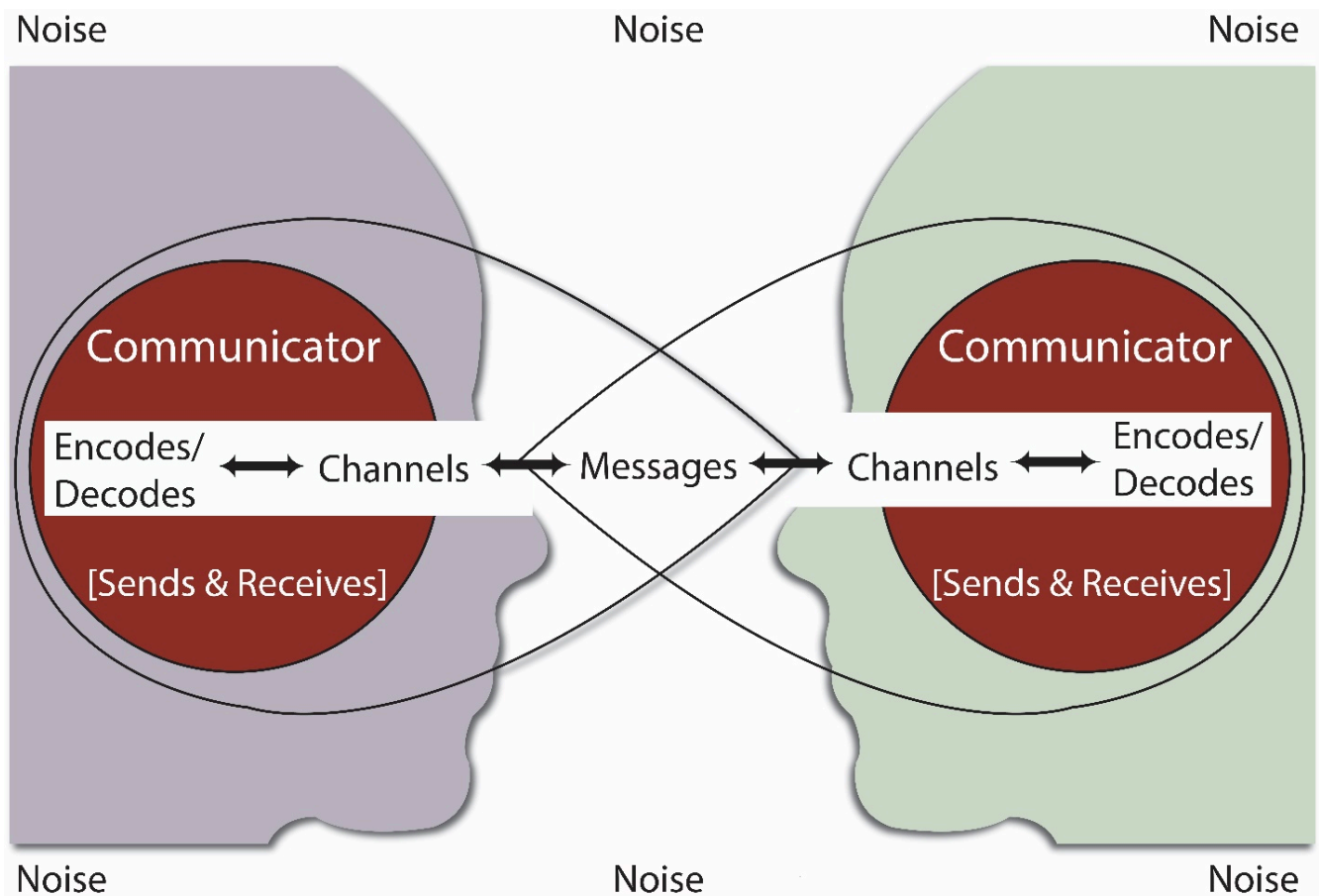


Figure 7. Transactional Model of Communication

Sydney's mother surprises her by appearing at school when Sydney did not know that she was on leave. Sydney has been worrying because her Mom, a Naval officer, was sailing off the coast of a country that has strained relations with the United States. After the shock and relief of the initial reunion, they engage in prolonged and animated conversation. They are so excited to share news about promotions, graduations, dating, and upcoming embarkments that Sydney and her mother are talking and listening at the same time, while still managing to interrupt each other. This encounter is marked by transaction, exchange, and interpretation of meanings.

Barnlund's transactional model, besides emphasizing the concurrent nature of interpersonal communication, also highlights its complexity and its continuous, dynamic, and ever-changing nature.

## Additional Concept

Stephen Axley, a business consultant and professor of Management at Western Illinois University, developed a metaphoric version of a communication model to represent an important finding about organizational communication. He was alarmed, during his visits to many profit-making companies, to discover that almost

everyone from executives to front-line workers were underestimating the importance of communication in the workplace.

Axley employed the metaphor of a conduit to illustrate this common misconception.<sup>21</sup> A conduit is anything that something else passes through, like a plumbing pipe or an electrical wire. A perfect conduit transfers everything that runs through it so that there is no loss of material or energy along the way. Axley warns that too many organizational members think of communication as a perfect conduit. They expect that as long as they put their message out there, it will be understood, conveyed perfectly and fully.

In reality, organizational messages too often are distorted by motivation, attention, and memory deficits. Sources who take communication for granted don't think about ideal delivery modes and adapting to their various audiences. The potential presence of gatekeepers can spin meanings in unintended directions or leave out important information.

So, the company that does not put effort into ensuring successful communication, as though they were easily engaging a perfect conduit, is doomed to unwelcome and unanticipated breakdowns. The final irony is that when things do go wrong, many organizational leaders do not think to suspect their communication practices as possibly responsible.

### Key Takeaways

- Models of communication illuminate how elements of communication interact and contribute to outcomes.
- Models may reveal the reasons for communication breakdowns.
- Action models represent communication as though it was just one-way transmission of messages.
- Interaction models allow receivers a more active role in the creation of meaning but, are still mostly linear.
- Transaction models recognize that we often serve as senders and receivers, negating the binary distinctions of other model types.

### Exercises

- Select three short interactions from your favorite sitcom and determine the identity of each of the elements from the Lasswell model of communication.
- After revisiting Berlo's SMCR model, identify two ways that a source and their receiver may differ and two appropriate adjustments you would then advise the sender to make to the message and/or channel.

## Types of Communication

### Interpersonal Communication

**Interpersonal communication**, which is what this book is all about, focuses on the exchange of messages between a few people. It is the process by which messages representing information, meaning, and emotion are sent and received between two or more people.

Our days are full of interpersonal communication. We wake up and say good morning to our roommates, meet our best friends for coffee to discuss our landscaper issues, work with colleagues on projects, shoot off emails to our babysitters, drop by our doctors' offices to dispute bills with office managers, and listen to our kids' homework complaints in the car after the school pickup.

Some scholars limit interpersonal communication to dyadic interaction, while others collapse small group communication under the interpersonal heading. Either way, these interactions take place through verbal, nonverbal, and mediated communication. We speak, gesture, write and engage in interpersonal communication with other methods as well.



*Figure 8. Interpersonal Communication. "chat-by-window" by pxfuel. This file is free for commercial use, DMCA.*

### Small Group Communication

Although scholars may differ on the exact number of people that make a group, we can say that a **group** is at least three people interacting towards a common goal. Sometimes these groups can be as large as a dozen or so, but larger groups become much harder to manage. 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. **Small group communication** is any interaction that involves at least three people interacting towards a common goal.

Group goals usually follow the purpose that the group was formed for in the first place. Many gather to investigate an issue, solve a particular problem, or make or endorse a decision. Congress forms committees to fact find on issues like steroid use or gambling in sports, a few members of a marketing team strive to adjust a campaign per a client's requests, and a campus faculty senate subcommittee may work to present a plan for addressing parking complaints to their Chancellor. Students may form groups to enhance their individual studying efforts as congregations break off into bible study groups. Groups of people struggling with their conditions, such as fear of flying or breast cancer, may be led by a psychologist in group therapy sessions. The corporate world often assembles focus groups to evaluate things like a food brand's new product line or a movie studio's shocking film ending.

Small group classes often study things like the origins and qualities of group leaders, the roles that people adopt in group settings, how group decisions are reached, and what portions of group talk are devoted to task or relational dimensions.

## Public Communication

The next category of communication is called public communication. **Public communication** occurs when an individual addresses an entire audience in a public setting. This one-to-many mode of communicating differs in audience size from interpersonal (much bigger) and mass (much smaller) communication. Public communication also does not usually involve a media for transmission, other than perhaps a microphone or public address (PA) system.

Public speakers often wish to inform or persuade their audiences or mark some special occasion or ceremony with them. A superstar real estate agent might fill an auditorium at the National Association of Realtors annual convention with a workshop on increasing profits. A gubernatorial candidate appears in front of a town hall of concerned citizens to convince them how to vote. Your coach delivers an impassioned locker room speech after a lousy first half and your first-grade BFF grows up to deliver the toast at your wedding reception.

The discipline of rhetorical study, beginning with Aristotle of ancient Athens, is devoted to the analysis, appreciation, and practice, of public communication. Rhetorical scholars examine the rhetoric of CEOs, presidents, social activists and others to determine what strategies and messages they employ, how useful those are, and how future speakers can improve.

## Mass Communication

**Mass Communication** is the process by which sources use mediated channels to address large, diverse audiences whose members are usually anonymous, dispersed in space and possibly, time. Mass media include channels such as television, radio, film, newspapers, and magazines. Sources may be individuals like United States President Ronald Reagan from his Resolute desk in the Oval Office, or collective such as the cast and production crew of the situation comedy, *The Office*.

As audiences may be located in ranges as wide as towns, provinces, countries or continents, mass media are utilized to broadcast across these spaces. If you think about the 2002 issue of *Glamour* magazine you read in your dentist’s waiting room when your phone battery died, you will realize that mass media allows for a sort of time travel between source and receiver, as well.

Communication technologies have complicated our understanding of mass media as the Internet or podcasts may be consumed individually or en masse. Also, the 1980s and 1990s increase in bandwidth from cable providers allowed for “narrowcasting” on networks that catered only to enthusiasts of golf, cooking, shopping, or true crime. This phenomenon developed further specificity with the digital advances that enabled social media.

Mass media outlets like television provide great benefits like information, entertainment, and companionship. However, research has investigated the potential drawbacks, too. In the 1930s, the Payne Fund series of studies found movie theatres to be sites where impressionable audiences, especially young ones, were influenced powerfully and uniformly to believe or do things that social norms otherwise discouraged.<sup>22</sup> Research since then has sometimes concluded in the opposite direction, showing that consumers of media tend to choose and use media according to their own needs and desires, rather than be overpowered by it..<sup>23</sup>



Figure 9. Mass Communication. [“Telegiornale LaC\\_TV” by Wikimedia Commons. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.](#)

## Computer Mediated Communication

Another type of communication is **computer mediated communication**, or the use of some form of digital technology to facilitate interaction between two or more people. We are surrounded by different digital media options and social media platforms such as Facebook/Meta, YouTube, Twitter/X, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Tik Tok, and new ones keep evolving to replace others like MySpace, Friendster, Vine, and YikYak.

The Interpersonal Communication in Mediated Contexts chapter provides an extensive treatment of its history, features, and relevant theories.

## Organizational Communication

An **organization** is a social, structured collectivity in which activities are coordinated in order to achieve individual and collective goals. The University of Southern California, the Environmental Protection Agency, Apple Inc., the Episcopalian Church, the American Heart Association, and your local Walmart are all organizations. Companies, corporations, businesses, agencies, and nonprofits are the sites of **organizational communication**, the interaction between members of an organization.

As organizations are often big places where their members or employees are earning a living or working towards common initiatives, the nature of communication in them tends to be different than in everyday interpersonal interactions. Your buddies may complain about how bosses at their part time jobs treat, and talk to, them differently than anyone else in their lives.

Organizational communication tends to be more formalized and regulated. New members have to be assimilated into the organizational culture by learning about its rules, expectations, norms, and even, language idiosyncrasies. Annahstasia delivered pizza for Domino's in the 1990s to eke her way through graduate school, so she had to learn about terms like "cashing out" and "prepping boxes," expectations about how to drive safely while trying to beat the ill-fated 30-minute delivery guarantee, norms about rushing in the store instead of out of it, and rules about speaking to customers differently than coworkers.

Organizational members must acquire knowledge about hierarchies and divisions as well as how information is expected to be shared among them. Organizational communication scholars are interested in aspects such as bureaucracy, standardization, interdependence, sensemaking, narrative, rituals, gender issues, power and ideology. *The Relationships at Work* provides deeper coverage of organizational communication.

## Public Affairs and Issue Management

While organizational members engage in organizational communication, organizations as collectives interact with their publics. Exxon spokespersons had to explain how their *Valdez* oil spill happened in 1989 and what the company would do to make up for it and prevent future disasters. Many companies promote their devotion to equal rights during the annual Pride week in the United States or participate in charity causes like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge.

Organizations communicate to a variety of publics. They promote their corporate social responsibility to the general public in marketing campaigns, lobby politicians to enact regulations that will benefit their bottom line, issue press releases to affect positive coverage from the media, and gather stockholders to maintain enthusiasm about a brand's prospects.

Public relations professionals and corporate representatives who handle risk and crisis communication are examples of the practice of **public affairs and issue management**.

## Context-Situated Communication

The discipline of communication studies recognizes forms of communication that may involve interpersonal, mass, public, or organizational communication but that take place in specific and well-established areas or contexts. We are referring to these as instances of **context-situated communication**.

Political communication examines congressional persuasion, campaign materials, officials' websites, and election debates. Intercultural communication takes place between parties who represent different cultures such as different nations, regions, religions, or economic classes.

Health communication has expanded from its initial predominant focus on communicative challenges between patients and their health care providers to scrutiny of media coverage of medical issues, government and agency health campaigns waged to change behavior, materials promoting alternative medicine, and caregiving and social support for people with illness, injury, or disability.

Sport communication involves verbal and nonverbal communication between teammates, biases in sport broadcasting, game reporting and announcing, franchise management, meaning of team nicknames, coaching relationships, and sport fan cultures.

Gender communication searches for differences, but also similarities, in how people of different gender identities relate and communicate. Trends in how people pursue romance, employ conversation, use and abuse others, interact at work, and get socialized in school, are examined. Sometimes pursued from a feminist perspective that seeks to promote true equality among all people, gender communication may also inspire interest in sexual, racial and ethnic, and religious identities as well.



*Figure 10. Context-Situated (Health) Communication.*

[\*“Doctor explains x-ray to patient” by Rhoda Baer. Public domain.\*](#)

### Exercises

- Discuss the ways that advertising in mass media outlets can both help and hurt consumers.
- Describe an interaction you had with a coworker that would have seemed odd outside of the workplace, and why.

- What is your favorite famous public speech by a politician or social activist? What made it so great?

## Communication Ethics

If we are going to pursue a better life through enhanced communication, we should certainly consider and practice a code of **communication ethics**. 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 untrustworthy. Trust can take a long time to establish but it can vanish in an instant.

It is essential that every time you communicate, you consider the consequences of your messages and whether you are treating others fairly and with the same respect that you desire and deserve. The Golden Rule dictates that we treat others as we would have them treat us and communication is a perfect proving ground for this moral code.

It may not be instantaneously obvious what it means to practice interpersonal communication ethically. Fortunately, the National Communication Association has created a general credo for ethical communication.<sup>24</sup> The subheadings below represent the nine statements created by the National Communication Association to help guide conversations related to communication ethics.

### 1. Honesty and Integrity

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

We live in a world where the division of fact and fiction, real-life and fantasy, truth and lies, real news and fake news, etc. has become increasingly blurry. The NCA credo argues that ethical communication should always strive towards truth and integrity. As such, it's important to consider our interpersonal communication and ensure that we are not spreading lies or falsehoods.

### 2. Diversity and Civility

**We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.**

It is perfectly appropriate to disagree with people as long as we do so in a civilized manner. So much of our

interpersonal communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century seems to be about insisting, “I’m right, and you’re wrong.” We should instead remember that it’s possible for many different vantage points to have equal value. People’s experiences in life lead them to different positions that can be equally valid. From an ethical perspective, it’s very important to listen to others and not immediately start thinking about our comebacks or counter-arguments. Otherwise, we’re not listening openly and fairly.

### 3. Respecting and Responding

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

It is critical that we approach our interpersonal interactions with understanding and respect. It can be tough to listen to messages that you strongly disagree with, but we can still give opposing viewpoints a hearing and respond in ways that signal respect for each other.

### 4. Access and Well-Being

**We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and society.**

As communication scholars and students, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to perform and improve their communication. One of the reasons we’ve written this book is because we believe that all students should have access to an interpersonal communication textbook that is either very affordable or free. Furthermore, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to develop their interpersonal communication skills, listening skills, presentation skills, and social skills. Ultimately, developing communication skills helps people in their interpersonal relationships and makes them better equipped to serve the welfare of themselves and others.

### 5. Communication Climates

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

As communicators, we need to take a two-pronged approach to our interpersonal interactions. First, we need to care about the needs of others. We need to understand that our communication can either build people up or tear them down. This doesn’t mean there are never occasions where you should tell people that they’re wrong, but there are ways of doing this that correct without reducing their self-esteem.

Second, we need to strive for mutual understanding. We should aspire to ensure that our messages are interpreted correctly by others and that we’re interpreting others’ messages correctly as well. We should avoid

jumping to conclusions and assuming that someone else has anything other than goodwill towards us, at least until their actions indicate otherwise..

## 6. Condemning Degradation

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

We believe that any communication that degrades another person is reprehensible. It is easy enough to label obvious hate messages as disgusting (e.g., anti-immigrant signs, burning crosses, racist graffiti, etc.). However, many people engage in biased language without realizing it's happening. We'll discuss the issue of biased language and how to avoid it in more detail in the Verbal Communication chapter. It is not enough to refrain from engaging in hurtful discourse. We have to also speak out against others who do.

## 7. Courage of Conviction

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

We live in a world where injustices are still very prevalent. From outsized anti-immigrant rhetoric to laws regarding medical treatment for transgender people, we believe that it's important to pursue fairness and justice. Whether it's remembering to call someone by their preferred names or supporting individuals seeking equal rights and protection under the law, we should be on the side of progressive justice and civil rights for all.

## 8. Information Sharing and Privacy

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

It was not so long ago that we emerged from the isolated throes of a worldwide pandemic. It is indisputable that some made poor choices with regard to the well-being of themselves and others. We must be effortful in our attempts to fill information gaps and correct disinformation, particularly when it has consequences for the community. Still, a balance must be achieved so that disclosures, even of immoral or uninformed positions, are not publicized if they were shared in confidence.

## 9. Responsibility for Consequences

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

Lastly, the National Communication Association's Credo for Ethical Communication advocates that people take responsibility for the consequences of their communication. If you say something that unduly hurts someone else's feelings, it's important to recognize that and apologize. If we accidentally spread false information, it's important to correct the facts when we learn them. We should also not promote language or causes that operate at the expense of other peoples' positive conditions.

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

The rhetorically sensitive person (a) tries to accept role-taking as part of the human condition, (b) attempts to avoid stylized verbal behavior, (c) is characteristically willing to undergo the strain of adaptation, (d) seeks to distinguish between all information and that information acceptable for communication, and (e) tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways.<sup>25</sup>

With these nine principles in mind, we can execute exemplary communication while knowing that it is doing far more good than harm. It is hard to ask for more (or less) than that!

### Key Takeaways

- Honesty, respect, and acceptance of other's positions as valid, even if not correct, is vital.
- Everyone deserves access to channels of communication, a climate of understanding, and desired levels of privacy.
- We must not practice, nor bystand others' acts or messages of degradation or hate.
- Acting for justice is critical, as is recognizing how our communication can hurt or impede others.

### Exercises

- Revisit the nine statements of ethics from the National Communication Association.
- Vow to put them into practice to the best of your ability.

## Key Terms

### **action models**

A category of communication models that view communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver.

### **appropriate communication**

Communication featuring tactics and behaviors that most people would consider acceptable and ethical.

### **channel**

The mode, means or media that transmits a message.

### **cognitive complexity**

A characteristic of seeing the world from multiple and nuanced perspectives that is associated with communication effectiveness.

### **communication**

The process by which messages representing information, meaning, and emotion are sent and received between two or more people.

### **communication competence**

Communication that is both appropriate and effective.

### **communication ethics**

Considering the consequences of your messages and whether you are treating others fairly and with the same respect that you deserve and desire.

**computer mediated communication**

The use of some form of digital technology to facilitate interaction between two or more people.

**context-situated communication**

The type of communication that may be accomplished as interpersonal, mass, public, and organizational but that takes place in specific and well-established areas or contexts, such as politics, health, sports, and gender.

**culture**

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.

**effective communication**

Communication that achieves the goal(s) at least one party had for an interaction.

**emotional intelligence**

The ability to recognize your own emotions and the emotions of others.

**environment**

The context or situation where communication occurs.

**feedback**

The response to the message.

**gatekeeper**

A “middleman” who passes along a message somewhere between the source and the receiver.

**group**

Three or more people interacting together to achieve a common goal.

**interaction models**

A category of communication models that portray both the sender AND the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication they share.

**interpersonal communication**

Communication between a small number of people that is the essence of relationships and often face-to-face and synchronous.

**looking glass self**

The concept that recognizes our self-images are shaped by how others act around, and speak to, us as well as by what we inherently know about ourselves.

**mass communication**

The process by which sources use mediated channels to address large, diverse audiences whose members are usually anonymous, dispersed in space and possibly, time.

**message**

Information, meaning, and/or emotion conveyed by verbal or nonverbal means, the content of a communication interaction.

**model**

A simplified representation (often graphic) of a system that highlights the crucial components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real world.

**noise**

Anything that interferes with, hinders, or distorts a message.

**organization**

A social, structured collectivity in which activities are coordinated in order to achieve individual and collective goals

**organizational communication**

The interaction between members of an organization.

**process**

Something that is ongoing, dynamic, and changing with a purpose or towards some end.

**public affairs and issue management**

The communication employed as organizations as collectives interact with their publics such as citizens, consumers, government bodies, and the media.

**public communication**

A one-to-many mode of communicating that occurs when an individual addresses an entire audience in a public setting.

**receiver**

The individual who decodes the message and tries to understand the source of the message and the meaning they intended.

**self-monitoring**

The ability to focus on and recognize your own behavior, including communication.

**sender**

The person who decides to communicate, identifies the intent of the message (entertain, inform, distract), and constructs its content.

**small group communication**

Any interaction that involves at least three people interacting towards a common goal.

**source**

The person who decides to communicate, identifies the intent of the message (entertain, inform, distract), and constructs its content.

**transaction models**

A category of communication models that demonstrate how individuals often act as both source and receiver simultaneously.

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# PERCEPTION AND THE SELF

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Who are you? Have you ever sat around thinking about how you fit into the larger universe. A simple exercise helps to get at the heart of this question.<sup>1</sup> Use the worksheet in the workbook and answer “Who am I?” with the worksheet numbered 1 to 20. Results from this activity generally demonstrate five distinct categories about an individual: *social group an individual belongs to, ideological beliefs, personal interests, personal ambitions, and self-evaluations*. All of these five categories are happening at what is called the intrapersonal-level.

**Intrapersonal** refers to something that exists or occurs within an individual’s self or mind.

This chapter focuses on understanding perception and the self and how they relate to communication. **Intrapersonal communication** refers to communication phenomena that exist within or occurs because of an individual’s self or mind. The chapter highlights how in addition to personality, one’s biologically based temperament also plays an important role in how they interact with others interpersonally. Temperament is identifiable at birth, whereas, personality is something that develops over one’s lifespan. Although we cannot change the biological aspects of our temperament, we can learn how to adjust our behaviors in light of our temperaments.

## Perception Processes

### Learning Objectives

1. Describe and explain the three stages of the perception process.
2. Differentiate between self-concept and self-esteem.
3. Explain what is meant by Cooley’s concept of the looking-glass self.
4. Define and differentiate between the terms personality and temperament.
5. List and explain the different social, personal, and relational dispositions which affect dispositions.

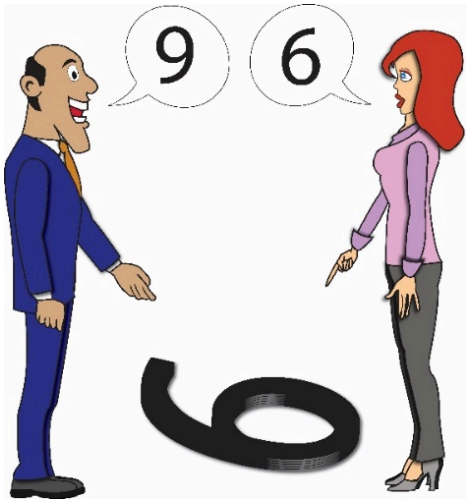


Figure 1 It's All About Perception

As you can see from Figure 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. In Figure 1, do you see it as a six or a nine? Why did you answer the way that you did?

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. Thus, it is important to make an effort to see things the 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

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 section, you will learn tools that can help you understand perceptions and improve your communication skills. As you will see in many of the illustrations on perception, people can see different things. In some 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 2a, 2b, and 2c are an example of three artists' use of twisted perceptions. In the first picture, *The Rubin Vase*, there is 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 is called "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, "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law," shows two different images, one of a young woman and one of an older woman. 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.

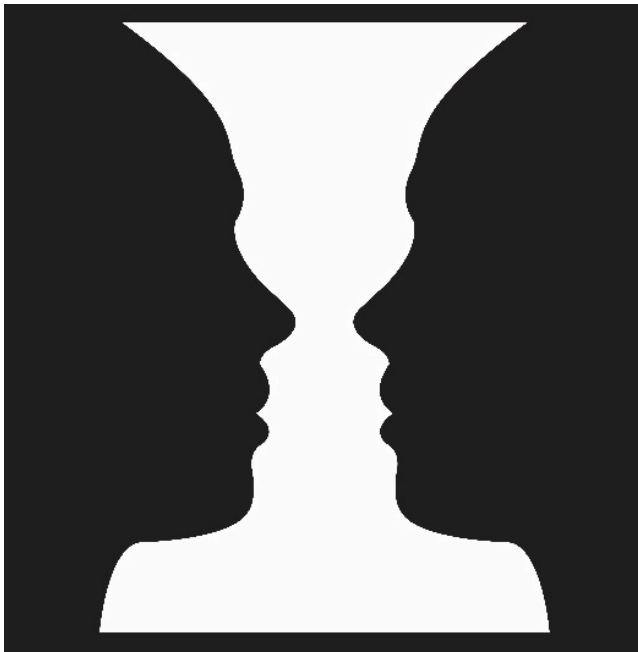


Figure 2a The Rubin Vase – based on Edgar John Rubin's (1915) "Vase Ambiguous Figure"



Figure 2b Charles Allan Gilbert (1892) “All is Vanity”



Figure 2c William Ely Hill (1915) “My Wife and My Mother-in-Law”

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 in inauthentic 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 i

mages 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. The perception process has three stages: attending, organizing, and interpreting.

## Attending

The first step of the perception process is to select what information you want to pay attention to or focus on, which is called **attending**. We attend 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.

Due to our limited cognitive abilities we are always focusing on a particular things and ignoring other things in a process called **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 devastated, 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: We often 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 pay attention to things that are different or contradicting. We are quick to notice something that we 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. Selective perception 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 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. After we select the information that we are paying attention to, we have to make sense of it in our brains. 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 final 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 (attending), 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:<sup>3</sup>

## 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.

## Personal Experience

Personal experience also 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

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

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

We make 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

Last 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.<sup>14</sup>

## Who Are You?

### Self-Concept

According to Baumeister (1999), **self-concept** implies “the individual’s belief about [their self], including the person’s attributes and who and what the self is.”<sup>4</sup> An attribute is a characteristic, feature, or quality or inherent part of a person, group, or thing.

In 1968, social psychologist Norman Anderson came up with a list of 555 personal attributes.<sup>5</sup> He had research participants rate the 555 attributes from most desirable to least desirable. The top ten most desirable characteristics were:

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

Conversely, the top ten least desirable attributes were:

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

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

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

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

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

8. Asswipe
9. Untrustworthy
10. Hitlerish

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

## The Three Selves

Carl Rogers argued an individual's self-concept is made of three distinct things: self-image, self-worth, and ideal-self.<sup>7</sup>

### Self-Image

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

### Self-Worth

**Self-worth** is the value that you place on yourself. In essence, self-worth is the degree to which you see yourself as a good person who deserves to be valued and respected. Unfortunately, many people judge their self-worth based on arbitrary measuring sticks like physical appearance, net worth, social circle/cliq, career, grades, achievements, age, relationship status, likes on Facebook, social media followers, etc.... Interested in seeing how you view your self-worth? Then take a minute and complete the [Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale](#).<sup>8</sup> According to Courtney Ackerman, there are four things you can do to help improve your self-worth:<sup>2</sup>

1. You no longer need to please other people.

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

## Ideal-Self

The final characteristic of Rogers' three parts to self-concept is the ideal-self.<sup>10</sup> The **ideal-self** is the version of yourself that you would like to be, which is created through our life experiences, cultural demands, and expectations of others. The real-self, on the other hand, is the person you are. The ideal-self is perfect, flawless, and, ultimately, completely unrealistic. When an individual's real-self and ideal-self are not remotely similar, someone needs to think through if that idealized version of one's self is attainable. It's also important to know that our ideal-self is continuously evolving. How many of us wanted to be firefighters, police officers, or astronauts as kids? Some of you may still want to be one of these, but most of us had our ideal-self evolve.

## The "Looking-Glass" Self

Charles Horton Cooley's looking-glass self argues: "Each to each a looking-glass / Reflects the other that doth pass"<sup>11</sup> Although the term "looking-glass" isn't used very often in today's modern tongue, it means a mirror. Cooley argues, when we are looking to a mirror, we also think about how others view us and the judgments they make about us. Cooley posed three postulates:

1. Actors learn about themselves in every situation by exercising their imagination to reflect on their social performance.
2. Actors next imagine what those others must think of them. In other words, actors imagine the others' evaluations of the actor's performance.
3. The actor experiences an affective reaction to the imagined evaluation of the other.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 3 presents an illustration of this basic idea. You have a figure standing before four glass panes. In the left-most mirror, the figure has devil horns; in the second, a pasted on a fake smile; in the third, a tie; and in the last one, a halo. Maybe the figure's ex sees the devil, his friends and family think the figure is always happy, the figure's coworkers see a professional, and the figure's parents/guardians see their little angel. Along with each of these ideas, there are inherent judgments. And, not all of these judgments are necessarily accurate, but we still come to understand and know ourselves based on our perceptions of these judgments.

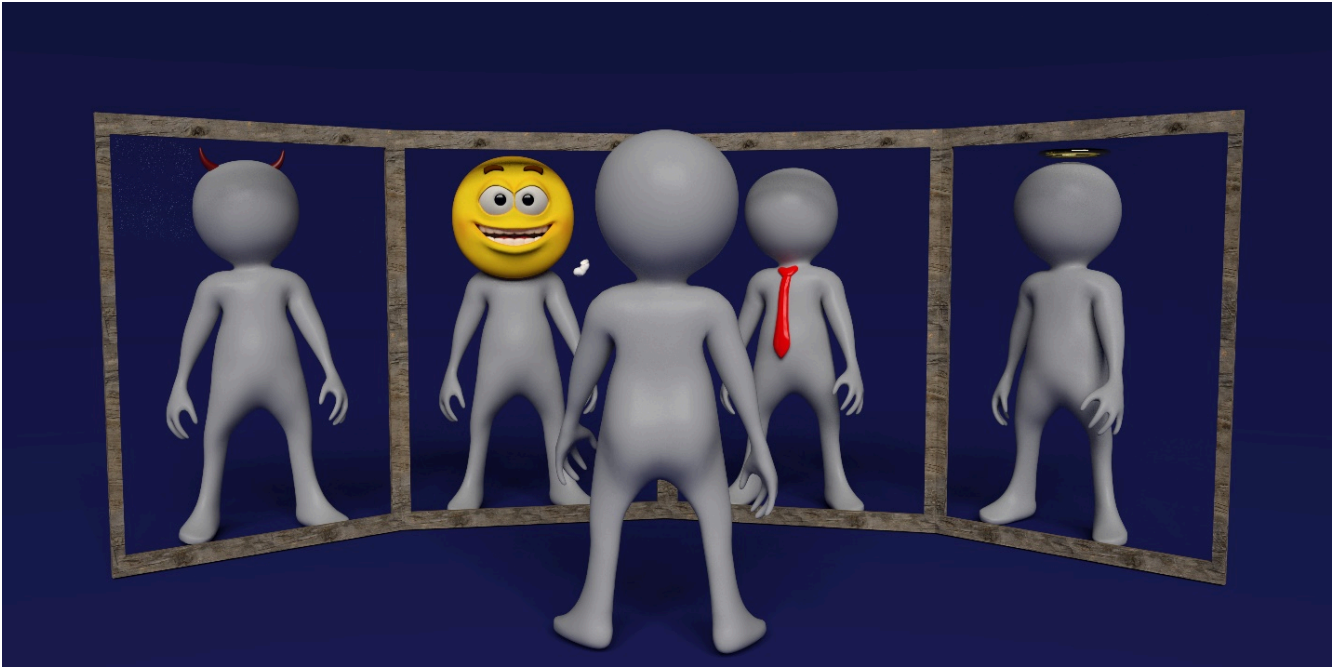


Figure 3 Looking-Glass Self

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

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

## Self-Esteem

One of the most commonly discussed intrapersonal communication ideas is an individual's self-esteem, with many academic and popular press books on the topic. **Self-esteem** is an individual's subjective evaluation of their abilities and limitations. Let's break down this definition into sizeable chunks.

## Subjective Evaluation

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

In addition to the word "subjective," we also use the word "evaluation" in the definition of self-esteem. By evaluation, we mean a determination or judgment about the quality, importance, or value of something. We evaluate how we interact with others, the work we complete, and we evaluate ourselves and our specific abilities and limitations. Our lives are filled with constant evaluations.

## Abilities

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

## Limitations

In addition to one's abilities, it's always important to recognize that we all have limitations. A 4'6" basketball player might be quite good at the game, but physically they will not be able to dunk the ball on a standard-height rim. We all have limitations on what we can and cannot do. When it comes to your self-esteem, it's about how you evaluate those limitations. Do you realize your limitations and they don't bother you? Or do

your limitations prevent you from being happy with yourself? When it comes to understanding limitations, it's important to recognize the limitations that we can change and the limitations we cannot change. One problem that many people have when it comes to limitations is that they cannot differentiate between the types of limitations.

## Self-Esteem and Communication

You may be wondering by this point about the importance of self-esteem in interpersonal communication. Self-esteem and communication have a reciprocal relationship (as depicted in Figure 4). Our communication with others impacts our self-esteem, and our self-esteem impacts our communication with others. As such, our self-esteem and communication are constantly being transformed by each other.



Figure 4 Self-Esteem and Communication

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

## Self-Compassion

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

Self-Compassion stems out of the larger discussion of compassion. **Compassion** then is about the sympathetic consciousness for someone who is suffering or unfortunate. **Self-compassion** “involves being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire

to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience."<sup>18</sup> Neff argues that self-compassion can be broken down into three distinct categories: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Three Factors of Self-Compassion

## Self-Kindness, Common Humanity, and Mindfulness

**Self-kindness** is simply extending the same level of care and understanding to ourselves as we would to others. Instead of being harsh and judgmental, we are encouraging and supportive. Instead of being critical, we are empathic towards ourselves. Now, this doesn't mean that we just ignore our faults and become narcissistic (excessive interest in oneself), but rather we realistically evaluate ourselves. Second, **self-compassion** is common humanity, or "seeing one's experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating."<sup>19</sup> No one is perfect. No one is ever going to be perfect. We all make mistakes (some big, some small). We're also all going to experience pain and suffering in our lives. Being self-compassionate is approaching this pain and suffering and seeing it for what it is, a natural part of being human. "The pain I feel in difficult times is the same pain you feel in difficult times. The circumstances are different, the degree of pain is different, but the basic experience of human suffering is the same."<sup>21</sup> The final factor of self-compassion is mindfulness. Neff defines mindfulness as "holding one's painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness

rather than over-identifying with them.”<sup>22</sup> Essentially, Naff argues that mindfulness is an essential part of self-compassion, because we need to be able to recognize and acknowledge when we’re suffering so we can respond with compassion to ourselves.

## Don't Feed the Vulture

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

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

Unfortunately, all of us have vultures circling our heads or just sitting on our shoulders. In Figure 3.5, we see a young woman feeding an apple to her vulture. This apple represents all of the negative things we say about ourselves during a day. Many of us spend our entire days just feeding our vultures and feeding our vultures these self-deprecating, negative thoughts and statements. Admittedly, these negative thoughts “come from only one place. They grow out of other people’s criticisms, from the negative responses to what we do and say, and the way we act.”<sup>24</sup> We have the choice to either let these thoughts consume us or fight them. According to Richmond and colleagues the following are characteristic statements that vultures wait to hear so they can feed:

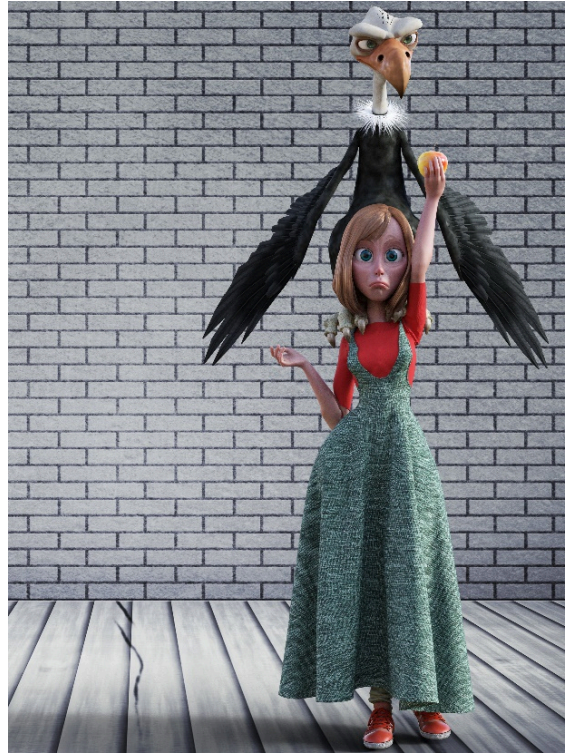


Figure 3.5 Don't Feed the Vulture

- *Oh boy, do I look awful today; I look like I've been up all night.*
- *Oh, this is going to be an awful day.*
- *I've already messed up. I left my students' graded exams at home.*
- *Boy, I should never have gotten out of bed this morning.*
- *Gee whiz. I did an awful job of teaching that unit.*
- *Why can't I do certain things as well as Mr. Smith next door?*
- *Why am I always so dumb?*
- *I can't believe I'm a teacher; why, I have the mentality of a worm.*
- *I don't know why I ever thought I could teach.*
- *I can't get anything right.*

- *Good grief, what am I doing here? Why didn't I select any easy job?*
- *I am going nowhere, doing nothing; I am a failure at teaching.*
- *In fact, I am a failure in most things I attempt.*<sup>25</sup>

## Dealing with the Vulture

Do any of these vulture statements sound familiar to you? If you're like us, I'm sure they do. Part of self-compassion is learning to recognize these vulture statements when they appear in our minds and evaluate them critically. Ben Martin proposes four ways to challenging vulture statements (negative self-talk):

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

time?<sup>26</sup>

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

## Personality and Perception in Intrapersonal Communication

**Personality** is defined as the combination of traits or qualities—such as behavior, emotional stability, and mental attributes—that make a person unique. Before we delve into personality, let’s take a quick look at two common themes in this area of research: nature or nurture and temperament.

### Nature or Nurture

One of the oldest debates in the area of personality research is whether a specific behavior or thought process occurs within an individual because of their nature (genetics) or nurture (how they were raised). The first person to start investigating this phenomenon was Sir Francis Galton back in the 1870s.<sup>28</sup> In 1875, Galton sought out twins and their families to learn more about similarities and differences. As a whole, Galton found that there were more similarities than differences: “There is no escape from the conclusion that nature prevails enormously over nurture when the differences of nurture do not exceed what is commonly to be found among persons of the same rank of society and in the same country.”<sup>29</sup> However, the reality is that Galton’s twin participants had been raised together, so parsing out nature and nurture (despite Galton’s attempts) wasn’t completely possible. Although Galton’s anecdotes provided some interesting stories, that’s all they amounted to.

### Minnesota Twins Raised Apart

So, how does one determine if something ultimately nature or nurture? The next breakthrough in this line of research started in the late 1970s when Thomas J. Bouchard and his colleagues at Minnesota State University began studying twins who were raised separately.<sup>30</sup> This research started when a pair of twins, Jim Lewis and

Jim Springer, were featured in an article on February 19, 1979, in the *Lima News* in Lima, Ohio.<sup>31</sup> Jim and Jim were placed in an adoption agency and separated from each other at four weeks of age. They grew up just 40 miles away from each other, but they never knew the other one existed. Jess and Sarah Springer and Ernest and Lucille Lewis were looking to adopt, and both sets of parents were told that their Jim had been a twin, but they were also told that his twin had died. Many adoption agencies believed that placing twins with couples was difficult, so this practice of separating twins at birth was an inside practice that the adoptive parents knew nothing about. Jim Lewis' mother had found out that Jim's twin was still alive when he was toddler, so Jim Lewis knew that he had a twin but didn't seek him out until he was 39 years old. Jim Springer, on the other hand, learned that he had been a twin when he was eight years old, but he believed the original narrative that his twin had died.

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

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

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

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

## Twin Research in Communication

In the field of communication, the first major twin study published was conducted by Cary Wecht Horvath in 1995.<sup>34</sup> Horvath compared 62 pairs of identical twins and 42 pairs of fraternal twins to see if they differed in terms of their **communicator style**, or “the way one verbally, nonverbally, and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, filtered, or understood.”<sup>35</sup> Identical twins’ communicator styles were more similar than those of fraternal twins. Hence, a good proportion of someone’s communicator style appears to be a result of genetic makeup. However, this is not to say that genetics was the only factor at play about one’s communicator style.

Other research in the field of communication has examined how a range of different communication variables are associated with genetics when analyzed through twin studies:<sup>36,37, 38</sup>

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

Despite similarities across many categories, it would be wrong to argue that all of our communication is biological. We cannot dismiss the importance that genetics plays in our communicative behavior and development, but social and environmental factors are just as important in shaping communication. For example, imagine we have two twins that were separated at birth. One twin is put into a middle-class family where she will be exposed to a lot of opportunities. The other twin, on the other hand, was placed with a lower-income family where the opportunities she will have in life are more limited. The first twin goes to a school that has lots of money and award-winning teachers. The second twin goes to an inner-city school where there aren’t enough textbooks for the students, and the school has problems recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. The first student has the opportunity to engage in a wide range of extracurricular activities both in school (mock UN, debate, student council, etc.) and out of school (traveling softball club, skiing, yoga, etc.). The second twin’s school doesn’t have the budget for extracurricular activities, and her family cannot afford out of school activities, so she ends up taking a job when she’s a teenager. Now imagine that these twins are naturally aggressive. The first twin’s aggressiveness may be exhibited by her need to win in both mock UN and debate; she may also strive to not only sit on the student council but be its president. In this respect, she demonstrates more prosocial forms of aggression. The second twin, on the other hand, doesn’t have these more prosocial outlets for her aggression. As such, her aggression may be demonstrated through more interpersonal problems with her family, teachers, friends, etc.... Instead of having those more positive outlets for her aggression, she

may become more physically aggressive in her day-to-day life. In other words, both biological dispositions and context are very important to communicative behaviors.

## Temperament Types

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

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

In 1978, David Keirsey developed the Keirsey Temperament Sorter, a questionnaire that combines the Myers-Briggs Temperament Indicator with a model of four temperament types developed by psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer in the early 20th century.<sup>40</sup> In reality, there are many four-type personality systems that have been created over the years. Table 1 provides just a number of the different four-type personality system that are available on the market today. Each one has its quirks and patterns, but the basic results are generally the same.

System	Personalities			
<b>Hippocrates Greek Terms</b>	Sanguine	Melancholy	Choleric	Phlegmatic
<b>Wired that Way</b>	Popular Sanguine	Perfect Melancholy	Powerful Choleric	Peaceful Phlegmatic
<b>Keirsey Temperament (1967)</b>	Artisan Sensation Seeking	Rational Knowledge Seeking	Guardian Security Seeking	Idealist Identity Seeking
<b>Carl Jung's Theory (1921)</b>	Feeling	Thinking	Sensing	Intuition
<b>Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1962)</b>	Feeler Extravert	Thinker Introvert	Intuitor Extravert	Sensor Introvert
<b>"What's My Style?" (WMS)</b>	Spirited	Systematic	Direct	Considerate
<b>The P's</b>	Popular	Perfect	Powerful	Peaceful
<b>The S's</b>	Spirited	Systematic	Self-propelled	Solid
<b>The A's</b>	Active	Analytical	Administrative	Amiable
<b>LEAD Test</b>	Expressor	Analyst	Leader	Dependable
<b>Biblical Characters</b>	Peter	Moses	Paul	Abraham
<b>DiSC</b>	Influencing of Others	Cautiousness/ Compliance	Dominance	Steadiness
<b>McCarthy/4MAT System</b>	Dynamic	Analytic	Common Sense	Innovative
<b>Plato (340 BC)</b>	Artisan	Scientist	Guardian	Philosopher
<b>Enneagram</b>	Helper Romantic	Asserter Perfectionist	Adventurer Achiever	Peacemaker Observer
<b>True Colors</b>	Orange	Gold	Green	Blue
<b>Children's Literature</b>	Tigger	Eeyore	Rabbit	Pooh
<b>Charlie Brown Characters</b>	Snoopy	Linus	Lucy	Charlie Brown
<b><i>Who Moved My Cheese?</i></b>	Scurry	Hem	Sniff	Haw
<b>LEAD Test</b>	Expresser	Analyst	Leader	Dependable
<b>Eysenck's EPQ-R</b>	High Extravert Low Neurotic	Low Extravert High Neurotic	High Extravert High Neurotic	Low Extravert Low Neurotic

Table 1. Comparing 4-Personality Types

None of the research examining the four types has found clear sex differences among the patterns. Females and males are seen proportionately in all four categories. Keirsey argues that the consistent use of the four

temperament types (whatever terms we use) is an indication of the long-standing tradition and complexity of these ideas.<sup>41</sup>

## Personality and The Big Five

Unlike temperament, which has been argued to have a biological root, **personality** is a more flexible combination of socially derived and assessed traits held by a person. One of the most commonly discussed personality frameworks is the Big Five.<sup>42</sup> Figure 6 shows the Big Five.

### Openness

**Openness** refers to “openness to experience,” or the idea that some people are more welcoming of new things. These people are willing to challenge their underlying life assumptions and are more likely to be amenable to differing points of view. Table 2 explores some of the traits associated with having both high levels of openness and having low levels of openness.

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

Table 2. Openness

### Conscientiousness

**Conscientiousness** is the degree to which an individual is aware of their actions and how their actions impact

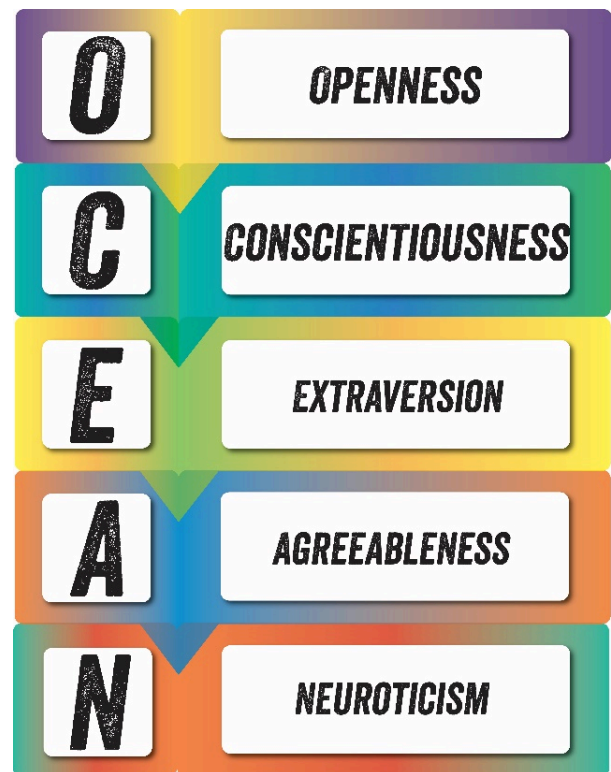


Figure 6 OCEAN Model for Personality (The Big Five)

other people. Table 3 explores some of the traits associated with having both high levels of conscientiousness and having low levels of conscientiousness.

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

Table 3. Conscientiousness

## Extraversion

**Extraversion** is the degree to which someone is sociable and outgoing. Table 4 explores some of the traits associated with having both high levels of extraversion and having low levels of extraversion.

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

Table 4. Extraversion

## Agreeableness

**Agreeableness** is the degree to which someone engages in prosocial behaviors like altruism, cooperation, and

compassion. Table 5 explores some of the traits associated with having both high levels of agreeableness and having low levels of agreeableness.

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

Table 5. Agreeableness

## Neuroticism

**Neuroticism** is the degree to which an individual is vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. Table 6 explores some of the traits associated with having both high levels of neuroticism and having low levels of neuroticism.

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

Table 6. Neuroticism

## Social, Personal, and Relational Dispositions

**Social-personal dispositions** refer to general patterns of mental processes that impact how people socially relate to others or view themselves. **Communication dispositions** impact how people interact with others, some are more personal and cognitive others have greater impact on how we interact with others.<sup>63</sup> As you read here, if you feel like you're facing a challenge to your social-personal mental wellbeing, we encourage you to visit <https://coms-idea.ku.edu/find-support> to locate resources on our campus (or seek resources on your campus if you are not at KU).

### Loneliness

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

Loneliness tends to impact people in several different ways interpersonally. Some of the general research findings associated with loneliness have demonstrated that these people have lower self-esteem, are more socially passive, are more sensitive to rejection from others, and are often less socially skilled. Interestingly, lonely individuals tend to think of their interpersonal failures using an **internal locus of control** and their interpersonal successes externally.<sup>64</sup>

### Depression

**Depression** is a psychological disorder characterized by varying degrees of disappointment, guilt, hopelessness, loneliness, sadness, and self-doubt, all of which negatively impact a person's general mental and physical wellbeing. Depression (and all of its characteristics) is very difficult to encapsulate in a single definition. If you've ever experienced a major depressive episode, it's a lot easier to understand what depression is compared to those who have never experienced one. Depressed people tend to be less satisfied with life and less satisfied with their interpersonal interactions as well. Research has shown that depression negatively impacts all forms

of interpersonal relationships: dating, friends, families, work, etc. We will periodically come back to depression as we explore various parts of interpersonal communication.

## Narcissism

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

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

Vangelisti and colleagues examined a purely communicative form of narcissism they deemed conversational narcissism.<sup>65</sup> **Conversational narcissism** is an extreme focusing of one's interests and desires during an interpersonal interaction while completely ignoring the interests and desires of another person: Vangelisti et al. found several attributes of conversationally narcissistic behavior. Conversational narcissists inflate their self-importance via bragging, refusing to listen to criticism, praising one's self, etc. They may talk so fast others cannot interject, shift the topic to their self, interrupting others, etc. Conversational narcissists often attempt to show-off or entertain others to turn the focus on themselves. Some behaviors include primping or preening, dressing to attract attention, being or laughing louder than others, positioning one's self in the center, etc. Lastly, conversational narcissists tend to have impersonal relationships. During their interactions with others, conversational narcissists show a lack of caring about another person and a lack of interest in another person. Some common behaviors include "glazing over" while someone else is speaking, looking impatient while someone is speaking, looking around the room while someone is speaking, etc. As you can imagine, people engaged in interpersonal encounters with conversational narcissists are generally highly unsatisfied with those interactions.

## Empathy

**Empathy** is the ability to recognize and mutually experience another person's attitudes, emotions, experiences, and thoughts. Highly empathic individuals have the unique ability to connect with others interpersonally, because they can truly see how the other person is viewing life. Individuals who are unempathetic generally have a hard time taking or seeing another person's perspective, so their interpersonal interactions tend to be

more rigid and less emotionally driven. Generally speaking, people who have high levels of empathy tend to have more successful and rewarding interactions with others when compared to unempathetic individuals. Furthermore, people who are interacting with a highly empathetic person tend to find those interactions more satisfying than when interacting with someone who is unempathetic.

## Self-Monitoring

The last of the personal-social dispositions is referred to as self-monitoring. In 1974 Mark Snyder developed his basic theory of **self-monitoring**, which proposes that individuals differ in the degree to which they can control their behaviors following the appropriate social rules and norms involved in interpersonal interaction.<sup>67</sup> In this theory, Snyder proposes that there are some individuals adept at selecting appropriate behavior in light of the context of a situation, which he deems high self-monitors. High self-monitors want others to view them in a precise manner (impression management), so they enact communicative behaviors that ensure suitable or favorable public appearances. On the other hand, some people are merely unconcerned with how others view them and will act consistently across differing communicative contexts despite the changes in cultural rules and norms. Snyder called these people low self-monitors.

Interpersonally, high self-monitors tend to have more meaningful and satisfying interpersonal interactions with others. Conversely, individuals who are low self-monitors tend to have more problematic and less satisfying interpersonal relationships with others. In romantic relationships, high self-monitors tend to develop relational intimacy much faster than individuals who are low self-monitors. Furthermore, high self-monitors tend to build lots of interpersonal friendships with a broad range of people. Low-self-monitors may only have a small handful of friends, but these friendships tend to have more depth. Furthermore, high self-monitors are also more likely to take on leadership positions and get promoted in an organization when compared to their low self-monitoring counterparts. Overall, self-monitoring is an important dispositional characteristic that impacts interpersonal relationships.

## Argumentativeness/Verbal Aggressiveness

Starting in the mid-1980s, Dominic Infante and Charles Wigley defined **verbal aggression** as “the tendency to attack the self-concept of individuals instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication.”<sup>80</sup> Notice that this definition specifically is focused on the attacking of someone’s self-concept or an individual’s attitudes, opinions, and cognitions about one’s competence, character, strengths, and weaknesses. For example, if someone perceives themselves as a good worker, then a verbally aggressive attack would demean that person’s quality of work or their ability to do future quality work. In a study conducted by Terry Kinney,<sup>81</sup> he found that self-concept attacks happen on three basic fronts: group membership (e.g.,

“Your whole division is a bunch of idiots!”), personal failings (e.g., “No wonder you keep getting passed up for a promotion!”), and relational failings (e.g., “No wonder your spouse left you!”).

Now that we’ve discussed what verbal aggression is, we should delineate verbal aggression from another closely related term, argumentativeness. According to Dominic Infante and Andrew Rancer, **argumentativeness** is a communication trait that “predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to attacking verbally the positions which other people take on these issues.”<sup>82</sup> You’ll notice that argumentativeness occurs when an individual attacks another’s positions on various issues; whereas, verbal aggression occurs when an individual attacks someone’s self-concept instead of attack another’s positions. Argumentativeness is seen as a constructive communication trait, while verbal aggression is a destructive communication trait.

Individuals who are highly verbally aggressive are not liked by those around them.<sup>83</sup> Researchers have seen this pattern of results across different relationship types. Highly verbally aggressive individuals tend to justify their verbal aggression in interpersonal relationships regardless of the relational stage (new vs. long-term relationship).<sup>84</sup> In an interesting study conducted by Beth Semic and Daniel Canary, the two set out to watch interpersonal interactions and the types of arguments formed during those interactions based on individuals’ verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness.<sup>85</sup> The researchers had friendship-dyads come into the lab and were asked to talk about two different topics. The researchers found that highly argumentative individuals did not differ in the number of arguments they made when compared to their low argumentative counterparts. However, highly verbally aggressive individuals provided far fewer arguments when compared to their less verbally aggressive counterparts. Although this study did not find that highly argumentative people provided more (or better) arguments, highly verbally aggressive people provided fewer actual arguments when they disagreed with another person. Overall, verbal aggression and argumentativeness have been shown to impact several different interpersonal relationships, so we will periodically revisit these concepts throughout the book.

## Attachment

In a set of three different volumes, John Bowlby theorized that humans were born with a set of inherent behaviors designed to allow proximity with supportive others.<sup>95</sup> These behaviors were called attachment behaviors, and the supportive others were called attachment figures. Inherent in Bowlby’s model of attachment is that humans have a biological drive to attach themselves with others. For example, a baby’s crying and searching help the baby find their attachment figure (typically a parent/guardian) who can provide care, protection, and support. Infants (and adults) view attachment as an issue of whether an attachment figure is nearby, accessible, and attentive? Bowlby believed that these interpersonal models, which were developed in infancy through thousands of interactions with an attachment figure, would influence an individual’s interpersonal relationships across their entire life span. According to Bowlby, the basic internal working model of affection consists of three components.<sup>96</sup> Infants who bond with their attachment figure during the first

two years develop a model that people are trustworthy, develop a model that informs the infant that he or she is valuable, and develop a model that informs the infant that he or she is effective during interpersonal interactions. As you can easily see, not developing this model during infancy leads to several problems.

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

In 1991, Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz expanded on Bowlby's work developing a scheme for understanding adult attachment.<sup>97</sup> In this study, Bartholomew and Horowitz proposed a model for understanding adult attachment. On one end of the spectrum, you have an individual's abstract image of themselves as being either worthy of love and support or not. On the other end of the spectrum, you have an individual's perception of whether or not another person will be trustworthy/available or another person is unreliable and rejecting. When you combine these dichotomies, you end up with four distinct attachment styles (as seen in Figure 7).

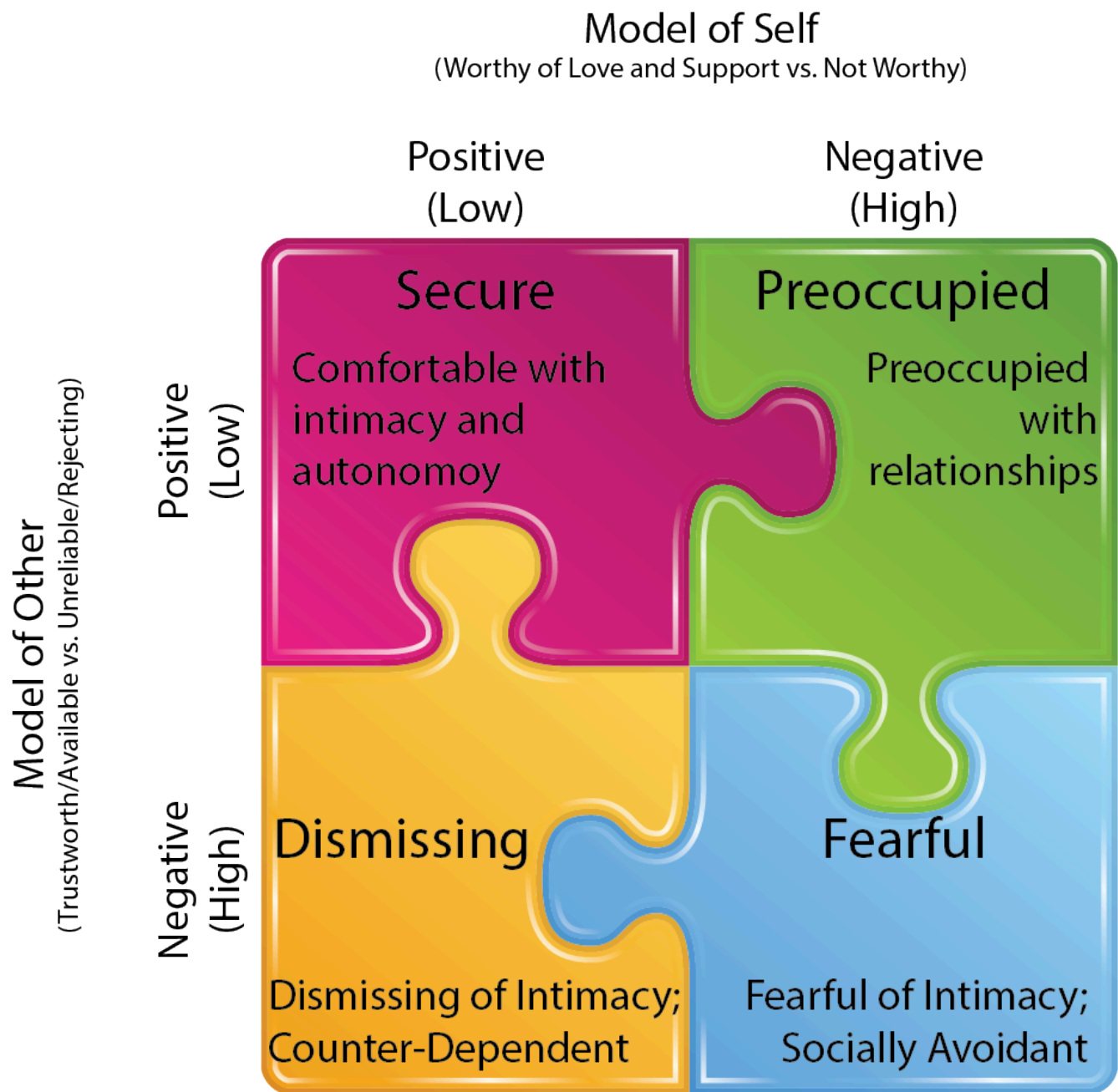


Figure 7 Attachment Styles

The first attachment style is labeled “**secure**,” because these individuals believe that they are loveable and expect that others will generally behave in accepting and responsive ways within interpersonal interactions. Not surprisingly, secure individuals tend to show the most satisfaction, commitment, and trust in their relationships. The second attachment style, **preoccupied**, occurs when someone does not perceive themselves as worthy of love but does generally see people as trustworthy and available for interpersonal relationships. These individuals would attempt to get others to accept them. The third attachment style, **fearful** (sometimes referred to as fearful avoidants),<sup>98</sup> represents individuals who see themselves as unworthy of love and generally

believe that others will react negatively through either deception or rejection. These individuals simply avoid interpersonal relationships to avoid being rejected by others. Even in communication, fearful people may avoid communication because they simply believe that others will not provide helpful information or others will simply reject their communicative attempts. The final attachment style, **dismissing**, reflects those individuals who see themselves as worthy of love, but generally believes that others will be deceptive and reject them in interpersonal relationships. These people tend to avoid interpersonal relationships to protect themselves against disappointment that occurs from placing too much trust in another person or making one's self vulnerable to rejection.

### Key Takeaways

- Perception involves attending, organizing, and interpreting.
- Our sense of self including self-image, self-worth, and ideal self are manifestations of what we think of ourselves and how we think others see us (the looking glass self)
- Personality and temperament have many overlapping characteristics, but the basis of them is fundamentally different. Personality is the product of one's social environment and is generally developed later in one's life. Temperament, on the other hand, is one's innate genetic predisposition that causes an individual to behave, react, and think in a specific manner, and it can easily be seen in infants.
- The Big Five or OCEAN model describes common personality traits.
- Social, personal, and relational dispositions affect how we communicate with others.

### Key Terms

#### **affectionless psychopathy**

The inability to show affection or care about others.

#### **argumentativeness**

Communication trait that predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues.

**communication apprehension**

The fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.

**communication dispositions**

General patterns of communicative behavior.

**dismissing attachment**

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as worthy of love, but generally believe that others will be deceptive and reject them in interpersonal relationships.

**depression**

A psychological disorder characterized by varying degrees of disappointment, guilt, hopelessness, loneliness, sadness, self-doubt, all of which negatively impact a person's general mental and physical wellbeing.

**emotional loneliness**

Form of loneliness that occurs when an individual feels that he or she does not have an emotional connection with others.

**empathy**

The ability to recognize and mutually experience another person's attitudes, emotions, experiences, and thoughts.

**extraversion**

An individual's likelihood to be talkative, dynamic, and outgoing.

**fearful attachment**

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as unworthy of love and generally believe that others will react negatively through either deception or rejection.

**ideal-self**

The version of yourself that you would like to be, which is created through our life experiences, cultural demands, and expectations of others.

**intrapersonal**

Something that exists or occurs within an individual's self or mind.

**intrapersonal communication**

Communication phenomena that exist within or occurs because of an individual's self or mind.

**introversion**

An individual's likelihood to be quiet, shy, and more reserved.

**locus of control**

An individual's perceived control over their behavior and life circumstances.

**loneliness**

An individual's emotional distress that results from a feeling of solitude or isolation from social relationships.

**Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis**

Hypothesis posed by John Bowlby that predicts that infants who are denied maternal attachment will experience problematic outcomes later in life.

**narcissism**

A psychological condition (or personality disorder) in which a person has a preoccupation with one's self.

**personality**

The combination of traits or qualities such as behavior, emotional stability, and mental attributes that make a person unique.

**preoccupied attachment**

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who do not perceive themselves as worthy of love, but do generally see people as trustworthy and available for interpersonal relationships.

**responsiveness**

The degree to which an individual considers other's feelings, listens to what others have to say, and recognizes the needs of others during interpersonal interactions.

**secure attachment**

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who

believe that they are lovable and expect that others will generally behave in accepting and responsive ways within interpersonal interactions.

**self-concept**

An individual's belief about themselves, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is.

**self-conscious shyness**

Feeling conspicuous or socially exposed when dealing with others face-to-face.

**self-esteem**

An individual's subjective evaluation of their abilities and limitations.

**self-image**

The view an individual has of themselves.

**self-monitoring**

The theory that individuals differ in the degree to which they can control their behaviors in accordance with the appropriate social rules and norms involved in interpersonal interaction.

**self-worth**

The degree to which you see yourself as a good person who deserves to be valued and respected.

**social loneliness**

Form of loneliness that occurs from a lack of a satisfying social network.

**social-personal dispositions**

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people socially relate to others or view themselves.

**temperament**

The genetic predisposition that causes an individual to behave, react, and think in a specific manner.

**verbal aggression**

The tendency to attack the self-concept of individuals instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication.

**willingness to communicate**

An individual's tendency to initiate communicative interactions with other people.

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# VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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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. This chapter examines verbal communication, embracing the idea 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 vital to communication. Without language, it is very difficult to develop meaningful connections with others? Language allows us to express ourselves and obtain our goals.

Language can often be the most 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.

## Linking Communication and Symbols

### 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.

Consider a word you’re probably familiar with: 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. Figure 1 depicts 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.”

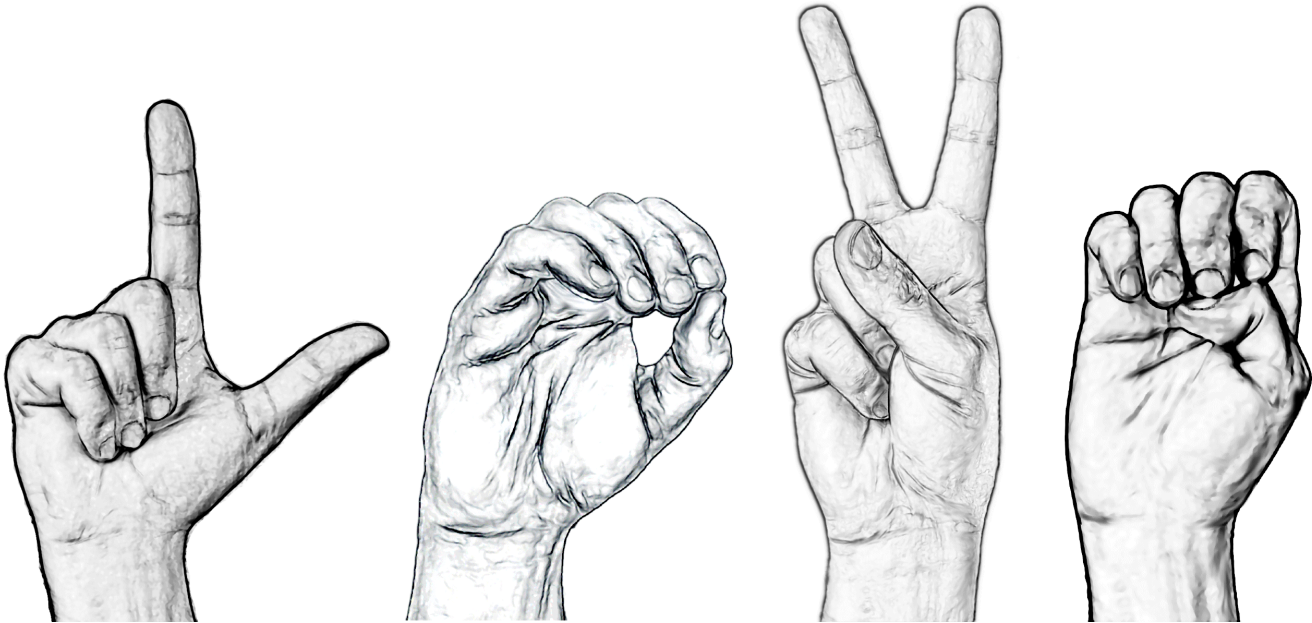


Figure 1 The word “love” spelled out in American Sign Language. [“Dr. Bill’s ASL fingerspelling and handshape art,”](#) copyright Dr. Bill Vicars and [www.lifeprint.com](#).

Symbols can also be visual representations of ideas and concepts. For example, look at the various symbols in Figure 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 icons for YouTube and dig just use their names, but these images have become associated with these online platforms over many years.

## The Symbol is Not the Thing

Now that we’ve explained what symbols are, we should probably offer a few very important 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. Similarly, if you explore the symbols in Figure 2 these symbols are not the organizations themselves. The stylized red P is not Pinterest, the lowercase blue f is not Facebook. Each of these might best be described as computer code that exists on the World Wide Web that allows us, people, to interact, but you can recognize the symbol associated with these businesses and this code.



Figure 2 Social Media Icons. “[Social Media Mix 3D Icons – Mix #1.](#)” by [Blogtrepneur](#). This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).

## Symbols are Arbitrary

How we assign symbols is entirely arbitrary. For example, in Figure 3, we see two animals that are categorized under the symbols “dog” and “cat.” In this image, the “dog” is on the left side, and the “cat” is on the right side. The words we associate with these animals only exist because we have said it’s so for many, many years. Back when humans were labeling these animals, we could just have easily 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 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). This symbol may seem like it’s everywhere today, but it’s only existed since September 1982. Today we have many symbolic emoticons to choose from: 🙄👁️👁️👤👋.

## Communication Is Shared Meaning

Although the assignment of symbols to real things and ideas is arbitrary, our understanding of them exists because we agree to their meaning. If we were talking and I said, “it’s time for tea,” you may think that I’m going to put on some boiling water and pull out the oolong tea. However, if I said, “it’s time for tea” in the United Kingdom, you would assume that we were getting ready for our evening meal. Same word, but two very different meanings depending on the culture one uses the term. In the United Kingdom, high tea (or meat tea) is the evening meal. Dinner, 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 they 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. Half through Act 1, the hair was flopping back in our laps like the legs of a spider. I mean, those strands of hair had to be 8 to 9 inches long and came down on us 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 very 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 also 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.

## Relating Words and Meaning

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?”<sup>1</sup> This example illustrates that meanings are in people, and words don’t necessarily represent what they mean.

Words can have different rules to help us understand the meaning. There are three rules: semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic.<sup>2</sup>

### Semantic Rules

First, **semantic rules** are the dictionary definition of the word. Semantic rules are definitional meanings associated with words. However, the meaning can also 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 Chicago 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.

### Syntactic Rules

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

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

Another example is Figure 4. 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.

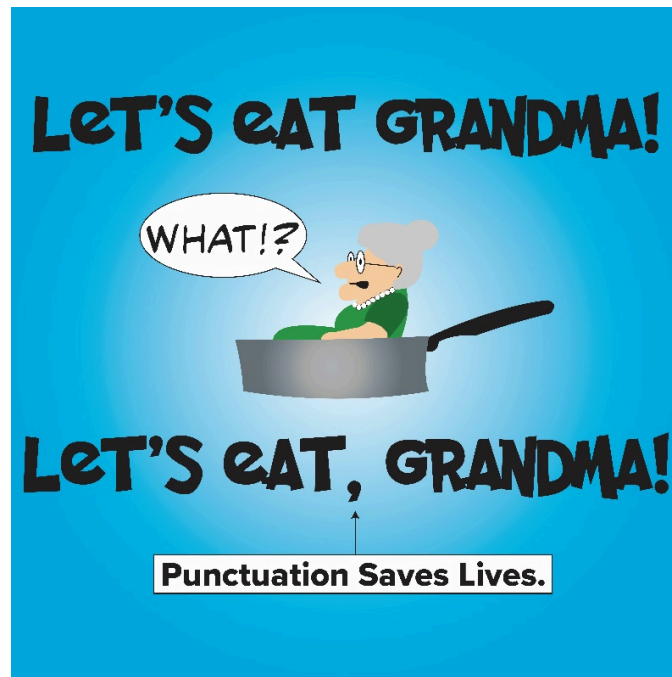


Figure 4 Commas Matter

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

Most pragmatic rules are based on culture and experience. For instance, the term “Netflix and chill” 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.

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. Though the parents/guardians and children are each talking about ‘love’ the way that meaning is conveyed, verbally and nonverbally, effect how each views reality.

Specific words can make a difference in how a person will receive the message. That is why leaders (and politicians) may spend time 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 the two sound 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 as childish, old, and cheap. These words can give a connotation about how the person perceives them.

## Level of Abstraction

When we think of language, it can be pretty **abstract**. For example, when we say something is “interesting,” it can be positive or negative. That is what we mean when we say that language is abstract. Language can be very specific. You can tell someone 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).<sup>3</sup> The abstraction ladder starts abstract at the top, while the bottom rung and is very concrete. Figure 5 shows 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.



Figure 5  
Abstraction Ladder

## Metamessages

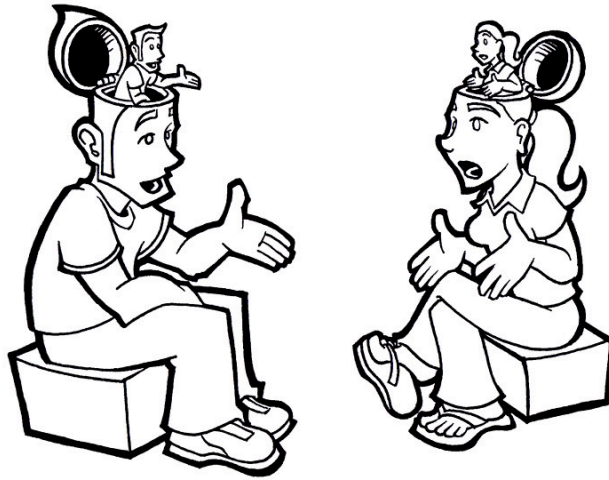


Figure 6 Metacommunication is talk-about-talk.  
Credit: Artist: Martin Whitmore,  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rustychainsaw/2928663605/sizes/z/>

**Metacommunication** is communication about communication.<sup>4</sup> It's an abstraction of what we feel we're talking about, as show in Figure 6. **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 encourage you to consider your own messages, it's possible 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.<sup>5</sup> Ogden and Richards noticed that misunderstandings occur when people associate different meanings with the same message. Their model (Figure 7) 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 maybe you call him your little “cuddle monster” because he always wants to be connected to you at all times. Again, 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.

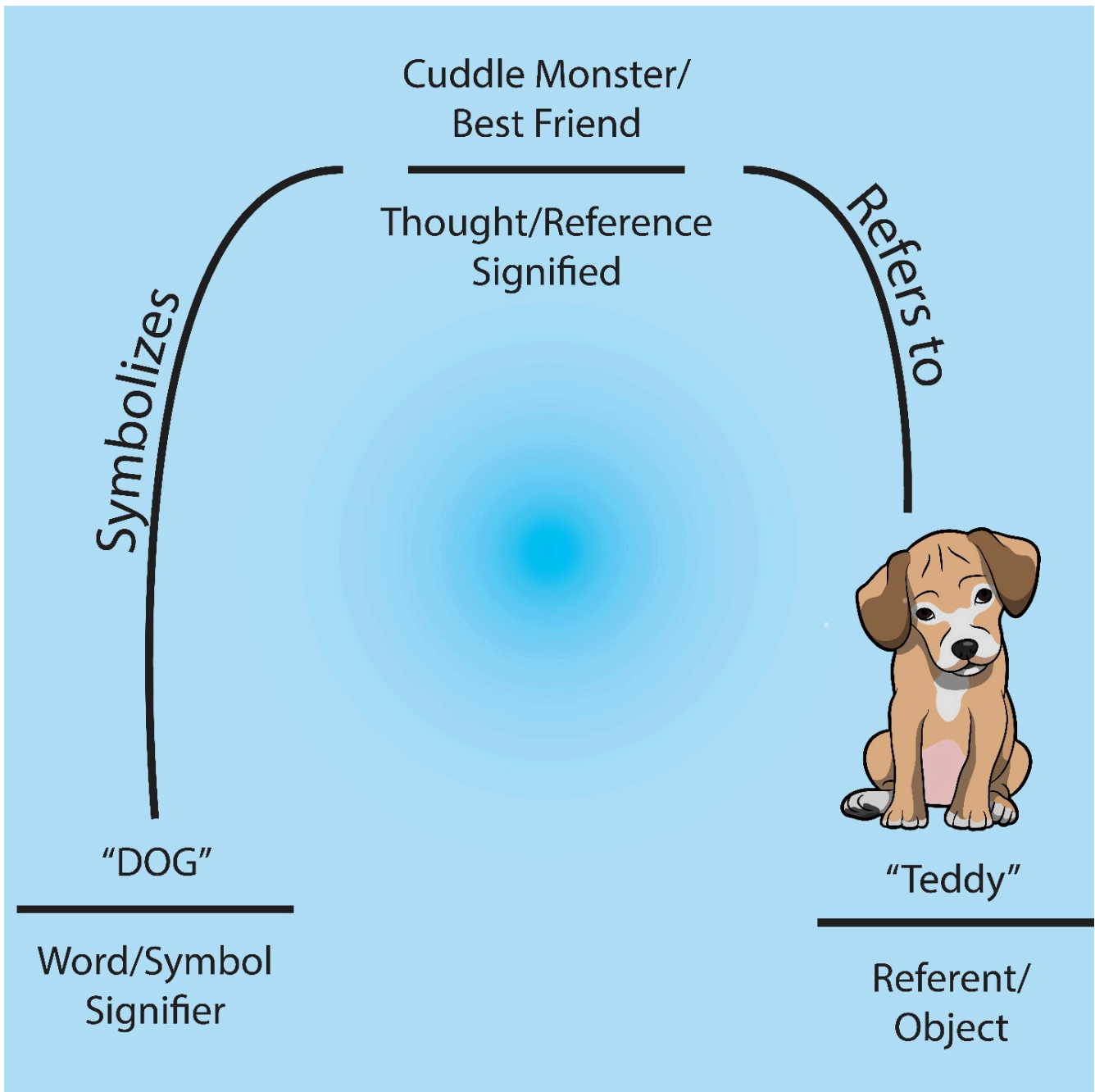


Figure 7 Signifier, Signified, and Referent

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 also 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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. For us to meet our needs, we need to use language that other people understand. Think about Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which we previously covered—“Mom, I’m hungry!” “Ouch that hurt!” “I could use a drink.” “Hold my hand.” The way we talk often meets instrumental, or need-based functions.

**Regulatory functions** of language are to influence the behaviors of others through requests, rules, or persuasion. These functions may coincide with our needs, but they do not always. For example, you might say “go this way” or “be kind to your brother.” Regulatory functions are also present in 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

**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 and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

We know a lot about a culture based on the language that the members of the group speak.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

Analyzing the Hopi Native American language, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf discovered that there is not a difference between nouns and verbs.<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup>

A very popular theory that helps us understand how culture and language coexist is the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**.<sup>11</sup> This hypothesis helps 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.

**Linguistic relativity** provides more room for the role of experience and understanding than linguistic

determinism. Linguistic relativity argues that the structure of a language influences its speakers' worldview or cognition, and thus individuals' languages determine or influence their perceptions of the world. Language can express not only our thoughts but our feelings as well. Language not only represents 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. Many Japanese people 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.

## The Importance of Language

By now, you can see that language influences how we make sense of the world. In this section, we will understand some of the ways that language can impact our perceptions and possibly our behavior. To be effective communicators, we need to realize the different ways that language can be significant and instrumental.

### Naming and Identity

New parents/guardians typically spend a great deal of time trying to pick just the right name for their newborn. Some names are very distinctive, which also makes them memorable and recognizable. Think about musical artists or celebrities with unique names. It helps you remember them, and it helps you distinguish that person from others. Some names encompass some cultural or ethnic identity. In the popular book, *Freakonomics*, the authors showed a relationship between names and socioeconomic status.<sup>15</sup> They discover that a popular name usually starts with high socioeconomic families, and then it becomes popular with lower socioeconomic families. Hence, it is very conceivable to determine the socioeconomic status of people you associate with based on their birth date and name. Figure 8 shows some of the more popular baby names for girls and boys, along with names that are non-binary.



Figure 8 Popular Baby Names

## Affiliation

When we want others to associate with us or have an **affiliation** with us, we might change the way we speak and the words we use. All of those things can impact how other people relate to us. Researchers found that when potential romantic partners employed the same word choices regarding pronouns and prepositions, then interest also increased. At the same time, couples that used similar word choices when texting each other significantly increased their relationship duration.<sup>16</sup> This study implies that we often inadvertently mimic other people's use of language when we focus on what they say.

If you have been in a romantic relationship for a long period, you might create special expressions or jargon for the other person, and that specialized vocabulary can create greater closeness and understanding. The same line of thinking occurs for groups in a gang or persons in the military. If we adapt to the other person's communication style or **converge**, then we can also impact perceptions of affiliation. Research has shown that people who have similar speech also have more positive feelings for each other.<sup>17</sup> However, speech can also work in the opposite direction when we **diverge**, or when we communicate in a very different fashion. For instance, a group from another culture might speak the same dialect, even though they can speak English, in order to create distance and privacy from others.

# Types of Language

## Formal vs. Informal Language

In everyday conversation across situations 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. This is commonly called **code-switching**. Put simply, you talk differently to your best friend than you do your boss or a grandparent. 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.

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 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 (1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> ).
Speakers/writers avoid the use of contractions.	Speakers/writers can actively include contractions.
Avoid the inclusion of emotionally laden ideas and words.	It allows for the inclusion of emotions and empathy.
Language should be objective.	Language can be subjective.
Language should avoid the use of colloquialisms.	It's perfectly appropriate to use colloquialisms.
Only use an acronym after it has clearly been spelled out once.	People use acronyms without always clearly spelling out what it means.
All sentences should be complete (clear subjects and verbs).	Sentences may be incomplete (lacking a clear subject and/or verb).
The use of pronouns should be avoided.	The use of personal pronouns is common.
Avoids artistic languages as much as possible.	Includes a range of artistic language choices (e.g., alliteration, anaphora, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, etc.).
Arguments are supported by facts and documented research.	Arguments are supported by personal beliefs and opinions.
Language is gender neutral.	Language includes gender references.
Avoids the imperative voice.	Uses the imperative voice.

Table 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 more simple. Informal language tends to use more contractions and abbreviations. If you look at your text messages, you will probably see several examples of informal language.

## Jargon

**Jargon** is the specialized or technical language of a specific group or profession that may not be understood by outsiders.<sup>23</sup> 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. A 2023 survey provides some of the most common business jargon:<sup>24</sup>

- *Actionable*
- *Best practices*
- *Buzzworthy*
- *Dialogue*
- *Move the needle*
- *Raise the bar*
- *ROI (return on investments)*
- *Top of mind*
- *Viral*

Perhaps you've heard a few of these jargon phrases in your workplace, or others like 'low hanging fruit' or 'circle back.' Maybe you have even found yourself using a few of them. Your workplace may even have some specific jargon only used in your organization, Rock Chalk!

## Colloquialisms

**Colloquialisms** are the use of informal words in communication.<sup>25</sup> Colloquialisms vary 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
- *Gonna* – going to
- *Hit a writer's block* – unable to write
- *Hit the hay* – to go to sleep
- *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, or even older generations.<sup>26</sup> 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 associated with the millennial generation:

- *Dude*
- *My bad*
- *For real*
- *Sick, wicked*
- *Chill*
- *Not gonna lie*
- *Adulthood*
- *Basic*

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.<sup>27</sup> Idioms can help amplify messages or 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. There are many extensive lists of idioms available online. Table 4.2 presents just a few different idiom examples.

<b>IDIOM</b>	<b>MEANING/SENTENCE</b>
a breath of fresh air	Refreshing/fun. She's a breath of fresh air.
a change of heart	Change my mind. I've had a change of heart.
a blessing in disguise	Something bad that turns out good. Losing his job turned out to be a blessing in disguise.
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.
you can say that again	You agree emphatically. Kanye West is a great singer. You can say that again!
you name it	Everything you can think of. This camp has every activity you can think it—like swimming, canoeing, baske
wouldn't be caught dead	Not even dead would I do something. I wouldn't be caught dead wearing that dress to the ball.
get off my back	Leave me alone. Bug off! Get off my back!
drive me up a wall	Drive me crazy. Rude people drive me up a wall.
spill the beans	Tell a secret. Hey, don't spill the beans. It's a secret.
like beating a dead horse	A waste of time. Trying to get my father to ever change his mind is like beating a dead horse.
out of this world	Fantastic! My vacation to Hawaii was out of this world!

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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
break the ice	Start a conversation. Talking about the weather is a good way to break the ice when you meet someone new
give me a break	Leave me alone! Come on! Give me a break! I've been working all day long- and I just want to play a little b
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Table 2 Common Idioms

## Clichés

**Cliché** is an idea or expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.<sup>28</sup> 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.

## 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.<sup>30</sup> Bias in language is uneven or unbalanced. Examples of this may include “mankind” as opposed to “humanity.”

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

Table 3 Biased Language

## Sexism, Hetero-/Cis-Normativity, and Racism

Before discussing the concepts of sexism and racism, we must understand the term “bias.” **Bias** is an attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person’s race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness. **Sexism** or bias against others based on their sex can come across in language. **Sexist language** can be defined as “words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either sex.”<sup>18</sup> Language can impact how we feel about ourselves and others. For instance, there is a magazine called *Working Mother*, but there is not one called “Working Father.” Even though the reality is that many men who work also have families and are fathers, there are no words that tend to distinguish them from other working men. Whereas, women are distinguished when they both work and are mothers compared to other women who solely work and also compared to women who are solely mothers and/or wives.

Think about how language has changed over the years. We used to have occupations that were highly male-dominated in the workplace and had words to describe them. For instance, policemen, firemen, and chairmen

are now police officers, firefighters, and chairpersons. The same can also be said for some female-dominated occupations. For instance, stewardess, secretary, and waitress have been changed to include males and are often called flight attendants, office assistants, and servers. Thus, to eliminate sexism, we need to be cautious of the word choices we use when talking with others. Sexist language will impact perceptions, and people might be swayed about a person's capability based on the word choices.

**Heteronormativity**, a bias whereby people assume that others are heterosexual, is also pervasive in social interactions. For example, a young female might be asked "Do you have a boyfriend?" Heteronormativity manifests in language, and can make others feel ostracized or excluded because it involves language that articulates underlying biases. But here too language is changing, it is increasingly common for people to use the term "partner" to refer to a romantic companion. **Cisnormativity**, a bias involving presumptions about gender assignment, such as the presumption of a gender binary, or expectations of conformity to gender roles even when transgender identities are otherwise acknowledged, also creates challenges for individuals who do not ascribe to binary gender (e.g., agender, gender fluid, trans individuals, etc.). Trans and non-binary people who were able to freely express their gender identity were on average 20% more satisfied with their life and their job in a recent study.<sup>12</sup>

Biases about race also manifest in language, **racism** is the bias people have towards others of a different race. **Racist language** conveys that a racial group is superior or better than another race. Some words in English have racial connotations. Smith-McLallen and colleagues explain:

In the United States and many other cultures, the color white often carries more positive connotations than the color black... Terms such as "Black Monday," "Black Plague", "black cats" and the "black market" all have negative connotations, and literature, television, and movies have traditionally portrayed heroes in white and villains in black. The empirical work of John E. Williams and others throughout the 1960s demonstrated that these positive and negative associations with the colors black and white, independent of any explicit connection to race, were evident among Black and White children as young as 3 years old ... as well as adults.<sup>19</sup>

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

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

## 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!

### Key Takeaways

- Communication is symbolic, and words are a common and important symbol.

- Words and meanings are socially and culturally connected.
- The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis proposes a range between linguistic relativism and linguistic determinism.
- Language has many functions and forms that are both formal and informal in nature.
- Language creates reality, and biases can be encoded in language.

## Key Terms

### **abstract**

Refers to words that relate to ideas or concepts that exist only in your mind and do not represent a tangible object.

### **abstraction ladder**

A diagram that explains the process of abstraction.

### **affiliation**

A connection or association with others.

### **ambiguous language**

Language that has multiple meanings.

### **bias**

An attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness.

### **biased language**

Language that shows preference in favor of or against a certain point-of-view, shows prejudice, or is demeaning to others.

### **buzz word**

Informal word or jargon used among a particular group of people.

**cliché**

Expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.

**colloquialism**

Informal expression used in casual conversation that is often specific to certain dialects or geographic regions of a country.

**connotation**

What a word suggests or implies; connotations give words their emotional impact.

**converge**

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be similar.

**denotation**

The dictionary definition or descriptive meaning of a word.

**discourse**

Spoken or written discussion of a subject.

**diverge**

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be drastically different.

**euphemism**

Replacing blunt words with more polite words.

**formal language**

Official or academic language.

**heuristic function**

The use of language to explore and investigate the world, solve problems, and learn from your discoveries and experiences.

**idiom**

Expression or figure of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally.

**imaginative function**

The use of language to play with ideas that do not exist in the real-world.

**informal language**

Common, everyday language people use during most interpersonal interactions.

**instrumental function**

The use of language as a means for meeting your needs, manipulating and controlling your environment, and expressing your feelings.

**interactional function**

The use of language to help you form and maintain relationships.

**jargon**

The specialized or technical language of a specific group or profession that may not be understood by outsiders.

**language**

A system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols.

**language adaptation**

The ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner

**language awareness**

a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.

**linguistic determinism**

The perspective that language influences thoughts.

**linguistic relativity**

The argument that the structure of a language influences its speakers' worldview or cognition, and thus individuals' languages determine or influence their perceptions of the world.

**metamessage**

The meaning beyond the words themselves.

**personal function**

The use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self.

**racism**

bias against others on the basis of their race or ethnicity.

**racist language**

Language that demeans or insults people based on their race or ethnicity.

**regulatory function**

The use of language to control behavior.

**relative language**

Language that gains understanding by comparison.

**representational function**

The use of language to represent objects and ideas and to express your thoughts.

**Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**

A theory that suggests that language impacts perceptions. Language is ascertained by the perceived reality of a culture.

**sexism**

Bias of others based on their biological sex.

**sexist language**

Language that excludes individuals on the basis of gender or shows a bias toward or against people due to their gender.

**slang**

The nonstandard language of a particular culture or subculture.

**spin**

The manipulation of language to achieve the most positive interpretation of words, to gain political advantage, or to deceive others.

**static evaluation**

Language shows that people and things change.

**vocabulary**

All the words understood by a person or group of people.

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# NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

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## Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of nonverbal communication in all forms of interaction.
- Recognize the functions of nonverbal communication.
- Provide examples of the channels of nonverbal communication.

**Nonverbal communication** is defined as communication that is produced by some means other than words such as eye contact, body language, or vocal cues.<sup>1</sup> Nonverbal cues are the “show” to verbal communication’s “tell.”



Figure 1. Nonverbals the Show, Verbals the Tell. “Show and Tell,” by woodleywonderworks. [This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.](#)

Most people think of communication as the use of the spoken word but that can be supplemented or replaced

by what is visually or aurally observed about us. When a classmate asks for a lift back to the dorm, you could augment your “Sure, I can take you,” with a smile and a nod thus affirming your positivity towards the request. If you responded with the same exact words but accompanied them with a sigh and an eye roll, an entirely different impression will be made.

We bet there have been times in your life where an email or text message has been taken the wrong way by its receiver. Maybe you were trying to be playful with your words but the other person found it to be insulting. These sorts of unfortunate outcomes are sometimes the result of a lack of, or deficit in, nonverbal information. If the target of your message could have just heard your tone of voice or seen your mischievous grin, they wouldn’t have taken it so seriously. This is why way back in 1982, the first emoticons were invented for use on ARPANET, the military sourced predecessor to the World Wide Web on the Internet. A computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon University, Scott Fahlman used “:-)” to indicate sarcasm or humor and “:-(” to represent straightforward and serious tones.

Examples like these speak to the important contributions nonverbal communication makes to interactions.

## Importance of Nonverbal Communication

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. Moreover, we frequently do intend to convey meaning with our voices, and bodies, and faces. Whether those meanings come across can be another story. As such, it’s very important to understand how nonverbal messages impact our daily interpersonal interactions and lives.

## Nonverbal Communication Provides Value for Meaning Making

It is hard to overestimate the meaning associated with nonverbal communication in any given interaction. For example, if you are having a conversation with your friend who just broke up with her girlfriend, you will use more than her words, “I just broke up with my girlfriend” to understand how to communicate with her. 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 announces the breakup, sighs, and mocks wiping sweat off of her forehead, she might appear relieved. If you are aware and perceiving her cues, your response could reasonably be, “it seems like you may be a little relieved. Were things not going well?”

In addition to awareness, individuals may believe that nonverbal communication is valuable. If a parent ever said to you, “it wasn’t what you said, it was how you said it,” then they were demonstrating a belief that nonverbal communication is essential. If your best friend claimed that, “I can frown or shrug my shoulders

without it meaning anything,” they would be devaluing nonverbal communication. As the recipient of the shoulder shrug, you know that, of course, it meant something, even if only to you. The indifference it conveys is no less powerful than a resigned, “whatever!”

## Nonverbal Communication Can Be Ambiguous and Misunderstood

A particularly challenging aspect of nonverbal communication is the fact that it can be ambiguous. In the seventies, nonverbal communication was a trendy topic. Some were under the impression that we could use nonverbal communication to “read others like a book.” It was believed that anytime another person crossed her arms, she was always closed off to persuasion or communication. Also, that liars could be detected for their failure to make eye contact. These conclusions are only sometimes right, rather than infallible, and would be far more advisable if supported with verbal evidence.

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 may signal romantic interest or could be merely indicating desire for platonic friendship. However, Jeffrey Hall and Chong Xing of the University of Kansas Department of Communication Studies noted that particular nonverbal behaviors are more likely to associate with one of five different kinds of flirting styles.<sup>2</sup> For instance, “sincere flirting” may involve less fidgeting and more smiling whereas “playful flirting” is often accompanied by extending or protruding of the chest.

Comedian Samuel J. Comroe has tremendous expertise in explaining how nonverbal communication can be misunderstood. His 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.”

## Nonverbal Communication Can Be Culturally Based or Universal

Successful interactions with individuals from other cultures are partially based on the ability to adapt to or understand their native nonverbal behaviors. One famous anecdote describes a merger meeting between representatives of an American and a Japanese company. Getting close to the deal that would link their firms together forever, the Americans shied off and backed out. It seems they noticed their counterparts giggling quietly to each other as the paperwork for signatures was passed around. Having grown up in a culture where

giggling can signal others making fun of you, the Western businesspersons sensed that the potential partners were “putting one over” on them. Too bad none of them did their homework to discover that in some Eastern cultures, giggling is a sign of positive nervousness and anticipation.

While we should remember that noting the context of nonverbal communication may be critical to understanding it, there are some examples of cues that are nearly universal in meaning. For instance, a baby from virtually anywhere on Earth is just as likely to indicate mirth with a laugh and pain with a cry as any other infant.

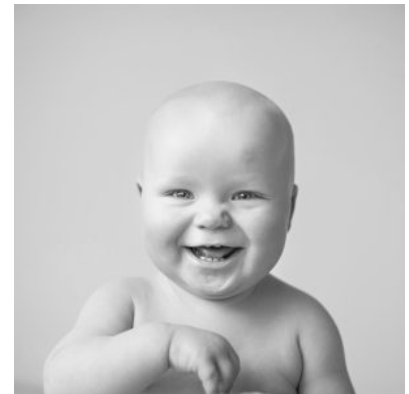


Figure 2. Universal Nonverbals. “Baby boy happy laughing” by pickpic. [Royalty free.](#)

## Nonverbal Communication Is Omnipresent

Nonverbal communication is always present. Paul Watzlawick’s first axiom of his interactional view of communication asserts that humans cannot not communicate. 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.” In fact, even in the absence of that intention, your silence could be interpreted that way.

We can’t help but exude information that others can interpret. Asleep in the Brooklyn terminal awaiting his bus, Saul has no idea that others observe AND INTERPRET his nap (e.g., “that guy is tired”), his t-shirt (e.g., “wonder if he is ironically representing Def Leppard?”), and his extremely long beard and sidelocks (e.g., “he’s probably Hasidic”).

## Nonverbal Communication Is Usually Trusted

Despite the pitfalls of nonverbal communication, individuals typically rely on nonverbal communication to identify the meaning in interactions. Communication scholars agree that the majority of meaning in any interaction is attributable to nonverbal communication. This is especially noteworthy when verbal and nonverbal cues are contradictory. You might assume that the expression, “well, excuse me,” when unaccompanied by nonverbals, would be a form of polite apology. Not so when entertainer [Steve Martin’s nonverbals](#) invested the expression with outrage and exasperation. In cases such as these, nonverbal communication tends to be believed more than verbal for meaning.

Some researchers find that meaning attributed to nonverbal communication in interactions ranges from 60 to 70%.<sup>3,4</sup> Others have concluded that 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 (Figure 3).<sup>5</sup>

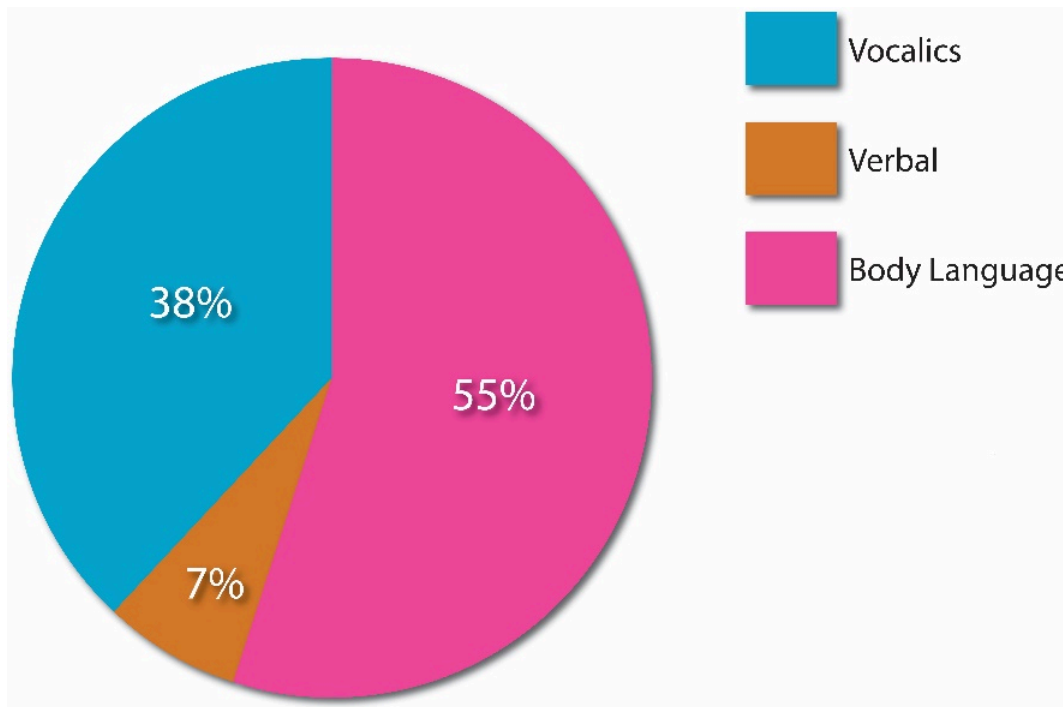


Figure 3. Mehrabian's Explanation of Message Meaning

Regardless of the actual percentage, it is worth noting that the majority of meaning in interaction is deduced from nonverbal communication. But there are other functions served by nonverbal communication.

### Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication is readily evident and important in everyday interactions.
- Nonverbal cues, even when unintentionally transmitted, help receivers derive meanings or decode verbal messages.

### Exercises

- Create a list of three situations in which nonverbal communication helped you to accurately interpret verbal communication.
- When was the last time you felt like someone else's true feelings were revealed by something other than their words?

## Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal cues are used for a variety of purposes within everyday communication. More often than not, such usage is intentional, though we have already considered how nonverbal communication is not always within our volition.

### Express Emotion

We use our arms, our tone of voice, and especially our faces, to show others how we are feeling. Watch Kansas City Royals third baseman [George Brett's reaction](#) when the umpire calls him out, eliminating his supposed home run during the famous Pine Tar incident from a 1983 game against the New York Yankees. There is no doubt that Brett intended to register how furious he was at what he felt was an unfair, and uncalled for, ruling.

Sometimes, we do not intend to represent our true feelings but our nonverbals may give them away. In *A Christmas Story*, which has become a yuletide classic movie, Ralphie doesn't want his parents to know the extent of his [disappointment about not receiving the Red Ryder rifle](#) he covets on Christmas morning. Yet, his slumped posture, downward gaze, and mumbled "Almost" in response to whether he got all he wanted all give him away. Within minutes, his unbridled joy at getting the gun after all is equally and unmistakably evident.

### Represent Meaning

As discussed below, nonverbals known as emblems can sometimes be used by their sources and receivers to arrive at clear and direct meanings. "Two thumbs pointed at this guy" indicate your own belief in some aspect of your identity just as pointing towards, but behind the back of, a culprit indicates their culpability in committing some offense. Holding your hand straight out tells your friend to "stop!" arguing with you, while sticking your tongue out at her shows you didn't appreciate the sarcastic insult she just delivered.

## Inform Perceptions

Nonverbal cues can be used to deliver messages to others about who or what we are. Flexing and pointing to a bicep or jutting out your chin and looking downward at your target can indicate that you are a tough guy who should not be messed with. Accidentally tripping over a Kilim rug in an antique shop and looking at it like it did it to you on purpose may give bystanders an entirely different, and humorous, impression of you.

## Regulate Interaction

We can also inspire and shape our interactions with others through the mere display of particular nonverbal cues. Sticking out and waving your index fingers in the direction of your face tells another that you wish to chat with them while glancing at your watch frequently lets them know you have had about enough of their side of the story.

### Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication serves many purposes.
- The functions of nonverbal communication are accomplished purposefully and unintentionally.

## Channels of Nonverbal Communication

This chapter addresses several channels of nonverbal communication that are of particular importance in interpersonal relationships. These include haptics (touch), vocalics (voice), kinesics (body movement and gestures) including oculosics and facial expressions (eye and face behavior), proxemics (use of space) including nonverbal immediacy, artifacts (clothing and adornments), chronemics (use of time), olfactics (smell), and physical appearance. Each of these channels 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. Touch is a form of communication that can be used to initiate, regulate, and maintain relationships. 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.”<sup>6</sup>

Several factors impact how touch is perceived and how individuals are evaluated in social interactions. These factors of touch are duration, frequency, intensity, and location.

Duration is how long touch endures; a hug from a seldom-seen auntie that lasts too long can be uncomfortable and induce dread about future contact with her. Frequency is how often touch is used; when a car sales person touches you again and again while invoking your name with every sentence, the artifice of those acts creates doubt about their good will towards you and damages their credibility. Intensity is the amount of pressure applied; a football quarterback may lean down hard on a running back’s shoulder pads in the huddle to emphasize holding onto the ball instead of fumbling it. Finally, location refers to the parts of the body that are touched; a suitor’s grazing of your hand means something very different than their cupping of your chin.

It’s also essential to understand the importance of touch to psychological wellbeing. Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench found that there are three different factors related to touch deprivation.<sup>7</sup> First, the absence of touch is the degree to which an individual perceives that touch is not prevalent in their interactions. Second, a longing for touch can be psychologically straining because humans inherently have a desire for physical contact. Some address this void by petting their pets. Lastly, some people desire touch so much that they’ll engage in sexual activity just to get it. Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench also found a positive association between touch deprivation and depression and a negative one between touch deprivation and self-esteem.<sup>7</sup>

## Vocalics

Vocalics are vocal utterances or characteristics, other than words, that serve as forms of communication. These include vocal characteristics such as pitch, tempo, and volume, as well as dysfluencies or vocal fillers.

### Pitch

**Pitch** refers to placement on the frequency range between high and low and is the basis on which singing voices are classified as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, or bass.

Pitch that changes or is at a much higher or lower end of the range will be noticed. For example, when

children become excited or scared, they may be described as “squealing.” However, when pitch is too static for too long, it is considered to be **monotone** and may be evaluated as droning and lifeless, especially in public speaking.

## Tempo

**Tempo** refers to the rate at which one speaks. Extremes in tempo can reflect emotions such as excitement or anger, nervousness, or energy levels. When a diabetic aunt’s blood sugar is too low, she may start speaking slower, while an anxious salesperson may rush through a presentation to his bosses.

## Volume

**Volume** refers to how loudly or softly an individual speaks. When individuals speak loudly, it may convey anger, emotional distress, happiness, or heightened excitement. When individuals speak at a lower volume, it could accompany the sharing of bad news, discussing of taboo or sensitive topics (i.e., when people whisper “sex” or “she died”), or conveying of private information.

## Dysfluencies or Vocal Fillers

**Dysfluencies** or vocal fillers, are sounds that we make 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 they may be distracting when a public speaker says “uh” or “um” repetitively.

## Kinesics

**Kinesics** is the study of how the body is used in communication and includes facial expressions, eye behaviors, posture, and gestures.

## Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are one form of kinesics. Paul Eckman and Wallace V. Friesen asserted that facial expressions are likely to communicate seven emotions that are recognized throughout the world.<sup>8</sup> 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. It is pretty incredible how small changes in facial muscles can be read by others as indicating nuanced emotions such as contentment, smugness, and disdain (see Figure 4).

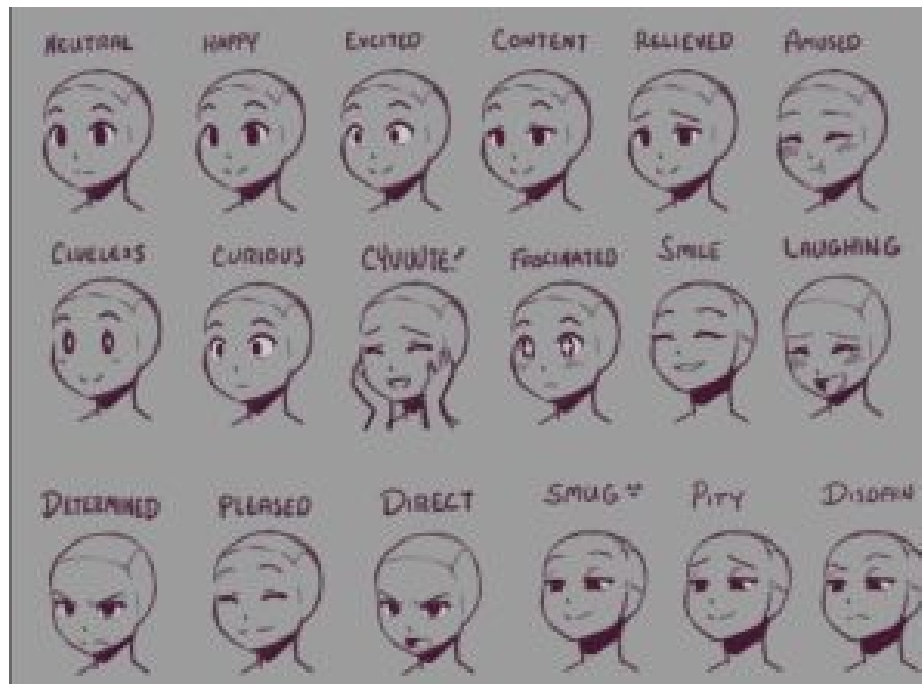


Figure 4. Nuanced Emotional Expressions. “Expression Sheet” by HeartGear. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 License.

Although not all facial expression is “universally” recognized, people are generally able to interpret facial expressions within a context. Smiling might communicate happiness, politeness, or a desire to be pleasing. When a flight attendant pastes on a smile while dealing with a difficult passenger, observers are unlikely to register that as actual happiness.

## Oculesics

**Oculesics** is the study of how individuals communicate through eye behavior. Eye contact is generally the first form of communication for interactants. In situations where people are looking to find partners, such as at a Sadie Hawkins dance, some will interpret the sharing of eye contact as a sign of romantic interest.

Often when discussing eye behavior, researchers refer to “gaze.” Research consistently demonstrates that females gaze at interaction partners more frequently than males<sup>9,10,11</sup> and that when people gaze for too long or for too little, there is likely to be a negative interpretation of this behavior.<sup>12</sup> Gaze is sometimes the focus (little pun intended) of interesting contextual and cultural implications. An Iranian-American employee may be told by bosses to “look at me when I’m talking to you” because they were socialized to avert eye contact with superiors. Conversely, subordinates may be told when dressed down by their Navy drill sergeant to “stop eyeballing me!”

## Posture

**Posture** refers to the shape of our bodies when standing or sitting and varies from curved and slouched to erect and straight. Strong posture may be associated with interest, formality, or respect while weak posture can signal disinterest, fatigue, or boredom. Military superiors often command their charges to stand at attention or to adopt the “at ease” position.

## Gestures

**Gestures** are movements of the body, especially the arms and hands, that convey meaning. Gestures that differ in the functions they serve are known as emblems, illustrators, affect displays, and regulators.

## Emblems

Gestures that are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture are called **emblems**.<sup>13</sup> 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” portrays use of the emblem for “loser.” A few emblematic gestures seem to be universal, such as a shrug of the shoulders for “I don’t know.” Many of them are culturally determined, meaning that they may mean different things in different places. In the United States, the thumbs-up and “okay” hand gestures are positive but in Iran, Ethiopia, and Mexico, they may have negative sexual connotations or even be considered obscene.<sup>14</sup>

## Illustrators

While emblems can be used as direct substitutions for words, **illustrators** are kinesics that help emphasize or explain a word. Arms spread way out with hands held parallel illustrate how “big the fish that got away was” and shaking a fist while shouting at an inconsiderate driver helps to get across anger.

## Affect Displays

**Affect displays** are nonverbal cues that show feelings and emotions. Sure, a frown shows sadness and a smile gladness. But how about fans of the National Hockey League’s 2023-2024 Florida Panthers, who were so thrilled with the team’s first Stanley Cup championship that they literally shook the glass and boards that surround their home ice? Ironically, an hour earlier, the same glass was pounded loudly to express disgust with a referee’s missed interference call.

## Regulators

**Regulators**, as discussed earlier, are gestures like head nods and eye contact that help initiate, coordinate, or terminate the flow of conversational turn taking. Listeners may sit back but shift forward when wanting to speak. Quick and furtive glances at the clock on the wall may signal a desire to wrap up an interaction.

## Proxemics

**Proxemics** is the study of communication through the use and understanding of physical space. Supermarkets and business offices may be arranged to influence sales or symbolize status, for instance. Space between communicators was famously categorized by Edward T. Hall,<sup>15</sup> who recognized four approximated “distances” used to achieve comfort in conversation. These distances are sometimes referred to as “space bubbles” (see Figure 5).

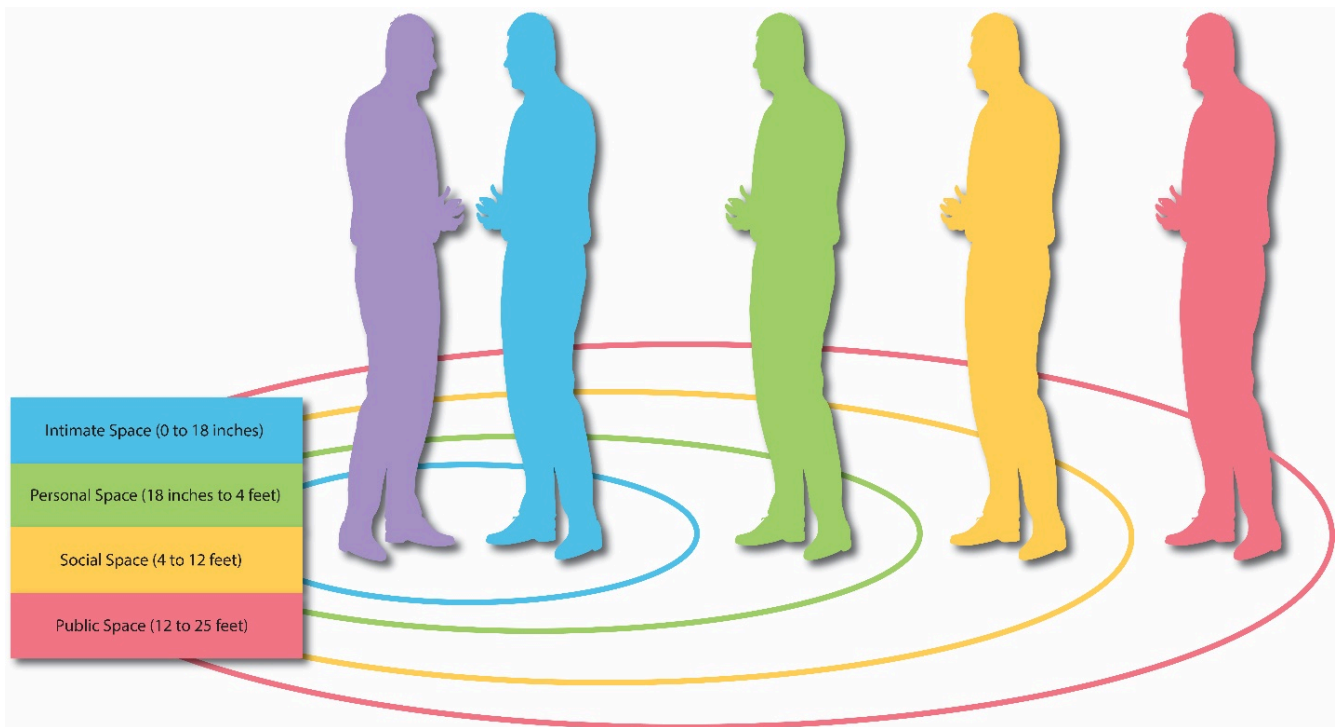


Figure 5. Edward T. Hall's Four Spaces

Hall's largest bubble, from 12 feet to 25 feet away, is referred to as “public” distance, often adopted in contexts such as public speaking. Social distance, anywhere from 4 to 12 feet, is meant for acquaintances, such as vaguely familiar coworkers and fellow elevator riders. The personal distance, 18 inches to 4 feet, is often used for conversations with friends or some family. Intimate distance, that ranges between 0 and 18 inches from the body, is reserved for those with whom we have our closest personal relationships. Moms, BFFs, and significant others are comfortably allowed this close to us.

The actual space associated with each distance is likely to vary with personal preferences and cultural contexts. Jerry, his parents, and Kramer struggle to cope with the proxemics style of a friend who is a “[close talker](#)” on the sitcom, *Seinfeld*. Riders of the Tokyo Metro train system must accept intimate distance with strangers on cars that are packed densely with people, like sardines in a can. Check out “[Professional Pushers Shove Passengers Onto Busy Tokyo Train!](#)”

## Nonverbal Immediacy

**Nonverbal immediacy** is defined as physical and/or psychological closeness. More specifically, Mehrabian defines immediacy as behaviors increasing the sensory stimulation between individuals.<sup>16</sup> Immediacy behaviors include being physically close and 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. In the health care setting, the positive outcomes of nonverbally immediate interaction are well documented: patient satisfaction,<sup>17,18</sup> understanding of medical information,<sup>19,20</sup> patient perceptions of provider credibility,<sup>21</sup> patient perceptions of confidentiality,<sup>22</sup> and decreased apprehension when communicating with a physician.<sup>23</sup>

## Artifacts

**Artifacts** are items with which we adorn our bodies with or carry with us. These include tattoos and piercings, jewelry, clothing, or any object that communicates meaning. One very famous artifact that most most recognize is the eyeglasses of Harry Potter. When Snoop Dogg was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, he wore a classic camel hair overcoat, but also large bulky jewelry. These accoutrements could be interpreted as classy and rebellious or tasteful and showy. Their contrasts might even signify the extent of Snoop’s confidence due to his wealth, fame, and power.

## Chronemics

**Chronemics**, as explained by Thomas J. Bruneau,<sup>24</sup> is the meaning(s) of time and use of it to communicate. As with many nonverbals, chronemics are sometimes culturally bound. Cultures using monochronic time prefer engaging in one task at a time and those using polychronic time multitask more. Traditionally, the U.S. is a monochronic culture along with Canada or Northern Europe whereas Korea, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa tend to be more polychronic. Time is a bit more fluid in polychronic cultures and punctuality is more important in monochronic ones.

## Olfactics

**Olfactics** generally refers to the study of scent and communication. Scent can draw others in or repel them, and the same scent can have different impacts on different people. Fragrances like cologne and perfume, and shower and bath products are billion dollar industries in the United States. The summer of 2024 saw a huge wave on social media of testimonials for the pleasing santal and bergamot scents of Salt and Stone, a natural deodorant.

Countless articles in the popular media address how to deal with a “smelly coworker” while others describe the sexual attractiveness we perceive from another’s pheromones, chemicals emitted from their glands. A terrific bit of evidence for the idiosyncratic nature of communication is that the alluring appeal of your cologne to one person may be an overwhelming cloud of olfactory assault to another.

## Physical Appearance

Whether we like it or not, our physical appearance has an impact on how people view, and relate to, us. Physical appearance is often among the reasons people decide whether to interact with each other.

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

The connection between physical appearance and nonverbal communication needs to be made for two important reasons: (1) The decisions we make to maintain or alter our physical appearance reveal a great deal about who we are, and (2) the physical appearance of other people impacts our perception of them, how we communicate with them, how approachable they are, how attractive or unattractive they are, and so on.<sup>25</sup>

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 hairstyle can communicate meanings to other people.

## Physical Appearance and Society

Unfortunately for people considered to be less attractive and for society at large, research has shown physical appearance to affect outcomes and lives in different specific 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.

Culture and era matter in how physical attractiveness is assessed. For example, the “Rubenesque ideal” for physical attractiveness was a dominant standard centuries ago. It stems from the paintings of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), who is famous for his use of full-figured women to depict beauty (see Figure 6).

In the United States today, most people that are portrayed in leading roles are thin and fit. In Rubens’ time, they might have been considered to be frail and even poor, as evidenced by their apparent undernourishment.

Facial symmetry, the extent to which the two sides of a face mirror each other, is considered a prominent contemporary determinant of attractiveness, as well.

## 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**” in the 1960s.<sup>26,27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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 men and women who were matched.

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

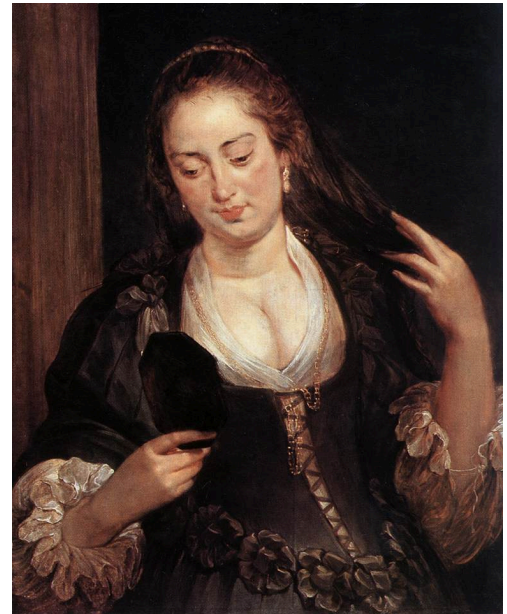


Figure 6. The Rubenesque Woman. [Woman with a Mirror by Peter Paul Rubens](#)

- Nonverbal channels of communication are informed by many parts of our bodies and our voices..
- Vocal cues such as rate, pitch, and volume have an impact on whether communication is effective.
- Facial expressions and body movements may enhance communication, but they also may contradict words or unintentionally reveal feelings.

## Exercises

Recall a situation in which you interacted with an individual whose nonverbal behaviors detracted from the individual's ability to communicate effectively. Describe these nonverbal behaviors and suggest what the individual could do differently.

## Key Terms

### **affect displays**

Nonverbal cues that show feelings and emotions.

### **artifacts**

Items with which we adorn our bodies with or carry with us.

### **chronemics**

The meaning(s) of time and use of it to communicate.

### **dysfluencies**

Vocal fillers or sounds that we make to fill dead air while we are thinking of what to say next.

**emblems**

Gestures that are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.

**gestures**

Movements of the body, especially the arms and hands, that convey meaning.

**haptics**

The study of touch as a form of communication.

**illustrators**

Kinesics that emphasize or explain a word.

**kinesics**

The study of how the body is used in communication and includes facial expressions, eye behaviors, posture, and gestures.

**matching hypothesis**

A prediction that people are more likely to find themselves in romantic relationships with people who are perceived as similarly physically attractive.

**monotone**

The quality of voice that features virtually no change in pitch and may be evaluated as droning and lifeless.

**nonverbal communication**

Communication that is produced by some means other than words such as eye contact, body language, or vocal cues.

**nonverbal immediacy**

Physical and/or psychological closeness.

**oculesics**

The study of how individuals communicate through eye behavior.

**olfactics**

The study of scent and communication.

**pitch**

Placement on the frequency range between high and low and is the basis on which singing voices are classified as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, or bass.

**posture**

The shape of our bodies when standing or sitting and varies from curved and slouched to erect and straight.

**proxemics**

The study of communication through the use and understanding of physical space.

**regulators**

Gestures like head nods and eye contact that help initiate, coordinate, or terminate the flow of conversational turn taking.

**tempo**

The rate of speech; how slowly or quickly you talk.

**vocalics**

Vocal utterances or characteristics, other than words, such as pitch, tempo, and volume, that serve as forms of communication.

**volume**

How loudly or softly an individual speaks.

## Notes

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# CULTURE IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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## Learning Objectives

- Define and understand culture in interpersonal communication.
- Comprehend the functions and characteristics of culture.
- Describe common cultural characteristics as they relate to 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.



Figure 1 Traditional costumes and contemporary style of dress are elements of culture. [Traditional Dresses of Kashmir.](#) By Azad888. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported](#) license.

## 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 like that seen from Kashmir in Figure 1. 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. 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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. One big mistake many U.S. citizens make is assuming *Cinco de Mayo* is Mexican Independence Day, which it is not. Instead, *El Grito de la Independencia* (The Cry of Independence) is held annually on September 16 in honor of Mexican Independence from Spain in 1810. Sadly, *Cinco de Mayo* has become more of an American holiday than it is a Mexican one. Just as an FYI, *Cinco de Mayo* is the date (May 5, 1862) observed to commemorate the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla that conclude the Franco-Mexican War (also referred to as the Battle of Puebla Day). We raise this example because 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.

## 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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!”<sup>7</sup> As you can tell, from the very beginning of the Disney cast member experience, Disney attempts to create a very specific microculture that is based on all things Disney.

Key Takeaways

- Over the years, there have been numerous definitions of the word culture. For our purposes, we define culture as a group of people who, through a process of learning, can share perceptions of the world, which influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior.
- In the realm of cultural studies, we discuss three different culturally related terms. First, we have a dominant culture, or the established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs of a specific society. Within that dominant culture will exist numerous co-cultures and microcultures. A co-culture is a regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that exerts influence in society. Lastly, we have microcultures or cultural patterns of behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization.

## 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 themselves 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 themselves as a “good” member of this organization.

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

The final factor of collective self-esteem is **importance to identity**, or the degree to which group membership is important to an individual. As mentioned earlier, we all belong to a wide range of cultural groups. Some of these groups are near and dear to us, while others are ones we don’t think about very often, so they just aren’t very important to us. For example, if you’re someone who has always lived in Charleston, South Carolina, then being a member of the Southerner cultural group may be a very important part of your identity. 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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 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.”<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.

## Culture as Normative

Another function of culture is that it helps us establish norms. Essentially, one's culture is normative,<sup>16</sup> or we assume that our culture's rules, regulations, and norms are correct and those of other cultures are deviant, which is highly ethnocentric. The term **ethnocentrism** can be defined as the degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating other cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions, often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior. 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.

### Key Takeaways

- Collective self-esteem is an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups. Research has shown that there are four significant parts to collective self-esteem: private collective esteem, membership esteem, public collective esteem, and importance to identity.
- Stereotypes are beliefs that we hold about a person because of their membership in a specific cultural group. Interpersonally, stereotypes become problematic because we often filter how we approach and communicate with people from different cultures because of the stereotypes we possess.

## Cultural Characteristics and Communication

### High and Low Context Cultures

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. 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.”<sup>19</sup> Previously, 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.

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.”<sup>20</sup> Table 1 further explores the differences between low-context and high-context cultures. In Table 1, we broke down issues of context into three general categories: communication, cultural orientation, and business.

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

Table 1 Low-Context vs. High-Context Cultures

You may be wondering, by this point, how low-context and high-context cultures differ across different countries. Figure 2 illustrates some of the patterns of context that exist in today's world.<sup>21</sup>

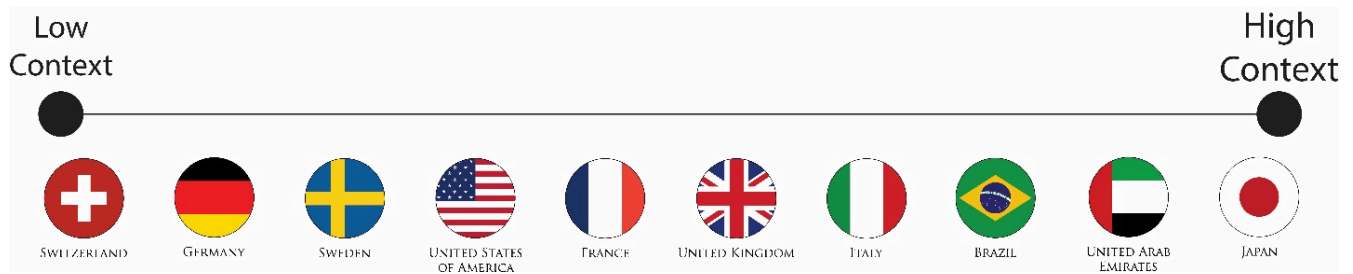


Figure 2 Low- and High-Context Nations

## Six Cultural Dimensions

Another very important researcher in the area of culture is a man by the name of Geert Hofstede. 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. 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

However, income is just one indicator 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.<sup>26</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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].<sup>29</sup>*

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.<sup>30</sup> 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. 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 64<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

## Indulgence vs. Restraint

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.”<sup>34</sup> 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.

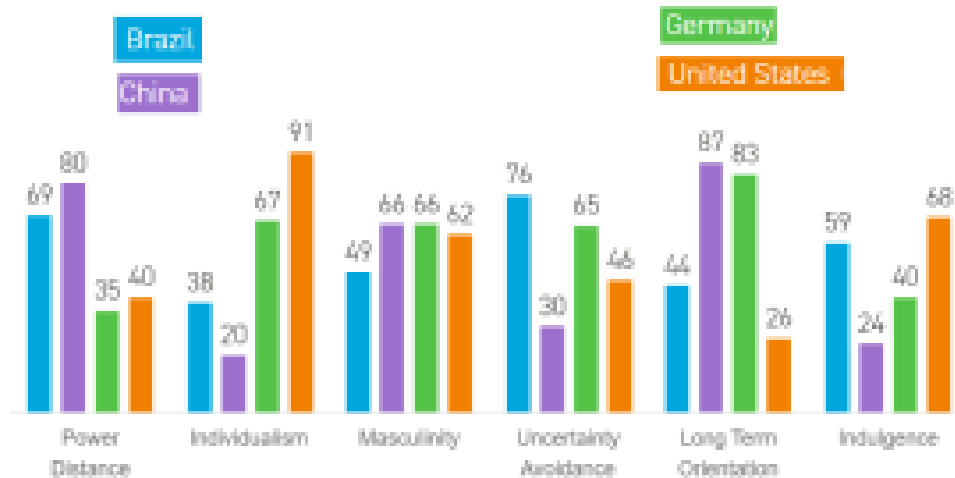


Figure 3 Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Comparison of 4 countries: US, China, Germany and Brazil in all 6 dimensions of the model.

## Face-Negation Theory

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.<sup>38</sup>

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. 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).<sup>39</sup>

Individuals who are competent in facework can recognize when facework is necessary and then handle those situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively. As such, facework should be viewed as a necessary component for understanding any form of interpersonal interaction but is especially important when examining interpersonal interactions that occur between people from differing cultural backgrounds.

## What is Face?

The concept of **face** is one that is not the easiest to define nor completely understand. Originally, the concept of face is not a Western even though the idea of “saving face” is pretty common in every day talk today. According to Hsien Chin Hu, the concept of face stems from two distinct Chinese words, *lien* and *mien-tzu*.<sup>40</sup> *Lien* “represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. Lien is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction.”<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, *mien-tzu* “stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [America]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation.”<sup>42</sup>

Face is essentially “a person’s reputation and feelings of prestige within multiple spheres, including the workplace, the family, personal friends, and society at large.”<sup>44</sup> For our purposes, we can generally break face down into general categories: face gaining and face losing. Face gaining refers to the strategies a person might use to build their reputation and feelings of prestige (e.g., talking about accomplishments, active social media presence, etc.), whereas face losing refers to those behaviors someone engages in that can harm their reputation or feelings of prestige (e.g., getting caught in a lie, failing, etc.).

### Key Takeaways

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

nonverbal behavior.

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

## 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.”<sup>46</sup>

### 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.

#### 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.

## 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.<sup>48</sup> 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.

### Key Takeaways

- Cultural intelligence involves the degree to which an individual can communicate

competently in varying cultural situations. Cultural intelligence consists of four distinct parts: knowledge, motivation, understanding, and behavior.

## Key Terms

### **behavioral CQ**

The degree to which an individual behaves in a manner that is consistent with what they know about other cultures.

### **belief**

Assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something.

### **co-culture**

Regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that exerts influence in society.

### **cognitive CQ**

The degree to which an individual has cultural knowledge.

### **collective self-esteem**

The aspect of an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.

### **collectivism**

Characteristics of a culture that values cooperation and harmony and considers the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of the individual.

### **cultural intelligence**

The degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations.

### **culture**

A group of people who, through a process of learning, can share perceptions of the world, which influence their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior.

**culture as normative**

The basic idea that one's culture provides the rules, regulations, and norms that govern a culture and how people act with other members of that society.

**dominant culture**

The established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs of a society.

**ethnocentrism**

The degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating different cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior.

**face**

The standing or position a person has in the eyes of others.

**feminine**

Cultures focused on having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial).

**high-context cultures**

Cultures that interpret meaning by relying more on nonverbal context or behavior than on verbal symbols in communication.

**importance to identity**

The degree to which group membership is important to an individual.

**indigenous peoples**

Populations that originated in a particular place rather than moved there.

**individualism**

Characteristics of a culture that values being self-reliant and self-motivated, believes in personal freedom and privacy, and celebrates personal achievement.

**indulgence**

Cultural orientation marked by immediate gratification for individual desires.

**long-term orientation**

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the future and not the present or past.

**low-context cultures**

Cultures that interpret meaning by placing a great deal of emphasis on the words someone uses.

**masculine**

Cultures focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge.

**membership esteem**

The degree to which an individual sees themselves as a “good” member of a group.

**metacognitive CQ**

The degree to which an individual is consciously aware of their intercultural interactions in a manner that helps them have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures.

**microculture**

Cultural patterns of behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization.

**motivational CQ**

The degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to differing cultural environments.

**norms**

Informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

**power distance**

The degree to which those people and organizations with less power within a culture accept and expect that power is unequally distributed within their culture.

**private collective esteem**

The degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group.

**public collective self-esteem**

The degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively.

**restraint**

Cultural orientation marked by the belief that gratification should not be instantaneous and should be regulated by cultural rules and norms.

**rules**

Explicit guidelines (generally written down) that govern acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

**short-term orientation**

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the past or present and not in the future.

**stereotype**

A set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.

**uncertainty avoidance**

The extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations.

**values**

Important and lasting principles or standards held by a culture about desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes.

## Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we started by discussing what the word “culture” means while also considering the concepts of co-culture and microcultures. We then looked at the critical functions that culture performs in our daily lives. Next, we discussed the intersection of culture and communication. Lastly, we ended this chapter discussing how you can improve your intercultural communication skills.

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# TALKING AND LISTENING

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## Learning Objectives

- Learn different types of conversation.
- Describe the motivations and consequences of self-disclosure and the Johari Window.
- Understand how to listen effectively and the different types of listening.
- Discuss different types of listening responses and types of questions.

We are constantly interacting with people. We interact with our family and friends. We interact with our teachers and peers at school. We interact with customer service representatives, office coworkers, physicians/therapists, and so many other different people in average day. Humans are inherently social beings, so talking and listening to each other is a huge part of what we all do day-to-day.

## The Importance of Everyday Conversations

Most of us spend a great deal of our day interacting with other people through what is known as a conversation. According to Judy Apps, the word “conversation” is comprised of the words *con* (with) and *versare* (turn): “conversation is turn and turnabout – you alternate.”<sup>1</sup> As such, a conversation isn’t a monologue or singular speech act; it’s a dyadic process where two people engage with one another in interaction that has multiple turns. Philosophers have been writing about the notion of the term “conversation” and its importance in society since the written word began.<sup>2</sup> Conversation is an important part of the interpersonal experience. Through conversations with others, we can build, maintain, and terminate relationships.

Coming up with an academic definition for the term “conversation” is not an easy task. For our purposes, we prefer Susan Brennan’s definition: “Conversation is a joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate interactively.”<sup>4</sup> Conversations are one of the most common forms of interpersonal communication.

## Types of Conversations

David Angle argues that conversations can be categorized based on directionality (one-way or two-way) and tone/purpose (cooperative or competitive).<sup>8</sup> One-way conversations are conversations where an individual is talking *at* the other person and not *with* the other person. Although these exchanges are technically conversations because of the inclusion of nonverbal feedback, one of the conversational partners tends to monopolize the bulk of the conversation while the other partner is more of a passive receiver. Two-way conversations, on the other hand, are conversations where there is mutual involvement and interaction. In two-way conversations, people are actively talking, providing nonverbal feedback, and listening.

In addition to one vs. two-way interactions, Angle also believes that conversations can be broken down on whether they are cooperative or competitive. Cooperative conversations are marked by a mutual interest in what all parties within the conversation have to contribute. Conversely, individuals in competitive conversations are more concerned with their points of view than others within the conversation. Angle further breaks down his typology of conversations into four distinct types of conversation (Figure 1).

### Discourse

The first type of conversation is one-way cooperative, which Angle labeled discourse. The purpose of a discourse conversation is for the sender to transmit information to the receiver. For example, a professor delivering a lecture or a speaker giving a speech.

### Dialogue

The second type is what most people consider to be a traditional conversation: the dialogue (two-way, cooperative). According to Angle, “The goal is for participants to exchange information and build relationships with one another.”<sup>2</sup> When you go on a first date, the general purpose of most of our conversations in this context is dialogue. If conversations take on one of the other three types, you could find yourself not getting a second date.

### Debate

The third type of conversation is the two-way, competitive conversation, which Angle labels “debate.” The debate conversation is less about information giving and more about persuading. From this perspective, debate conversations occur when the ultimate goal of the conversation is to win an argument or persuade someone to change their thoughts, values, beliefs, and behaviors. Imagine you’re sitting in a study group and you’re trying to advocate for a specific approach to your group’s project. In this case, your goal is to persuade the others within the conversation to your point-of-view.

## Diatribes

Lastly, Angle discusses the diatribe (one-way, competitive). The goal of the diatribe conversation is “to express emotions, browbeat those that disagree with you, and/or inspire those that share the same perspective.”<sup>10</sup> For example, imagine that your best friend has come over to your dorm room, apartment, or house to vent about the grade they received on a test.



Figure 1 Four Types of Conversations

## Sharing Personal Information

One of the primary functions of conversations is sharing information about ourselves. Earlier in the book, we discussed Berger and Calabrese’s Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT).<sup>11</sup> One of the basic axioms of URT is that, as verbal communication increases between people when they first meet, the level of uncertainty decreases. Specifically, the type of verbal communication generally discussed in initial interactions is called self-disclosure.<sup>12</sup> **Self-disclosure** is the process of purposefully communicating information about one’s self. Sidney Jourard sums up self-disclosure as permitting one’s “true self” to be known to others.<sup>13</sup>

As we introduce the concept of self-disclosure in this section, it's important to realize that there is no right or wrong way to self-disclose. Different people self-disclose for a wide range of different reasons and purposes. Emmi Ignatius and Marja Kokkonen found that self-disclosure can vary for several reasons:<sup>14</sup>

- Personality traits (shy people self-disclose less than extraverted people)
- Cultural background (Western cultures disclose more than Eastern cultures)
- Emotional state (happy people self-disclose more than sad or depressed people)
- Biological sex (females self-disclose more than males)
- Psychological gender (androgynous people were more emotionally aware, topically involved, and invested in their interactions; feminine individuals disclosed more in social situations, and masculine individuals generally did not demonstrate meaningful self-disclosure across contexts)
- Status differential (lower status individuals are more likely to self-disclose personal information than higher-status individuals)
- Physical environment (soft, warm rooms encourage self-disclosure while hard, cold rooms discourage self-disclosure)
- Physical contact (touch can increase self-disclosure, unless the other person feels that their personal space is being invaded, which can decrease self-disclosure)
- Communication channel (people often feel more comfortable self-disclosing when they're not face-to-face; e.g., on the telephone or through computer-mediated communication)

As you can see, there are quite a few things that can impact how self-disclosure happens when people are interacting during interpersonal encounters.

## Motives for Self-Disclosure

So, what ultimately motivates someone to self-disclose? Emmi Ignatius and Marja Kokkonen found two basic reasons for self-disclosure: social integration and impression management.<sup>15</sup>

### Social Integration

The first reason people self-disclose information about themselves is simply to develop interpersonal relationships. Part of forming an interpersonal relationship is seeking to demonstrate that we have commonality with another person. For example, let's say that it's the beginning of a new semester, and you're sitting next to someone you've never met before. You quickly strike up a conversation while you're waiting for the professor to show up. During those first few moments of talking, you're going to try to establish some kind of commonality. Maybe you'll learn that you're both communication majors or that you have the same favorite sports team or band. Self-disclosure helps us find these areas where we have similar interests, beliefs, values,

attitudes, etc.... As humans, we have an innate desire to be social and meet people. And research has shown us that self-disclosure is positively related to liking.<sup>16</sup> The more we self-disclose to others, the more they like us and vice versa.

However, we should mention that appropriate versus inappropriate self-disclosures depends on the nature of your relationship. When we first meet someone, we do not expect that person to start self-disclosing their deepest darkest secrets. When this happens, then we experience an expectancy violation. Judee Burgoon conceptualized expectancy violation theory as an understanding of what happens when an individual within an interpersonal interaction violates the norms for that interaction.<sup>17,18</sup> Burgoon's original **expectancy violation theory** (EVT) primarily analyzed what happened when individuals communicated nonverbally in a manner that was unexpected (e.g., standing too close while talking). Over the years, EVT has been expanded by many scholars to look at a range of different situations when communication expectations are violated.<sup>19</sup> As a whole, EVT predicts that when individuals violate the norms of communication during an interaction, they will evaluate that interaction negatively. However, this does depend on the nature of the initial relationship. If we've been in a relationship with someone for a long time or if it's someone we want to be in a relationship with, we're more likely to overlook expectancy violations.

So, how does this relate to self-disclosure? Mostly, there are ways that we self-disclose that are considered "normal" during different types of interactions and contexts. What you disclose to your best friend will be different than what you disclose to a stranger at the bus station. What you disclose to your therapist will be different than what you disclose to your professor. When you meet a stranger, the types of self-disclosure tend to be reasonably common topics: your major, sports teams, bands, the weather, etc. If, however, you decide to self-disclose information that is overly personal, this would be perceived as a violation of the types of topics that are normally disclosed during initial interactions. As such, the other person is probably going to try to get out of that conversation pretty quickly. When people disclose information that is inappropriate to the context, those interactions will generally be viewed more negatively.<sup>20</sup>

From a psychological standpoint, finding these commonalities with others helps reinforce our self-concept. We find that others share the same interests, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc., which demonstrates that how we think, feel, and behave are similar to those around us. Admittedly, it's not like we do all of this consciously.<sup>21</sup>

## Impression Management

The second reason we tend to self-disclose is to portray a specific impression of who we are as individuals to others. **Impression management** is defined as "the attempt to generate as favorable an impression of ourselves as possible, particularly through both verbal and nonverbal techniques of self-presentation."<sup>22</sup> Basically, we want people to view us in a specific way, so we communicate with others in an attempt to get others to see us that way. Research has found we commonly use six impression management techniques during interpersonal interactions: self-descriptions, accounts, apologies, entitlements and enhancements, flattery, and favors.<sup>23,24</sup>

## Self-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.<sup>25</sup> 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.

Four considerations are pertinent to disclosure.<sup>26</sup>

1. The type of relationship will affect individuals' need to disclose.
2. The disclosure has a risk-to-benefits ratio. In other words, individuals, who disclose certain types of information, may risk losing certain things (i.e., career or pride) or may benefit certain things (i.e., trust or security).
3. The appropriateness and relevance to the situation impacts what gets disclosed and what does not get disclosed.
4. Disclosure depends on reciprocity. Individuals will disclose similar amounts of information to each other.

The amount of disclosure that we are willing to share with others also depends on other factors. It is based on honesty, depth, availability of information, and the environment.

First, when we disclose to others, we can truly reveal characteristics about ourselves, or we can lie. In a recent study, it was found that most college students lie when initially meeting someone new for the first time. The cause is because we want to impress others. A lot of deception occurs on online chatrooms because sometimes people do not want to reveal who they really are, because of possible repercussions.

Depth is another factor of self-disclosure. When I talk to my parents, I can share hours of information about my day with them. I can talk about all sorts of things with them. However, I have a friend who is only willing to talk about the weather and what he ate with his parents. As you can see, the depth of information is very different. One person only talks about superficial facts, and the other person delves a lot deeper and is willing to discuss more themselves.

The availability of information has an impact as well. For instance, if you have more information on a certain topic, you might be willing to share more comments on the matter. For instance, if you and your friends are trying to decide which presidential candidate to vote support in the next election. You might be more willing to self-disclose what you know about a candidate and your opinions about that candidate based on your information. However, you might be less willing to comment on another candidate if you don't know their

platform or background.

The context or environment has an impact on self-disclosure. For instance, have you ever noticed that people tend to open up about themselves when they are in a confined space, such as an airplane? It is so interesting to meet how people are willing to share personal information about themselves with a total stranger only because the other person is doing it as well.

## Social Penetration Theory

In 1973, Irwin Altman and Dalmis Taylor were interested in discovering how individuals become closer to each other.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

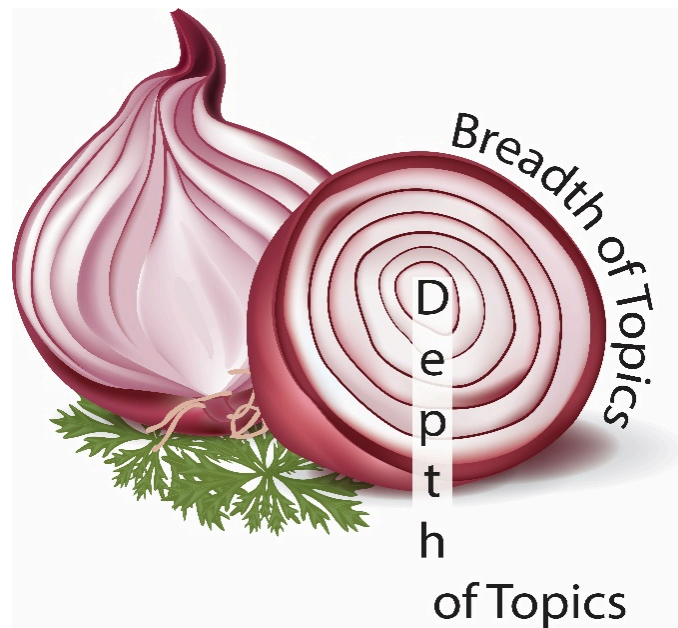


Figure 2 Social Penetration Theory

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.<sup>34</sup> A person's personality is like an onion because it has many layers (Figure 2). 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.

1. The first is personal characteristics (e.g., introverted or extraverted).
2. 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).
3. 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. People typically 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. By self-disclosing to others both in breadth and depth, it could lead to more relational closeness.

## Johari Window

The name "Johari" is a combination of the two researchers who originated the concept: Joseph Luft (Jo) and Harrington Ingham (hari).<sup>35</sup> The basic idea behind the Johari Window is that we build trust in our interpersonal relationships as we self-disclose revealing information about ourselves, and we learn more about ourselves as we receive feedback from the people with whom we are interacting.

As you can see in Figure 3, the Johari Window is represented by four window panes. Two window panes refer to ourselves, and two refer to others. First, when discussing ourselves, we have to be aware that some things about ourselves are known to us, and others are not. For example, we may be completely aware of the fact that we are extraverted and love talking to people (known to self). However, we may not be aware of how others

tend to view our extraversion as positive or negative (unknown to self). The second part of the window is what is known to others and unknown to others. For example, some common information known to others includes your height, weight, hair color, etc. At the same time, there is a bunch of information that people don't know about us: deepest desires, joys, goals in life, etc. Ultimately, the Johari Window breaks this into four different quadrants (Figure 3).

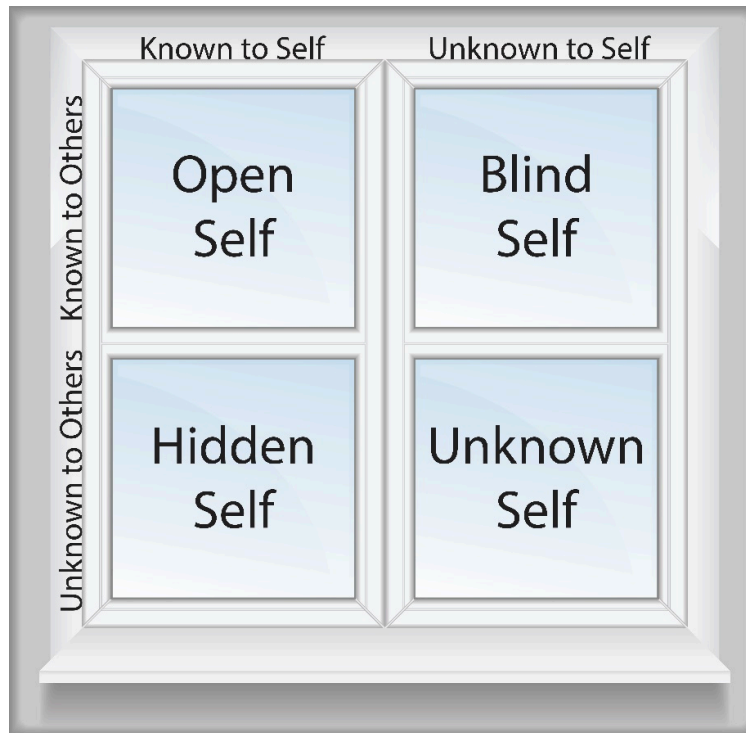


Figure 3 Johari Window

## Open Self

The first quadrant of the Johari Window is the open self, or when information is known to both ourselves and others. Although some facets are automatically known, others become known as we disclose more and more information about ourselves with others. As we get to know people and self-disclose and increasingly deeper levels, the open self quadrant grows. For the purposes of thinking about discussions and self-disclosures, the open self is where the bulk of this work ultimately occurs.

Information in the open self can include your attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, emotions/feelings, experiences, and values that are known to both the person and to others. For example, if you wear a religious symbol around your neck (Christian Cross, Jewish Star of David, Islamic Crescent Moon and Star, etc.), people will be able to ascertain certain facts about your religious beliefs immediately.

## Hidden Self

The second quadrant is what is known to ourselves but is not known to others. All of us have personal information we may not feel compelled to reveal to others. For example, if you're a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, you may not feel the need to come out during your first encounter with someone new. It's also possible that you'll keep this information from your friends and family for a long time.

Think about your own life, what types of things do you keep hidden from others? One of the reasons we keep things hidden is because it's hard to open ourselves up to being vulnerable. Typically, the hidden self will decrease as a relationship grows. However, if someone ever violates our trust and discusses our hidden self with others, we are less likely to keep disclosing this information in the future. If the trust violation is extreme enough, we may discontinue that relationship altogether.

## Blind Self

The third quadrant is called the blind self because it's what we don't know about ourselves that is known by others. For example, during an initial interaction, we may not know how the other person is reacting to us. We may think that we're coming off as friendly, but the other person may be perceiving us as shy or even pushy. One way to decrease the blind self is by soliciting feedback from others. As others reveal more of our blind selves, we can become more self-aware of how others perceive us.

One problem with the blind self is that how people view us and how we view ourselves can often be radically different. For example, people may perceive you as cocky, but in reality, you're scared to death. It's important to decrease the blind self during our interactions with others, because how people view us will determine how they interact with us.

## Unknown Self

Lastly, we have the unknown self, or when information is not known by ourselves or others. The unknown self can include aptitudes/talents, attitudes/feelings, behaviors, capabilities, etc. that are unknown to us or others. For example, you may have a natural talent to play the piano. Still, if you've never sat down in front of a piano, neither you nor others would have any way of knowing that you have the aptitude/talent for playing the piano. Sometimes parts of the unknown self are just under the surface and will arise with time and in the right contexts, but other times no one will ever know these unknown parts.

One other area that can affect the unknown self involves prior experiences. It's possible that you experienced a traumatic event that closes you down in a specific area. For example, imagine that you are an amazing writer, but someone, when you were in the fourth grade, made fun of a story you wrote, so you never tried writing again. In this case, the aptitude/talent for writing has been stamped out because of that one traumatic

experience as a child. Sadly, a lot of us probably have a range of aptitudes/talents, attitudes/feelings, behaviors, capabilities, etc. that were stopped because of traumas throughout our lives.

### Key Takeaways

- We self-disclose to share information with others. It allows us to express our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Self-disclosure includes levels of disclosure, reciprocity in disclosure, and appropriate disclosure.
- There can be positive and negative consequences of self-disclosure. These consequences can strengthen how you feel or create distance between you and someone else.
- The Johari Window is a model that helps to illustrate self-disclosure and the process by which you interact with other people.

## Listening

When it comes to daily communication, we spend about 45% of our listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing.<sup>36</sup> However, most people are not entirely sure what the word “listening” is or how to do it effectively.

## Hearing Is Not Listening

**Hearing** refers to a passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear. Hearing is a physiological process that 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].”<sup>37</sup> 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.”<sup>38</sup> 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 (listening) because you both like it. Let’s say you and your friend start to discuss 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.<sup>39</sup> Although not the only model of listening that exists, we like this model because it breaks the process of listening down into clearly differentiated stages: hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding (Figure 4).

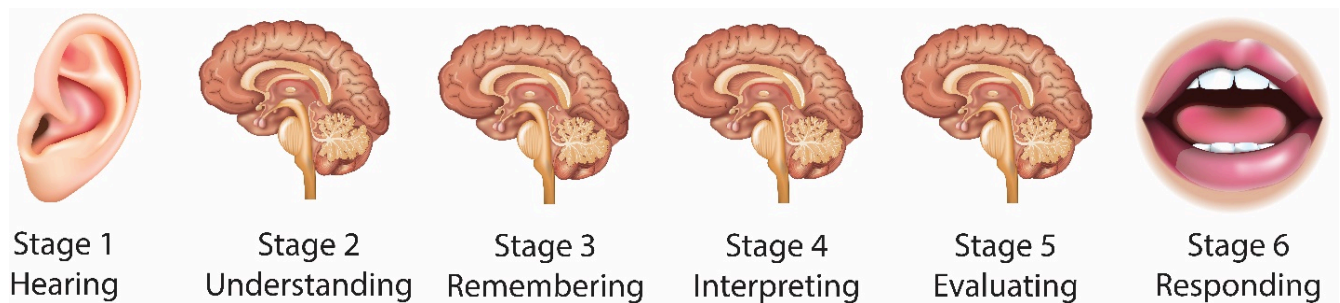


Figure 4 HURIER Model of Listening

## 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.

## Understanding

The second stage of the listening model is understanding, or the ability to comprehend or decode the source's message. When we discussed the basic models of human communication earlier in the book, 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. It is challenging to remember everything.

For example, if you tell your professor something when they are leaving the class, they may forget it quickly as they switch gear to their next class. It is wise to email them important things, so they don't forget. The remembering process fails people all the time. 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."<sup>40</sup> 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.

## Responding

In Figure 4, hearing is represented by an ear, the brain represents the next four stages, and a person's mouth represents the final stage. Effective listening starts with the ear and centers in the brain. 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.

## 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."<sup>44</sup> Watson et al. identified four distinct listening styles: people, content, action, and time.

## The Four Listening Styles



Figure 5 Four Listening Styles

### 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, etc.). People-oriented listeners are also very focused on maintaining relationships, so they are good at casual conversation 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.”<sup>46</sup>

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’).”<sup>47</sup>

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.”<sup>48</sup>

## 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.”<sup>49</sup>

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.

## Thinking about the Four Listening Types

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.

- Hearing happens when sound waves hit our eardrums. Listening involves processing these sounds into something meaningful.
- The listening process includes: having the motivation to listen, clearly hearing the message, paying attention, interpreting the message, evaluating the message, remembering and responding appropriately.
- There are different types of listening styles: people, action, content, and time.

## 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

Adler and colleagues have found different types of listening responses: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising (Figure 6).<sup>53</sup>

<b>Silent Listening</b>	
<b>Questioning</b>	Asking questions to understand the situation better.
<b>Paraphrasing</b>	Rephrasing in your own words what the speaker said.
<b>Empathizing</b>	Putting yourself in the same situation to understand what the speaker means.
<b>Supporting</b>	Showing that you endorse the speaker.
<b>Analyzing</b>	Considering possible solutions to what the speaker has said.
<b>Evaluating</b>	Assessing the best courses of action.
<b>Advising</b>	Counseling, recommending, and offering information that will help the speaker.

Figure 6. Types of Listening Responses

## Silent Listening

**Silent listening** occurs when you say nothing. It is ideal in certain situations and awful in other situations. However, when used correctly, it can be 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 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 ( <b>open/closed questions</b> )	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 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 put yourself in their shoes to understand the situation. 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.

### Research Spotlight



In 2015, Karina J. Lloyd, Diana Boer, Avraham N. Kluger, and Sven C. Voelpel conducted an experiment to examine the relationship between perceived listening trust and wellbeing. In this study, the researchers recruited pairs of strangers. They had one of the participants tell the other about a positive experience in their life for seven minutes (the talker) and one who sat and listened to the story without comment (the listener).

The researchers found that talkers who perceived the listener to be listening intently to be very important for effective communication. First, perceived listening led to a greater sense of social attraction towards the listener, which in turn, led to a greater sense of trust for the listener. Second, talkers who perceived the listener as listening intently felt their messages were clearer, which in turn, led to a greater sense of the talker's overall wellbeing (positive affect).

As you can see, simply perceiving that the other person is listening intently to you is very important on a number of fronts. For this reason, it's very important to remember to focus your attention when you're listening to someone.

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## Perception Checking

To judge others more accurately, we need to engage in perception checking.

Perception checking involves three steps:

1. Describe your perception of the event
2. Offer three different interpretations of that behavior
3. Seek clarification about the interpretations

That's it! I know this sounds easy, but it's definitely much harder than it looks.

### Key Takeaways

- The different types of listening responses are silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising.
- Questioning can be to clarify meanings, encourage elaboration, learn about others, increase discovery, or obtain more information.
- Perception checking involves describing the situation, offering three possible interpretations, and then seeking information.

### Key Terms

#### **analyzing**

This is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message.

#### **communication motives**

Reasons why we communicate with others.

### **conversations**

Interpersonal interactions through which you share facts and information as well as your ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people.

### **empathizing**

This is used to show that you identify with the speaker's information.

### **hearing**

A passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear.

### **Johari window**

A model that illustrates self-disclosure and the process by which you interact with other people.

### **listening**

A complex psychological process that can be defined as the process of physically hearing, interpreting that sound, and understanding the significance of it.

### **paraphrase**

To restate what another person said using different words.

### **self-disclosure**

The act of verbally or nonverbally revealing information about yourself to other people.

### **silent listening**

This occurs when you say nothing and is appropriate for certain situations.

### **social penetration theory**

Theory originally created by Altman and Taylor to explain how individuals gradually become more intimate as individuals self-disclose more and those self-disclosures become more intimate (deep).

## Chapter Wrap-Up

We spend most of our lives engaged in talking and listening behavior. As such, understanding the functions of talking and listening in interpersonal communication is very important. In this chapter, we started by discussing the importance of everyday conversations. We next discussed a specific type of talk: disclosing information about ourselves (self-disclosure). We then switched gears and focused on the listening component.

Overall, talking and listening are extremely important to interpersonal communication, so understanding how they function can help improve our communication skills.

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# ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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## Learning Objectives

- Understand that relationships vary in duration, contact frequency, sharing, support, interaction variability, and goals.
- Distinguish romantic relationships from other kinds.
- Name several ways that attraction to another person happens.
- Define the five stages of Coming Together and the five stages of Coming Apart.
- Explain the strengths and weaknesses of stage models.
- Detail the critical constructs and conclusions of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Relationship Maintenance Behaviors research, and Social Exchange Theory.
- Detail the critical constructs and conclusions of Communication Privacy Management, Relational Dialectics, and Genderlect Theory.
- Connect experiences of romantic relationships with each of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Relationship Maintenance Behaviors research, Social Exchange Theory, Communication Privacy Management, Relational Dialectics, and Genderlect Theory.
- Realize the utility of developing scripts for dating and sex initiation.
- Recognize six love styles and their associated features.

Over the course of our lives, we will enter into and out of many relationships of several different kinds. Interpersonal communication scholars emphasize acquaintance, coworker, friend, family, and intimate/romantic relationships. According to a study conducted by OnePoll in conjunction with Evite, at any random time, 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<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to dating, the average person has seven relationships before getting married.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, we focus on romantic relationships in particular though many of the concepts also apply to other relationship types. For instance, relational dialectics are featured here as well as in the chapter, Friendship Relationships. Relational stages, issues of privacy and disclosure, and the implications of gender and sex are certainly important to other kinds of relationships as well, but they may be best illustrated in the context of romantic ones.

Relationships may be instrumental as when a high school soccer coach and his sweeper back work together to win games and individually towards another league title and a college scholarship. Just about all relationships, however, feature social dimensions, as well. In them, we experience pleasure, companionship, control, and affection. You may spend time with one friend because you love talking to them and to another who can introduce you into popular cliques or desirable extracurricular activities. Relationships are generally meaningful and beneficial, allowing us to enjoy life, make important connections, and grow psychologically, emotionally, and physically. They can also be hollow sources of frustration, personal failure, and even regret and agony. Romantic relationships have great potential to produce positive and negative outcomes.

A major rationale for the study of interpersonal communication is that it is the primary means of engaging in relationships. A **relationship** is a connection or association between people that is marked by affiliation, attachment, and commitment. A **romantic relationship** is a union that features any or all of: affection, caregiving, shared relational identity, and intimacy in the form of emotional, intellectual, physical or sexual closeness. While some romances develop into marriages, which may be among the goals of many partners, the vast majority end in heartbreak.



Figure 1. Romantic Relationship. “Lesbische Romantik” by Queereaster Media Working Group. [This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.](#)

## Relationship Variables

All relationships are not the same. While they differ in value from treasured commitments to massive wastes of time, there are at least six characteristics that all relationships possess though to varying levels: duration, contact frequency, sharing, support, interaction variability, and goals.<sup>3</sup>

Some friendships last a lifetime, others last a short period. The length in time of a relationship is referred to as its **duration**. In a recent season of a reality show, one cast member spoke of his parents’ somewhat tumultuous thirty-year marriage while another agreed to marry a total stranger at first sight despite never having made it to a fourth date with anyone before.

**Contact frequency** is how often relational partners communicate with each other. Estranged siblings still have some form of relationship but they may only speak at each family gathering. Husband and wife real estate teams talk to each other every few minutes all day long, every day!

The more we spend time with other people and interact with them, the more we are likely **sharing** of details about ourselves. Sharing is the process of revealing and disclosing information about oneself to another. The extent of sharing of personal information is enhanced with trust and support of the relational partner.

The fourth variable is the amount of **support** provided within a relationship. Support is any message or behavior that conveys caring or comfort to another person so as to improve their condition. It could be the expertise or money that your Dad provides to get your car running again. It could also be the willingness of a stranger at a bus stop to listen to the impossibly vexing events of your day. One study found that married couples are more likely to provide supportive communication behaviors to their partners than are

dating couples.<sup>4</sup> An untold amount of research has demonstrated the benefits to our mood, health, and life experiences of having support of others, or even just believing that we do!

Your **interaction variability** with another person is the variety of interaction types you have and topics you cover. If Aunt Aaliyah only ever talks with Uncle Jayden about their retirement budget and his poor hygiene, they have low interaction variability. If it's impossible to predict whether cousins Cho and Dae will be playing Atom Zombie Smasher together, serving as each other's wingmen at the local nightclub, or physically tussling because of an argument about music, those two have pretty high interaction variability.

Relationship members almost always have **goals** or expectations and hopes for relational functions and outcomes. 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. Romantic partners typically expect their significant others to be truthful, supportive, and faithful. Relational satisfaction will result if partners meet those expectations. Of course, satisfaction itself is a high-level relational goal and one that has bearing on how far relationships progress through recognized stages.

## Exercises

- Think of two relationships you have in your life and which of them is more or less satisfying. Rate each of them for duration, contact frequency, sharing, support, interaction variability, and goals. Which of these variables seem to be especially important factors in your satisfaction?

## Typical Progression of Romantic Relationships

Mark Knapp introduced stages of relationship development<sup>5</sup> and his model was later modified with coauthor Anita Vangelisti.<sup>6</sup> Their Model of Interaction Stages in Relationships<sup>7</sup> features ten stages that are categorized as either parts of the process, Coming Together, or parts of the process, Coming Apart. Some refer to this as the staircase model (see Figure 2) of relational development.

While their stages, as described below, are highly informative and perhaps sometimes prescriptive for enjoying rich and full relationships, it is extremely important to realize the inherent dangers of fully embracing stage models.

Whether they model relationship development, grief, behavioral intervention, or group work, stages that

represent human behavior cannot be precise or accurate in their linearity. Some stages may be skipped, some will overlap, and others may be revisited after subsequent stages have occurred. As long as we consider stage models to be descriptive rather than predictive, they can be very useful for understanding the experiences of human relationships from onset to expiration.

Knapp and Vangelisti's ten stages<sup>6</sup> can be applied to most types of relationships but are especially well-suited for our focus on romantic ones.

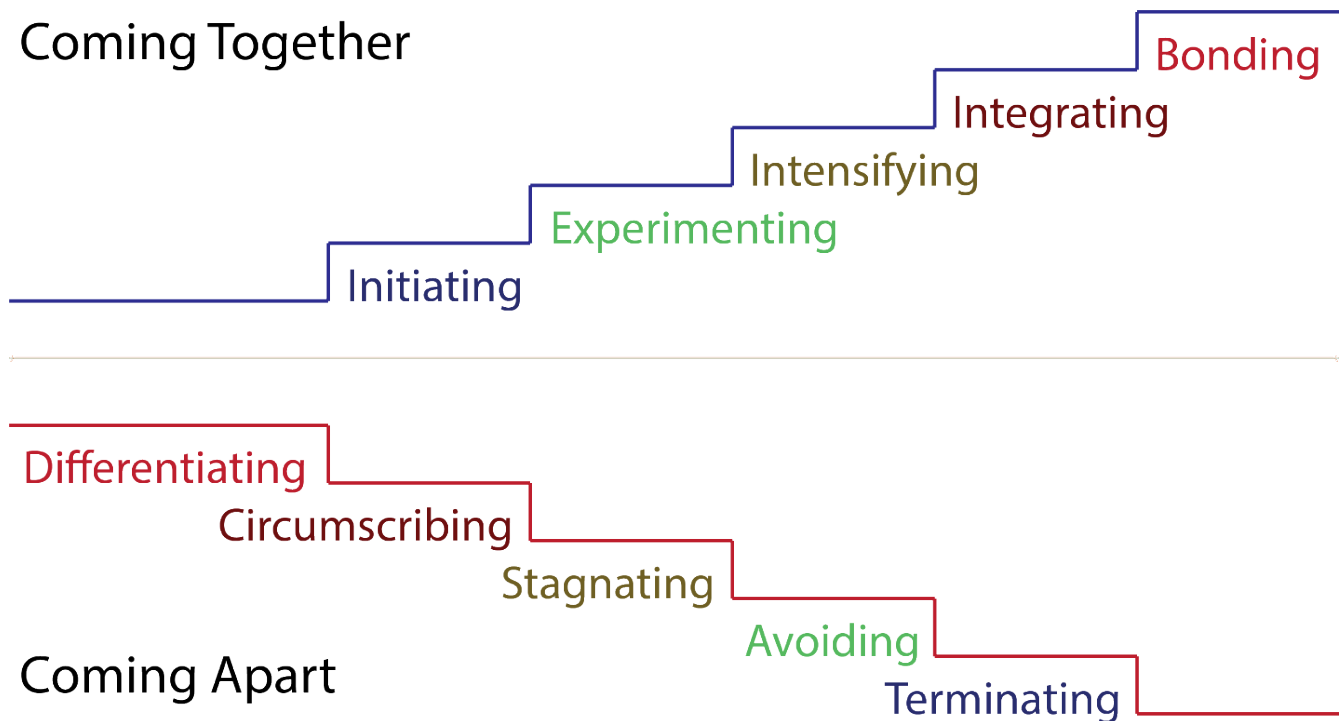


Figure 2. Knapp and Vangelisti's Model of Interaction Stages in Relationships

## Coming Together

Do you remember when you first met a special someone in your life? How did your relationship start? How did you two become closer? Every relationship has to start somewhere and sometime.

In this section, we will learn about the coming together stages, which include: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and then bonding. But even before initiating, especially in the context of romantic relationships, as well as friendships, **attraction** is likely to play an important role. Attraction is a combination of interest in another person and a desire to get to know them better.

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, which can change greatly from one culture or era to the next. We also know that pop culture can greatly define what is considered to be physically

appealing. Think of the curvaceous ideal of Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor in the 1950s as compared to the thin Sydney Sweeney or Anne Hathaway. In the 1950s, you had solid men with “Dad bods” like Robert Mitchum and Marlon Brando as compared to the heavily muscled men of today like Joe Manganiello and Zac Efron. Research shows that males place more emphasis on appearance than do females.<sup>8</sup>

**Social attraction**, or the degree to which an individual sees another person as entertaining, intriguing, and/or fun to be around. Most of us are drawn more to people who are “the life of the party” as opposed to “a stick in the mud.” **Task attraction** occurs when we perceive that others possess specific knowledge, skills, and/or contacts that may help us accomplish specific goals.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to characteristics associated with the three types of attraction, proximity and the existence of similarities or differences can also play roles in determining with whom we initiate relationships. It is entirely common for romantic couples to trace their origin story to settings that they had in common. Proximity contributes when partners meet at work, the gym, the grocery store, or have a common circle of friends that introduce them.

People with similar cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds and characteristics are typically drawn to each other. The **similarity thesis** states that we tend to form relationships with others who are like us.<sup>2</sup> There are three reasons why this may be: 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. 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 have realistic expectations about what the person will do and how they will behave. We also feel affiliation, or connection, with others who seem like us. It can be thrilling to discover all the similarities shared with a potential relationship partner; who hasn’t stayed up most of the night finding out that this new person also likes Olivia Rodrigo and lobster roll and can’t stand movies with loud car chases and explosions?

However, in some cases, people feel a better match to those who are less like them. Differences between partners tend to benefit relationships when they are **complementary**, which means that their dissimilar characteristics fulfill each other’s needs. Introverts who prefer to talk less may prefer extroverts who like to talk more. An adept cook may cherish the opportunity to feed an appreciative partner who barely manages to add milk to cereal. However, differences can lead to problems in relationships as when a free spender is resented by a frugal budgeter or the sloppy are paired with the fastidiously tidy.



Figure 3. Attraction and Initiating. “Man wearing brown leather zipper jacket.” By Vera Arsic. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

Conversation may be superficial and not very personal; this squares with Uncertainty Reduction Theory, which is introduced in the next section of this chapter.

## Experimenting

After we have initiated communication with the other person, we go to the next stage, **experimenting**, when “small talk” happens and commonalities are discovered. At this stage, Eduardo and Karina begin considering whether they wish to continue the relationship by learning more about the other person. Multiple interactions tend to be casual and reveal hometowns, favorite colors and subjects and pet peeves. Thoughts about forming an actual relationship preoccupy; Karina considers whether she can tolerate Eduardo’s smoking habit while embracing his charitable nature. For now, members of recent generations might describe the relationship as one of “talking.”

## Intensifying

The **intensifying** stage features establishment of identity as knowledge about partners increases greatly. Conversations become more serious and interactions more meaningful. Eduardo may begin to consider Karina to be his girlfriend, or they may mutually agree that they are now “dating” or “seeing each other.” Both are becoming more serious about their relationship.

## Integrating

As a couple achieves deeper levels of expectations and commitment, perhaps including exclusivity, and tells others about the relationship, they are inhabiting the **integrating** stage. The amount of time spent together

## Initiating

Once attraction has been established, the five stages of Coming Together may begin. Having determined that you are willing to take the risk and expend the effort of approaching a potential partner, you must let them know of your interest in initiating a conversation.

The **initiating** stage is the first one, when making contact and signaling interest are the goals. Eduardo says hello and introduces himself to Karina, who makes sure to indicate her receptivity by smiling and touching his arm. In this earliest of relational stages, they are primarily interested in making contact.

grows as do assumptions about participating in many activities together. Individuals now think of themselves as a unit.

Part of the appeal of the reality show, *Married At First Sight*, comes with observing couples who are so blatantly mixing up these stages of relationships by getting married at their first introduction to each other. Nevertheless, a great example of the integrating stage emerged. In Season 16 of *MAFS*, Shaquille takes great exception to Kirsten not offering to accompany him on his business trips as a college recruiter. Her failure to meet his expectation of this act of integration becomes a very large sticking point as Shaquille considers whether to pursue a divorce at the season finale.

## Bonding

The final stage of Coming Together is **bonding**, when commitment is increased and announced to wider social networks. In the case of couples on the path to marriage, this might include the proposal and engagement. For many traditional couples, relationships with partners' families have already started but now the ties are drawing tighter. Karina and Eduardo actually got eloped and married before making the announcement of that ultimate commitment to everyone they know!

In the circumstance of marriage, it is not like the relationship is done growing. As landmarks and milestones like anniversaries, child birth, and renewal of vows pass, integrating and bonding are addressed and experienced again. In fact, a void in the stages approach appears here as many relationships are maintained for years and years before coming apart, and some never do. The next section of this chapter reviews some of the interpersonal communication scholarship about relational maintenance.

Nevertheless, what separates Knapp and Vangelisti's first and last five stages is some dividing line between Coming Together and Coming Apart.

## Coming Apart

Some couples can stay longterm in committed and wonderful relationships, even if faced with individual or collective turmoil. For others, however, things inevitably come apart. No matter how hard they try to stay together, tension, resentment, and mistrust may foil those efforts. These ill-fated couples go through a Coming Apart process that involves: differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating.

## Differentiating

The **differentiating** stage is when the parties start to disengage with their identity as a couple in favor of their own. Independence begins to outstrip interdependence. Differences become over-emphasized while commonalities are overlooked. Language may start to change from "our car" and "our child" to "my car" and "my child." Tensions become harder to resolve, partly because they are associated with others from the past. These are early signals that the relationship is coming apart.



Figure 4. Differentiating and Circumscribing. “Woman in blue denim jeans sitting beside man in white long sleeve.” by Viktoria Slowikowska.

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## Circumscribing

**Circumscribing** is the stage when partners strive to limit their interactions with each other. Communication will lessen in quality and quantity. Taboo topics are avoided to prevent arguments. Less time spent together and fewer displays of affection and intimacy are exhibited.

## Stagnating

The next stage is **stagnating**, which means the relationship is not improving or growing. Limited communication becomes restrained, if not downright awkward. The partners may still live with each other physically but an emotional inertia prevents attempts to rebuild the relationship, which has become a chore. The couple is approaching the point of no return, where odds for reconciliation are becoming remote.

## Avoiding

When a couple prefers to stay away from each other entirely rather than interact or communicate, they have reached the **avoiding** stage. As partners have no desire to see or speak to each other, physically moving out of the shared residence becomes increasingly likely. Sadness is at its height as mourning for the relationship has started.

## Terminating

The **terminating** stage is when the parties end the relationship, gradually or suddenly, and make arrangements for life post-relationship. Awareness of interpersonal communication has popularized a focus on the channels (e.g., text message, email, Facebook posting, face-to-face) utilized for “breaking up” and their varied effects.

## Final Caveat On Stage Models

Knapp and Vangelisti’s is not the only approach to mapping relational life cycles. For instance, fellow scholar and theorist Steve Duck proposes four phases of relationship dissolution: the intrapsychic (i.e., dissatisfaction emerges for at least one of the partners), dyadic (i.e., discontent transforms from a private cognition to a shared impression), social (i.e., relational conflict goes public with family and friends) and grave-dressing (i.e., the relationship ends and narratives about reasons are created) phases.<sup>10</sup>

It bears repeating that stage models do not, nor do they intend to, perfectly portray the progression of every romantic relationship. Not every one goes through each of the ten stages; some terminate before the experimenting stage is complete. Some relationships coast smoothly after the intensifying or bonding stages without ever Coming Apart. Even after a period of stabilization, maintenance, and satisfaction, movement in either direction through more stages is possible.

Moreover, communication technology, terminology, and dating practices of contemporary couples may create more distance between reality and stage models. The stages do a poor job representing “talking,” “hooking up” or having “friends with benefits.” Relationships may also take place primarily, or even solely, in digital space.

Still, the ten stages of Coming Together and Coming Apart map pretty well to many romantic couples. Critically, they also provide description and recognition of phenomena that many dating partners identify, and with which they need understanding and assistance to best navigate.

### Key Takeaways

- Attraction comes in physical, social, and task forms and may also be inspired by proximity, similarities, and even differences.
- Knapp and Vangelisti’s model recognizes five stages of Coming Together and five stages of Coming Apart.
- The Coming Together stages include: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding.
- The Coming Apart stages include: differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating.
- Care should be taken not to subscribe to stage models strictly; human behavior is rarely that linear or predictable.

### Exercises

- Ask couples that you know how they started and determine the role of proximity in their meeting.
- Which of the five stages of Coming Together have you most clearly experienced in your romantic history?
- Which of the five stages of Coming Apart have you most clearly experienced in your romantic history?

## Interpersonal Communication Theory and Romantic Relationships

### Theories Tied to Relationship Progression

Interpersonal communication theory is a source of vast knowledge and guidance for anyone who relates with others, no matter their experience or success levels of the past. Several interpersonal communication theories may be considered to be most relevant to earlier or later stages of relational development, which is not to say they don't pertain to other times in relationships, too.

Dealing with uncertainty is a prominent aspect on the front end of most romantic relationships. Working to maintain relationships mostly occurs between their beginnings and endings, while gauging and contrasting their costs and benefits may inform decisions about whether to terminate them.

This section provides short summaries of concepts found, and communication's roles, in each of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Behaviors of Relational Maintenance, and Social Exchange Theory.

### Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Harboring an interest in communication as it takes place early in relationships, Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese began fleshing out their Initial Interaction Theory in the early 1970s. One phenomenon figured so prominently in their work that it was soon centered in the revamped **Uncertainty** Reduction Theory.<sup>11</sup> They began to understand that early in relationships, even as soon as the very first interaction, the participants experience, and react to, the unpleasant sensation of uncertainty.

Picture yourself on the first day at your college or university. Chances are good you moved into a residence like a dorm, before classes started, and were thrust into a variety of orientation activities. This was probably marked by the meeting of many new people in a short period of time. Every one of those people you met that day, or any other, were initially strangers to you.

The word, “stranger” originates in the French, “*étrangier*,” which translates to foreigner or alien. To each of us, strangers are strange. We know nothing about them, save what we immediately observe. Are they experienced or novices like us? Do they give of themselves freely to those they don’t know? And who exactly are they, anyway? What are they here for, what do they want? Could they be dangerous? Should I stay away from them?

These and hundreds of other questions we ask ourselves about new people are initially unanswered. We are so far from certain about them; in fact, we are quite uncertain. And we don’t like it.

Berger and Calabrese called uncertainty an aversive state, one based in our lack of knowledge about something, like a place or event, or someone, like Jacques, the Canadian first-year student who wore a hockey sweater on the first day of orientation, which was about 95°.

Because we don’t know much of anything about others in our first few meetings with them, we are usually quite uncomfortable. We don’t know whether they prefer Mike or Michael, we don’t know whether they like to kid around, we don’t know whether a political remark will send them off the deep end. Uncertainty, excuse our French, sorta sucks.

So, we are motivated to *reduce* the *uncertainty* inherent in these situations. Finding out more about this poorly known person, gathering information, thus increasing our certainty (i.e., reducing our uncertainty) about them is the only route for making ourselves feel better about interacting with them now or in the near future.

In fact, if we think we will see them again, we will really want to find out more. Berger and Calabrese nominated three conditions that are likely to supercharge our quest to discover information. The first is **anticipation of future interaction**. Jacques apparently lives next door to you now so you might as well start figuring him out. The business dude in the big brimmed classes, humming to himself on an elevator in a building that you won’t revisit, is a much less worthy target of investigation.



Figure 5. Elevator Strangers. “A Man in Blue Long Sleeves Looking at the Woman Walking Towards the Elevator” by cottonbro studios. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

However, if that business dude sports a Google logo conference badge and you would do anything to get your resume noticed by that company, you might have what the theorists called, **incentive value**. Get to know this guy a little and maybe you can get your foot in the door! From the romantic perspective, maybe you find yourselves attracted to the new person (i.e., they’re hot!) and your incentive is to pursue them for purposes of physical intimacy.

Finally, Berger and Calabrese predicted that **deviance**, behavior that is unexpected or out of place, can serve as a motivational boost to reduce uncertainty. If he goes from humming on the elevator to belting out the theme song, “Hello, Dolly!” while performing a little soft shoe dance routine, you probably become extremely curious about

what makes this guy tick (unless, the deviance from expected behavior is so severe that you lose all motivation to be around, or know, the stranger at all).

So if uncertainty is discomfiting and we are driven to counteract it with some information, how do we go about doing that?

The first strategy is the **passive** one, where we merely observe all we can about the target’s appearance and behavior. The second is **active**, where we ask around about them or perform our own furtive investigation, perhaps on social media. And the third is **interactive**, where we actually engage the individual in our mission to learn about them.

Utilizing face-to-face conversation, there are three well-recognized tactics. One is to just ask them questions. You can inquire about their name, their age, where they live, what they study or do for a living, or even whether they are a regular here where you’ve met them.

A barrage of questions is not always the most pleasant way to interact, however. Another tactic is to offer information about yourself, in hopes that they will match you with some about themselves. The superficial level of the questions, and the information disclosed, at this early point in the relationship are very much the stuff of Social Penetration Theory, covered in the Talking and Listening chapter.

Lastly, we can hazard guesses about them and allow them to confirm or invalidate them:

“I hear that accent of yours, I bet you’re a Red Sox fan.”

“No, my Dad was from Long Island and we’re actually generational Yankee fans.”

“Do you all get to go back to New York? I’ve always wanted to go.”

And the race to reduce uncertainty is officially underway! Especially in the early stages of relationships, the reduction of uncertainty drives much of our communication.

## Relationship Maintenance Behaviors

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, your relationships need attention. **Relationship maintenance** lasts from the first to last interaction episodes between partners. It consists of the behaviors and strategies that enable the stabilization point between relationship initiation and potential relationship destruction.<sup>12</sup>

Daniel Canary and Laura Stafford stated that “most people desire long-term, stable, and satisfying relationships”<sup>13</sup> and that relationship maintenance behaviors are required to achieve them. They believed that relationships do not just “fall apart or happen to stay together.”<sup>13</sup>

Joe Ayres studied how individuals maintain their interpersonal relationships.<sup>14</sup> He discovered that relational intent determined effort; partners that really want to stay together are more likely to employ the three maintenance strategies he identified.

First, **avoidance strategies** are used to evade communication that might threaten the relationship. Laura may just deal with figuring out how to pay the monthly bills rather than bring up how her girlfriend Iris is spending way too much lately. **Balance strategies** are used to maintain equality in the relationship so that partners do not feel underbenefited or overbenefited from being in the relationship.<sup>14</sup> Iris makes sure to do some house cleaning on the weekends as Laura is stuck with many household chores during the week. Finally, **direct strategies** are used to evaluate and remind the partner of relationship objectives. Laura will occasionally try to refresh Iris’ desire to save up enough together to achieve their house buying dream.

Canary and Stafford promote five key relationship maintenance behaviors. First, communicating with positivity is a critical relational maintenance factor as being nice results in romantic partners feeling happy and supported.

Second, openness is the degree to which partners disclose and share information and feelings. 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 together or dividing them fairly. Later, Canary and his colleagues found two more important relationship maintenance behaviors: effectively managing conflict and providing advice.<sup>15</sup>

Positivity's placement among these behaviors is substantiated by a famous premise, founded in the relational research program of John Gottman. Along with colleague Robert Levenson, Gottman determined that<sup>16</sup>



Figure 7. Relationship Maintenance Behaviors.

partners in satisfying relationships provide a ratio of five positive behaviors or comments for every single negative one. So, if Tennyley wants to make sure her relationship with Jimmie is satisfying, for every harsh criticism or sarcastic aside she throws at him, there should be some humor, a few acts of affection, a compliment, and an unsolicited favor.

Finally, in a series of studies originally intended to compare Canary and Stafford's maintenance behaviors as enacted in computer-mediated as opposed to face-to-face interactions, Andrew Ledbetter found that participants in everyday relationships reported much more specific behaviors. These included: sharing possessions, sharing entertainment media experiences, spending time together, casual conversation as well as deeper talks, both verbal and physical expressions of affection, sharing responsibility for tasks, managing and recovering from conflict, being humorous, and engaging in shared networks of family and friends.<sup>17</sup> The



Figure 6. Compliments for Positivity. "Text on a White Surface," by Eva Bronzini. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

eleven behaviors may not be the perfect recipe for keeping love alive but they sure seem incredibly advantageous for long-term couples.

## Social Exchange Theory

Maggie is growing increasingly exasperated with her boyfriend, Gunnar. When he approached her at a school-sponsored dance two years ago, she could not have been more elated. She considered herself to be “bookish and a little mousy, to be honest” while Gunnar was the star of the drama club’s presentations of *Our Town* and *Mamma Mia*. Maggie remembered a slumber party sleepover where her girlfriends spoke in awe about the shine that came off his teeth on stage.

The couple has been together exclusively ever since. However, in the last few weeks alone, Maggie has bailed Gunnar out after a charge of DUI, tended to the wounds he suffered in a bar brawl, disputed rumors that he impregnated a sophomore from the next town over, and fought to get her credit card charges expunged when he took her Visa on a solo vacation.

For all the affection she enjoys from him and attention the popular girls give him as his main squeeze, Maggie is wondering whether the relationship is worth it anymore. Her process of considering a break up with Gunnar is an ideal example of John Thibaut and Harold Kelley’s Social Exchange Theory.<sup>18, 19</sup>

Social Exchange Theory adopts an economic orientation to relationship evaluation. Thibaut and Kelley believed that we, perhaps not completely consciously, engage in cost-benefit analysis as we consider relationships we are engaged in. The rewards of being in romantic relationships are many: security, companionship, sex, love, support, and status. Some also garner material benefits from their relationships like living in a better house and neighborhood or buying fancier clothes and better cars.

But relationships may cost us quite a bit as well. We may find ourselves lacking free time, independence, the excitement of single life and responsibilities like supporting and caregiving our partners through times of illness, grief, job loss, etc. Our partners may drain us of energy, time, passion, money, or other resources.

Partners who find that the pleasurable aspects of a romantic relationship compensate for, or outstrip, the associated downsides are likely to wish to continue. Conversely those who feel the expense, worry, arguing and resentment are outweighing the rewards may start to lose interest in continuing the relationship and allow, or inspire, the onset of stages of Coming Apart.

Though such economic assessment can occur no matter how young a relationship is, it may be fair to regard Social Exchange Theory as most related to the latter stages. This is because by its nature, Social Exchange may help to predict or explain the reasons that relationships breakup and end.



Figure 8.  
Considering Costs  
and Benefits.  
“Woman at Desk  
Looking at Receipt  
and Scratching Her  
Head,” by Karolina  
Kaboompics. [All  
photos and videos  
on Pexels are free  
to download and  
use; Attribution is  
not required.](#)

Thibaut and Kelley operationalize this balancing of the emotional ledger with a concept they call the **comparison level (CL)**, which is the minimum standard for satisfaction that a relational partner is willing to tolerate. When Maggie, having summed the positives and the negatives, figures out what her own satisfaction level is in her relationship with Gunnar, she compares that to her CL. If the CL is exceeded, she is likely to remain committed to the relationship but if the CL is higher, Maggie may opt out.

We should note that we each have our own CL; that is, our standards vary for how much relational satisfaction is enough. A major determinant of anyone’s CL is probably the quality of their prior, perhaps recent, relationships. If you had a history of really bad relationships, you might be content now with a mediocre one, for instance.

Costs and rewards are not the only factors used to review the worth of a romantic relationship. Social Exchange Theory accounts for the incorporation of alternatives to the relationship. Thibaut and Kelley established the **comparison level of alternatives (CL<sub>alt</sub>)**, as a threshold for satisfaction in a relationship determined by available alternative arrangements. If Gunnar has a bevy of beauties lined up and ready to take Maggie’s place, his relationship with her is going to have to provide a very high level of satisfaction for him to stay interested.

A perfect embodiment of the CL<sub>alt</sub> is an image that just about all of us are familiar with. The distracted boyfriend meme is a street scene where a young couple has just passed an attractive girl in a red dress. The boyfriend, clad in his blue plaid shirt, has turned his head all the way around to look at her more, with an admiring expression on his face. His girlfriend peers up at him, astonished and disgusted by his interest and his lack of respect for her. The image has been circulated throughout the Internet with a variety of labels applied to the characters like Charles Barkley for the guy, MVP Trophy for the girlfriend, and World Championship for the girl in the dress.

For our purposes, the passing girl is perhaps directly raising this guy’s CL<sub>alt</sub> as well as the ire of his girlfriend.

Who knows? Perhaps his wandering eye has just tipped the scale in the favor of disadvantages his girlfriend considers whether to continue their romance!

## Theories Relevant Throughout Relationships

Whereas theories about uncertainty reduction, maintenance behaviors, and social exchange apply to any phase of a romantic relationship, they map particularly well to the early, middle, and later stages, respectively. Communication Privacy Management, Relational Dialectics, and Genderlect theories are evergreen for all phases of relationships, just as likely to come into play at any given point. We are always determining which secrets to share with whom, how to get all that we want out of our relationships, and how to best communicate and relate with people of other sexes or genders.

### Communication Privacy Management

Sandra Petronio is another communication scholar who has renamed her theory to better reflect how it has developed. Communication Boundary Management Theory<sup>20</sup> has been rebranded as Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory<sup>21</sup> since the 1990s. Though disclosure is treated more holistically in our Talking and Listening chapter, CPM deserves its placement here as it explains one of the chief sources of tension in romantic relationships.

Petronio contends that issues of information ownership, sharing secrets, and regulating rules for doing it are vital components of romantic relationships. **Privacy boundaries** are symbolically placed between personal private information and details that are shared with others. Individuals establish rules for who they share this information with and why. Rules are also inherently understood by, or expressed to, the receivers of private information as to who else is privy to the shared information. Anyone who receives the information is then said to co-own it.

Critically, when privacy rules are broken, a condition Petronio calls **boundary turbulence**, relational chaos may ensue.



Figure 9. Privacy Management. “elderly-gentleman-making-silence-gesture-in-studio” by Andrea Piacquadio. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

So, Savannah is torn about whether to share an embarrassing and distressing part of her history with Andrés, her fiancé of eighteen months. From eleven to seventeen years of age, Savannah struggled mightily with body image, believing that she was too overweight to be attractive or at times, to even show herself in public.

She developed anorexia nervosa and made a practice of no more than two bites of food per sitting. This meant she seldom ate with friends or family which only heightened her feelings of isolation and worthlessness. When her weight loss made no difference in how she felt about her body, she became despondent to the point of considering self-harm. Thankfully, a concerned guidance counselor elicited this information from Savannah and helped her enter therapy and treatment that returned her to a lifestyle similar to her peers.

Savannah is terrified that Andrés will leave her when he learns of her past behavior, which she now considers to be embarrassing. She decides that he deserves to know about it and “what he is getting himself into.” Her boundary for this issue is that no one else besides her most intimate partner should ever hear about it.

Andrés receives the story quite well and assures Savannah that no one should be ashamed of their past if they have made progress in their lives. “After all,” he tells her, “everything that you have ever gone through has contributed to the amazing, sexy, brilliant, vital person you are today!”

Savannah is thrilled with his reaction but explicitly sets the privacy rule that he must never tell anyone in his family, even though they are a close-knit and honest group. She didn’t feel the need to demand that he not tell

anyone else because he is obviously sensitive enough to know that this secret is not for public consumption. This reliance on an implicit rule is where they run into trouble.

A few weeks later, Andrés casually mentions that he reassured a salesperson at work that they could overcome their eating disorder just as his fiancé had. Savannah was instantly enraged with him both for revealing her secret to a complete stranger to her and also to someone who she might someday have to face. Andrés is bewildered as he felt he had followed her instructions perfectly as he never told anyone in his family.

As you might imagine, this boundary turbulence was extremely difficult for the young couple to work through. She still loved him but was now doubting his judgment and her trust in him. They finally were able to move on with their plans to marry after resolving that explicit communication was necessary in matters of such importance.

## Relational Dialectics

The construct of **dialectics** has been recognized by many scholars for many years. They are opposing forces that create everyday experiences of feeling pushed and pulled at the same time.

Leslie Baxter is a scholar who has always been interested in the challenges presented by relationships and the use of communication, or dialogue as her academic idol Mikhail Bakhtin referred to it, to navigate them. Early in Baxter's career her colleagues were interested in relational beginnings and disclosure, while she gravitated more towards relationship termination and decisions NOT to disclose made in relationships. The seeds of her Relational Dialectics can be found in these conditions of antithesis.

In 1996, with Barbara Montgomery, Baxter published the book, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*.<sup>22</sup> It reported research about dialectical tensions in families, romantic relationships, and friendships. Their overarching research premise is that all personal ties and relationships are always in a state of constant flux and contradiction. Specifically, **relational dialectics** form a “dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies.”<sup>23</sup>

Relational dialectics form contradictions that are co-existing and must be met with a “both/and” approach as opposed to an “either/or” mindset. For each of the three famous oppositional dialectics, the more relational partners have of one, the less they have of the other. Where both or either (!) parties prefer to be on the spectrum between the two poles can be another matter entirely. Each of these realities assures that the navigation of dialectics in relationships, especially romantic ones, is a never-ending, ever-changing process of communication and adjustment.

Though others (e.g., Ideal-Real, Similar-Different, Accepting-Critical) have been identified, the three most often covered in academic journal articles and textbook chapters are Integration-Separation, Stability-Change, and Openness-Closedness. Sometimes, synonyms are used for any of the dialectical poles but these terms represent the essence of the Big Three.

## Integration-Separation

Within the dialectic of Integration-Separation, partners seek intimacy, closeness and commitment, but also desire their own identity, space, and time. As great as it is to have someone who will be there always, to go to movies with and eat dinner together, raise a family and spend the holidays, it also feels necessary to see friends on your own, have your own hobbies, and have quiet time at home. James loves watching romantic comedies with his wife, Michele, in their home theatre, but if he had to do it every night, he couldn't spend the alone time he craves with his comic book collection and his online gaming community. She could not imagine James joining her book club but looks so forward to making dinner together in their kitchen most nights.

## Stability-Change

One of the nicest benefits of being in a romantic relationship is the stability it provides. Your partner is probably dependable and can be counted on to be the one that makes the bed or calls the cable company whenever there is a service outage. You don't have to experience the ridiculous highs but also numerous lows of traversing the dating scene. If there is a family funeral or wedding, there your partner will be, at your side. Families of Italian descent in East Coast locations such as New Jersey and Long Island are notorious for traditions like Wednesday Pizza Night and Saturdays being for steak and pasta; the reliability of these rituals can be incredibly comfortable and pleasant.

On the other hand, sameness can be stagnant and boring. If Lois and Alonzo institute a set schedule for sex, though they can count on that and are happy to make it a priority, the absolute regularness of that can make it mundane rather than exciting. While we enjoy attending our partner's company holiday party every year, it is the same location and same people each time. Wouldn't it be fun to just skip it and jet off to the tropics just once instead? For as much as routine and steadiness are wonderful aspects of long-term relationships, if they preclude change and prevent growth, the lack of novelty may foster dissatisfaction should follow.

## Expression-Privacy

It is pretty easy to find information about, and encouragement of self disclosure in this book. The Talking and Listening chapter includes Social Penetration Theory in which the act of disclosing to others is celebrated as the essence of intimacy. Indeed, one reason we cherish our romantic partners is that they are sounding boards for all of our experiences, feelings, and secrets. It is so much easier when you have someone to complain



Figure 10. Separation by Man Cave. "Unrecognizable Man Playing Videogame in Dark Room," by Erik Mclean. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

to about the cubicle inhabitant at work who insists on eating her tuna salad at her desk or to share your excitement with about an impending promotion. We also appreciate being the confidante, the person our beloved will share with, in kind.

Conversely, there should be some measure of privacy in our relationships, too. Our significant other doesn't need to know every thought or sensation we have. Memories of a prior lover, your parents' original doubts about them, and the contents of your middle school journal might very well be things that you want to protect even from "your person."

If you are sensing similarity between the openness-closedness dialectic and Communication Privacy Management, welcome to the wonderful world of communication theory where insightful perspectives about the human condition sometimes overlap in fascinating ways!

Relational dialectics as a theory is a treatment of disparities that emerge with consideration of the continuums between integration and separation, stability and change, and openness and closedness. One source of the disparity is between the desired and the actual. If you would like to be on your own about 35-40% of your waking hours but your spouse is nearby nearly every single minute, that is a challenging difference. Such difficulty can be magnified by the potential of disparity between partners' preferences like if one is a risk and novelty seeker while the other is a secure homebody. Finally, each of us changes over time. My partner may be confused when my previous willingness to listen to every detail of her girlfriends' drama transforms to a position of not wanting to know everything that she experiences.

One of Baxter's core premises is that dialogue, or communication, is the route to shoring up some of these relational fissures. If you feel your partner has pulled away too much, devoting ever more time to their work or sports, talk to them about it. If they are irked that you have been going through their text messages and DMs, they should talk to you about it. Through conversation, negotiation, and compromise, the resolutions of dialectical discrepancies and outcomes of romantic relationships, are most likely to be satisfying.

## Genderlect

The terms sex and gender are often used interchangeably though they shouldn't be. **Sex** refers to a person's biological status as male or female, as determined by chromosomes and secondary sex characteristics. **It is mainly treated as a binary variable.** **Gender**, however, refers to the behaviors and traits society considers masculine and feminine.<sup>24</sup> It is fluid, can vary in many different ways, and includes more than two possible values (e.g., masculine, feminine, androgynous). Ironically, one of the first theories about differences between the sexes in communication adopted the term gender and was called genderlect.

## Sex Differences in Interpersonal Communication

In the United States, we have expectations for how males and females should communicate and behave.<sup>25</sup> We

learn sex differences at a very young age. Boys and girls are socialized to play, perform, dress, and respond to things differently by families, mass media, in school and on the playground.

A popular theory that explores sex differences is Deborah Tannen's genderlect theory. It essentially represents the idea that men and women are so different and have such different interactional and communication approaches and purposes, it is as though they were raised in different cultures. In fact, most were raised differently in the same culture but Tannen points out they almost speak and relate in different versions of the same languages. This is how she derived the term genderlect. The theory predicts tremendous struggles in communicating with the other sex that can only be overcome with specialized scrutiny and adaptation.

In her book, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Tannen describes how men prefer "report" talk that is task-oriented and women engage in "rapport" talk, where the purpose is to develop relationships and emotional connections.<sup>26</sup> Men are more competitive, especially in public settings and make themselves the heroes in their own stories while women are more collegial and downplay their individual roles and contributions. Women want to explore feelings with their male romantic partners but they prefer to avoid such discussion. Men want to keep things straightforward and deal with relational issues in pragmatic, rational tones.



Figure 11. Sex and Gender Differences. "Man and Woman Having a Discussion," by RDNE Stock. All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.

Genderlect and the different cultures thesis have come under critical scrutiny. A pre-eminent scholar of sex-related differences and similarities, Kathryn Dindia, has pored over huge literatures of related studies and concludes, "sex differences exist but they are overwhelmed by similarities. When there are differences in general they are small."<sup>27</sup> For instance, some studies find a lack of significant difference between the sexes. Others find significant differences but with small effect sizes which means they were not as pronounced as they could be. And critically, these studies usually represent samples where something like 85% of the men and women overlap in their scores and the differences reside in only the remaining 15%. In fairness, some larger differences were found to exist in the ways that males and females express themselves nonverbally.

One excellent and specific refutation of the genderlect/different cultures theory came when a University of Kansas professor of Communication Studies, Adrienne Kunkel, and her advisor at Purdue University, Brant Burleson, tested whether males and females had different preferences for how they are offered comfort when upset. Unlike what genderlect would predict, men and women both desired emotional support such as talking it out more than instrumental support such as helping to fix a problem.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, the prospect of ALL men behaving one way and ALL women behaving another is intuitively doubtful. Maybe the most important caution against subscribing fully to the predominance of differences between the sexes is that the binary division of the world into males and females is becoming less acceptable. Gender is growing as the sex adjacent identity that most people now prefer to report.

### Key Takeaways

- Uncertainty Reduction Theory poses communication tactics such as questioning and disclosure for getting to know new people better, which makes us feel better.
- A variety of behaviors are associated with successful relationship maintenance. These include, but are not limited to: positivity, openness, expression of affection, and time spent together and with family and friends.
- Social Exchange Theory predicts that motivation to continue romantic relationships hinges on cost-benefit analysis and comparison to a minimum level standard of satisfaction or to available alternatives.
- Communication Privacy Management examines private information, our decisions about who to share it with, and rules for who they are allowed to share it with.
- Relational dialectics are contradictory desires within relationship, such as integration vs. separation, stability vs. change, and expression vs. privacy.
- Genderlect theory, which represents men and women as so consistently different that they must adjust communication greatly in order to get along, has received less support in recent years.

### Exercises

- Which of the relationship maintenance strategies do you identify as having employed in your own romantic experiences? Find a peer and compare your answers.
- Do you think your preferences lean more towards one side than the other in each of the

integration vs. separation, stability vs change, and expression vs. privacy dialectics. Why do you think so?

- What is an example of private information that you were willing to share with one person but not with another?

## Dating Scripts and Love Styles

We talk of dating as a single construct a lot of the time without really thinking through how dating has changed over time. In the twentieth century alone, we saw dating go from a highly formalized structure involving calling cards and sitting rooms, to drive-in movies shared in a car, to online dating with people we've never met in real life.<sup>29</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has already changed how people date through social networking sites and geolocation dating apps on smartphones. Social trends have moved away from terms like “going steady” and towards “talking” or “hooking up.” Dating is not a single thing, and dating has definitely changed with the times.

Paul Mongeau, Janet Jacobsen, and Carolyn Donnerstein presented five “supracategories” for what constitutes a “date”.<sup>30</sup> First, dating involves specific communication expectations. For example, people expect that their dating partner will be polite, relaxed, and social. Second, dating involves specific goals, like exploring a romantic relationship or just having fun. Third, specific date elements include getting ready, meeting somewhere, and engaging in shared activity. Fourth, dates are dyadic and couple-based, even when they are embedded in larger “group dates.” Last, dates involve feeling states which may include attraction and affection.<sup>30</sup>

Online matching service Match.com publishes an annual study examining single dating life and has recently found the following about their respondents:

- 48.9% have created at least one profile on a dating website or app.
- 41.1% have dated someone they met online.
- 25.1% have a “checklist” when it comes to finding a long-term romantic partner.
- 83.5% believe that love is hard to find in today’s world.
- 38.1% have been in a “friends with benefits” relationship.
- 28.3% had a friendship that turned into a significant romantic relationship.<sup>31</sup>

As dating appears to still be a significant feature of romantic relationship pursuit, it follows that many people have specific ideas for how dating works.

## Dating Scripts

Robert Abelson originally proposed the idea of script theory back in the late 1970s.<sup>32</sup> He defined a script as a “coherent sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him as either a participant or an observer.”<sup>32</sup> According to script theory, people tend to pattern their responses and behaviors during different social interactions, which requires being able to imagine past, present, and future behaviors and developing a script of expectations.<sup>33</sup>

In 1993, Suzanna Rose and Irene Frieze derived two different scripts for dating based on the reports of their heterosexual male and female college student sample. The male script consisted of 15 different behavioral actions, all initiated by the male:<sup>34</sup>

1. Picked up date
2. Met parents/roommates
3. Left
4. Picked up friends
5. Confirm plans
6. Talked, joked, laughed
7. Went to movies, show, party
8. Ate
9. Drank alcohol
10. Initiated sexual contact
11. Made out
12. Took date home
13. Asked for another date
14. Kissed goodnight
15. Went home

The female script, contained behaviors exhibited by both parties on a date:<sup>34</sup>

1. Groomed and dressed
2. Was nervous
3. Picked up date (male)
4. Introduced to parents, etc.
5. Courtly behavior (open doors–male)
6. Left
7. Confirmed plans
8. Got to know & evaluate date

9. Talked, joked, laughed
10. Enjoyed date
11. Went to movies, show, party
12. Ate
13. Drank alcohol
14. Talked to friends
15. Had something go wrong
16. Took date home (male)
17. Asked for another date (male)
18. Told date will call her (male)
19. Kissed date goodnight (male)

Take a second and go through these two lists. How do you think they differ? How well might they apply among today's heterosexual couples? One year after Rose and Frieze's study, Dean Klinkenberg developed scripts for gay male and lesbian dates.<sup>35</sup> Would you guess that they differed from Rose and Frieze's and from each other?

We've all been conditioned since we were very young to date and how to do it. We've listened to adults tell stories, watched dating as it is fictionalized on television and in movies, experienced it ourselves, and shared notes with friends. Thankfully, because there are cultural images of dating presented to us, our dating partners are likely to have similar dating scripts to ours, as long as they are from the same, or a similar, culture.

## Research Spotlight



One area that has received a decent amount of attention in script theory is sexual scripts, or scripts people engage in when thinking about “who can participate, what the participants should do (i.e., what verbal and nonverbal behaviors should be included and in what order they should be used), and where the sexual episode should take place.”<sup>36</sup> In 1993, Timothy Edgar and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick proposed a sexual script theory for communication.<sup>37</sup> In 2010, Betty La France examined reactions to the following scripts for public and private verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors that lead to sex:

Public Setting Script	Private Setting Script (Her Apartment)
<p>Craig was standing at the bar when he noticed Sarah. She also noticed him. There was eye contact between them. She glanced away. He approached her. "Hi, my name is Craig," he said. "I'm Sarah. How are you doing?," she replied. "Can I buy you a drink?," he asked. Craig asked, "Are you alone?" "No, I came with some friends," she replied. Craig asked her questions about herself, such as where she was from and what her major was. She responded to his questions. In return, Sarah asked Craig similar questions about himself.</p>	<p>She brought him a drink. "Want to listen to some music?," asked Sarah. She put on the music. Craig asked, "Are your roommates around?" "This is a great apartment," said Craig. He sat next to her on the couch. They engaged in casual conversation. There was eye contact between them. He moved closer to her. "You are so beautiful," said Craig. He put his arm around her. <i>Bedroom setting</i> He undressed her. Craig started to undress himself. Sarah helped him to undress. They discussed whether they should use protection. Craig put on a condom.</p>

La France found that participants predicted that as sexual scripts progressed, the likelihood that Sarah and Craig were going to have sexual intercourse increased. Overall, La France found that the sequence of both verbal and nonverbal sexual behaviors could predict the likelihood that people believed that Sarah and Craig would have sex. For example, in the public setting script, when Sarah says, "No, I came with some friends," this caused people to think that sex could be off-the-table because the statement indicates that the likelihood of the two leaving alone is lower.<sup>36</sup>

La France, B. (2010). What verbal and nonverbal communication cues lead to sex? An analysis of the traditional sexual script. *Communication Quarterly*, 58(3), 297–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2010.503161>

## Love Styles

An individual's **love style** is a persistent attitude about how love is perceived and valued, practiced and experienced, that is usually stable but may change over time.<sup>38</sup> For instance, college students may perceive love differently from their parents or guardians because they are in a different stages of life.

John Lee's love typology presents six love styles named with Greek and Latin terms for love, that you may identify with more or less so: eros, storge, ludus, agape, pragma, and mania (see Figure 12).<sup>39</sup>

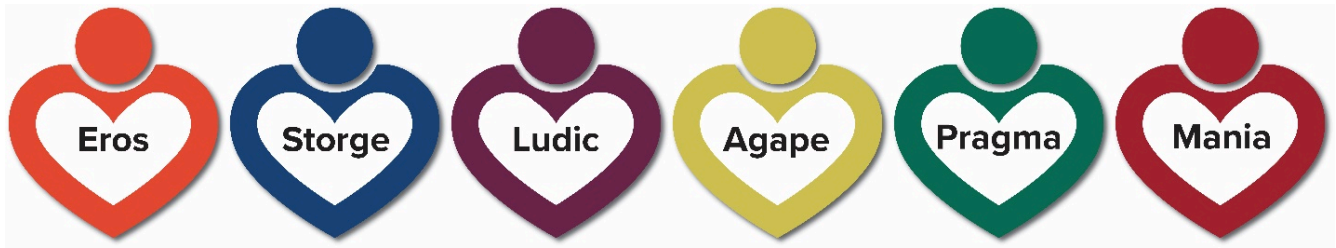


Figure 12. Love Styles

## Eros

**Eros** is the love style that emphasizes love and romance, physical beauty and attraction, emotional intensity, and strong commitment. Eros love often involves the early initiation of sexual intimacy and lends itself to consecutive monogamous relationships. Tyreek and Alex, who both subscribe to eros, were attracted to each other while participating in different social groups across a loud and sweaty club. They felt immediate sparks when they joined on the dance floor and have had a physically satisfying, though sometimes tumultuous, relationship ever since.



Figure 13. Storge – Friendly Love. “Man s Black Denim Pants,” by Marlene Leppänen. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

are deception and manipulation. Individuals with this love style have lower tolerance for commitment and strong emotional attachment. Durga likes to have several boyfriends at different stages so that she can avoid being alone when one of them does not work out for her. She tells some of them about this arrangement and hides it from others.

## Storge

**Storge** love resembles, or develops slowly out of, friendship where stability and psychological closeness are valued along with commitment. Passion and intense emotions are not valued as much as they are in the eros love style but the slow burn of storge may lead to a more enduring love. Stanley was a man in his 60s who had never been married but employed Phyllis, who cooked and cleaned for him for over 20 years. Their families were surprised, though pleasantly so, to receive their announcements of marriage.

## Ludic

**Ludic** lovers view love as a game, and play according to their rules in hopes of coming out ahead. The acceptance of multiple partners is likelier within the ludic love style, but so

## Agape

In contrast, **agape** love involves altruism, giving, and other-centered love. This love style approaches relationships in a non-demanding style with gentle caring and tolerance for others. Agapic lovers put their partners in front of themselves and often express their feelings through kind actions.

## Pragma

**Pragma** love is practical, logical and rational. In some contemporary cultures and many more of the past, marriages were arranged by families for functional purposes. The first tsar of Russia, Ivan the Terrible, married Anastasia Romanova in 1547 to bring together the Rurikid and Romanov family dynasties and deliver power to him. History shows that their pragmatic love transformed into one of eros, as they wound up entranced by each other. Nonetheless, this pragmatic approach to love, even when arranged, may see romantic partners paired for financial stability, family building, or simple companionship.

## Mania

**Mania** is the love style characterized by dependence, uncertainty, jealousy, and emotional upheaval. This type of lover is generally insecure and needs constant reassurance. Manic lovers may be accused of emotionally suffocating their partners and struggle with the integration-separation dialectic presented earlier in this chapter.

These love styles should not be considered to be mutually independent. An individual may approach love from an erotic stance but find and enjoy love that provides financial stability. You may find that several of the love styles seem to reflect your personality and preferences, as well. As with stage models of relational progress, the love styles are less about being predictive or prescriptive and more about being descriptive of behaviors we can identify from the realm of romance.

- Sequences of communication and behavioral expectations for dating and initiation of sex have been developed.
- The types of love are eros, ludus, mania, storge, pragma, and agape.
- Each love style can be found in all individuals, but some love styles are more prominent for each of us than are others.

## Exercises

- Discuss why dating scripts are useful to publish and share. What are some significant aspects of your dating script that seem to be missing from Rose and Frieze's?
- Determine the love style of each of your parents and grandparents, as well as your own. Describe how your love style developed and whether it was more learned or more an innate characteristic you possess.

## Key Terms

### **active**

Strategy of asking around about, or investigating, another person to learn information about them.

### **agape**

The love style that involves altruism, giving, caring, kindness, and other-centered love.

### **anticipation of future interaction**

The belief that we will deal with someone again, thus boosting the need to reduce uncertainty.

### **attraction**

Interest in another person and a desire to get to know them better.

### **avoidance strategies**

Used to evade communication that might threaten a relationship.

### **avoiding**

The fourth stage of Coming Apart when a couple stays away from each other entirely, ceases communication, and considers moving out of the shared residence.

### **balance strategies**

Used to maintain equality in the relationship so that partners do not feel underbenefited or overbenefited.

**bonding**

The final stage of Coming Together when commitment is increased and announced to wider social networks.

**boundary turbulence**

Chaotic condition resulting when violations of explicit or implicit privacy rules are broken within a relationship.

**circumscribing**

The second stage of Coming Apart, when partners strive to limit the number of interactions and amount of communication with each other.

**comparison level (CL)**

The minimum standard for satisfaction that a relational partner is willing to tolerate.

**comparison level of alternatives (CL<sub>alt</sub>)**

The threshold for satisfaction in a relationship determined by available alternative arrangements.

**complementary**

When people fulfill each other's needs by featuring differing characteristics.

**contact frequency**

How often relational partners communicate with each other.

**deviance**

Behavior that is unexpected or out of place and boosts the need to reduce uncertainty.

**differentiating**

The first stage of coming apart when parties start to disengage with their identity as a couple in favor of their own.

**dialectics**

Opposing forces that create everyday experiences of feeling pushed and pulled at the same time.

**direct strategies**

Used to remind a partner of relationship objectives.

**duration**

The length in time of a relationship.

**eros**

The love style that emphasizes love and romance, physical beauty and attraction, emotional intensity, and strong commitment.

**experimenting**

The second stage of coming together when “small talk” happens and commonalities are discovered.

**gender**

The behaviors and traits society considers masculine and feminine.

**goals**

Expectations and hopes for relational functions and outcomes.

**incentive value**

The belief that knowing someone will benefit us in some way, thus boosting the need to reduce uncertainty.

**initiating**

The first stage of coming together when making contact and signaling interest are the goals.

**integrating**

The fourth stage of coming together when deeper levels of expectations and commitment, perhaps including exclusivity, are reached.

**intensifying**

The third stage of coming together when identity as a couple is established and knowledge about partners increases greatly.

**interaction variability**

The variety of interaction types experienced, and topics covered, with particular relational partners.

**interactive**

Strategy of participating in interaction with another person to learn information about them.

**love style**

A persistent attitude about how love is perceived and valued, practiced and experienced, that is usually stable but may change over time.

**ludic**

The love style that features viewing of love as a game to be played according to rules that include acceptance of multiple partners, deception, and manipulation.

**mania**

The love style characterized by dependence, uncertainty, jealousy, and obsessive need for affirmation.

**passive**

Strategy of observing another person to learn information about them.

**physical attraction**

The degree to which one person finds another person aesthetically pleasing.

**pragma**

The love style that is practical, logical and rational, resulting sometimes in arranged relationships.

**privacy boundaries**

Symbolically placed borders between personal private information and details that are shared with others.

**relationship**

A connection or association between people that is marked by affiliation, attachment, and commitment.

**relational dialectics**

A “dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies”<sup>20</sup> such as integration vs. separation, expression vs. privacy, and stability vs. change.

**relationship maintenance**

Behaviors and strategies that enable stabilization point between relationship initiation and potential relationship destruction.

**romantic relationship**

A union that features any or all of: affection, caregiving, shared relational identity, and intimacy in the form of emotional, intellectual, physical or sexual closeness.

**sex**

A person’s biological status as male or female, as determined by chromosomes and secondary sex characteristics.

**sharing**

The process of revealing and disclosing information about oneself to another.

**similarity thesis**

The idea that we tend to form relationships with others who are like us due to validation, predictability, and affiliation.

**social attraction**

The degree to which an individual is seen as entertaining, intriguing, and/or fun to be around.

**stagnating**

The third stage of Coming Apart when the relationship has stopped improving or growing and emotional inertia blocks hopes for reconciliation.

**storge**

The love style that resembles, or develops slowly out of, friendship where stability and psychological closeness are valued more than passion.

**support**

Any message or behavior that conveys caring or comfort to another person so as to improve their condition.

**task attraction**

The perception that another possesses specific knowledge, skills, and/or contacts that may help with accomplishing specific goals.

**terminating**

The fifth and final stage of Coming Apart, and tenth overall, when the parties end the relationship, gradually or suddenly, and make arrangements for life after the “break-up.”

**uncertainty**

An uncomfortable state of not knowing much or enough about something or someone.

## Notes

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# CONFLICT IN RELATIONSHIPS

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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 looks at how conflict functions and provide several strategies for managing interpersonal conflict.

## Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between the terms conflict, disagreement, and argument.
- Explain the interrelationships among emotions and feelings.
- Describe emotional awareness and its importance to interpersonal communication.
- Differentiate between “I” and “You” statements.
- Explain the five common styles of conflict management
- Recognize the Four Horsemen of the Relational Apocalypse
- Understand and apply the STLC Conflict Model

## Understanding Conflict

For our purposes, it is necessary to differentiate a conflict from a disagreement.<sup>1</sup> A **disagreement** is a difference of opinion and often occurs during an **argument**, or a verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects. It’s important to realize that arguments are not conflicts, but if they become verbally aggressive, they can quickly turn into conflicts. One factor that ultimately can help determine if an argument will escalate into a conflict is an individual’s tolerance for disagreement. James McCroskey and colleagues defined **tolerance for disagreement** as whether an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.<sup>2,3</sup> People that have a high tolerance for disagreement can easily discuss opinions with pretty much anyone and realize that arguing is perfectly normal and, for some, even entertaining. People that have a low tolerance for disagreement feel personally attacked any time someone is perceived as devaluing their opinion. From an interpersonal perspective, understanding someone’s tolerance for disagreement can help in deciding if arguments will be perceived as the other as attacks

that could lead to verbally aggressive conflicts. However, not all conflict is necessarily verbally aggressive nor destructive.

The term “conflict” is actually very difficult to define. Simplistically, **conflict** is an interactive process occurring when individuals or groups have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations resources and/or values. First, conflict is interactive and inherently communicative. Second, two or more people or even groups of people must be involved. Lastly, there are a whole range of different areas where people can have opposing or incompatible opinions. For this generic definition, we provided a laundry list of different types of incompatibility that can exist between two or more individuals or groups. Is this list completely exhaustive? No. But we provided this list as a way of thinking about the more common types of issues that are raised when people engage in conflict. From this perspective, everything from a minor disagreement to a knock-down, drag-out fight would classify as a conflict.

## Two Perspectives on Conflict

As with most areas of interpersonal communication, no single perspective exists in the field related to interpersonal conflict. There are generally two very different perspectives that one can take. On the one hand, you had scholars who see conflict as a disruption in a normal working system, which should be avoided. On the other hand, some scholars view conflict as a normal part of human relationships.<sup>4</sup> Let’s look at each of these in this section.

### Perspective 1: Conflict Disrupts Working Systems

The first major perspective of conflict was proposed by McCroskey and Wheelless who described conflict as a negative phenomenon in interpersonal relationships:

Conflict between people can be viewed as the opposite or antithesis of affinity. In this sense, interpersonal conflict is the breaking down of attraction and the development of repulsion, the dissolution of perceived homophily (similarity) and the increased perception of incompatible differences, the loss of perceptions of credibility and the development of disrespect.<sup>6</sup>

From this perspective, conflict is something inherently destructive. McCroskey and Richmond went further and argued that conflict is characterized by antagonism, distrust, hostility, and suspicion.<sup>7</sup>

This negative view of conflict differentiates itself from a separate term, disagreement, which is simply a difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people. Richmond and McCroskey note that there are two types of disagreements: substantive and procedural.<sup>8</sup> A **substantive disagreement** is a disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue. Basically, if you and your best friend want to go eat at two different restaurants for dinner, then you’re engaging in a substantive disagreement. On the other hand, **procedural disagreements** are “concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a

policy should be implemented.”<sup>2</sup> So, if your disagreement about restaurant choice switches to a disagreement on how to make a choice (flipping a coin vs. rock-paper-scissors), then you’ve switched into a procedural disagreement.

In this view, conflict is a disagreement plus negative affect; not only do you disagree with someone else, you don’t like the other person. It’s the combination of a disagreement and dislike that causes a mere disagreement to turn into a conflict. Ultimately, conflict is a product of how one communicates this dislike of another person during the disagreement. People in some relationships end up saying very nasty things to one another during a disagreement because their affinity for the other person has diminished. When conflict is allowed to continue and escalate, it “can be likened to an ugly, putrid, decaying, pus-filled sore.”<sup>10</sup>

From this perspective, conflicts are ultimately only manageable; whereas, disagreements can be solved. Although a disagreement is the cornerstone of all conflicts, most disagreements don’t turn into conflicts because there is an affinity between the two people engaged in the disagreement.

## Perspective 2: Conflict is a Normal Part of Human Communication

The second perspective of the concept of conflict is very different from the first one. Cahn and Abigail contend conflict is a normal, inevitable part of life.<sup>11</sup> In this view, conflict is one of the foundational building blocks of interpersonal relationships. One can even ask if it’s possible to grow in a relationship without conflict. Managing and overcoming conflict makes a relationship stronger and healthier. Ideally, when interpersonal dyads engage in conflict management (or conflict resolution), they will reach a solution that is mutually beneficial for both parties. In this manner, conflict can help people seek better, healthier outcomes within their interactions.

In this view, conflict is neither good nor bad, but it’s a tool that can be used for constructive or destructive purposes. Conflict can be very beneficial and healthy for a relationship. Let’s look at how conflict is beneficial for individuals and relationships:

- Conflict helps people find common ground.
- Conflict helps people learn how to manage conflict more effectively for the future.
- Conflict provides the opportunity to learn about the other person(s).
- Conflict can lead to creative solutions to problems.
- Confronting conflict allows people to engage in an open and honest discussion, which can build relationship trust.
- Conflict encourages people to grow both as humans and in their communication skills.
- Conflict can help people become more assertive and less aggressive.
- Conflict can strengthen individuals’ ability to manage their emotions.
- Conflict lets individuals set limits in relationships.
- Conflict lets us practice our communication skills.

When one approaches conflict from this vantage point, conflict can be seen as a helpful resource in interpersonal relationships. However, both parties must agree to engage in prosocial conflict management strategies for this to work effectively.

## Interpersonal Conflict

According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict requires four factors to be present:

1. the conflict parties are **interdependent**,
2. they have the **perception that they seek incompatible goals or outcomes** or they favor incompatible means to the same ends,
3. the perceived incompatibility has the potential to **adversely affect the relationship** leaving emotional residues if not addressed, and
4. there is a **sense of urgency** about the need to resolve the difference. <sup>12</sup>

Let's look at each of these parts of interpersonal conflict separately.

### People are Interdependent

According to Cahn and Abigail, “**interdependence** occurs when those involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important, making it worth the effort to maintain.”<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, interpersonal conflict occurs when we are in some kind of relationship with another person. For example, it could be a relationship with a parent/guardian, a child, a coworker, a boss, a spouse, etc. In each of these interpersonal relationships, we generally see ourselves as having long-term relationships with these people that we want to succeed. We may have disagreements and arguments with all kinds of strangers, but those don't rise to the level of interpersonal conflicts.

### Differing Goals, Differing Means to the Same End

An incompatible goal occurs when two people want different things. For example, imagine you and your best friend are thinking about going to the movies. They want to see a big-budget superhero film, and you're more in the mood for an independent artsy film. In this case, you have pretty incompatible goals (movie choices). You can also have incompatible means to reach the same end. Incompatible means, in this case, “occur when we want to achieve the same goal but differ in how we should do so.”<sup>14</sup> For example, you and your best friend agree on going to the same movie, but not about at which theatre you should see the film.

## Negative Effects When Unaddressed

Next, interpersonal conflicts can lead to very negative outcomes if the conflicts are not managed effectively. Here are some, of many, possible examples of conflicts that are not managed effectively:

- One partner dominates the conflict, and the other partner caves-in.
- One partner yells or belittles the other partner.
- One partner uses half-truths or lies to get her/his/their way during the conflict.
- Both partners only want to get their way at all costs.
- One partner refuses to engage in conflict.

Again, this is a sample laundry list of some of the ways where conflict can be mismanaged. When conflict is mismanaged, one or both partners can start to have less affinity for the other partner, which can lead to a decreasing in liking, decreased caring about the relational partner, increased desire to exit the relationship, increased relational apathy, increased revenge-seeking behavior, etc. All of these negative outcomes could ultimately lead to conflicts becoming increasingly more aggressive (both active and passive) or just outright conflict avoidance.

## Role of Urgency in Resolving Conflict

Lastly, there must be some sense of urgency to resolve the conflict within the relationship. Conflict must get to the point where it needs attention, and a decision must be made or an outcome decided upon, or else. Conflict can escalate if it is not resolved. Indeed, some people let conflicts stir and rise over many years that can eventually boil over, but these types of conflicts when they arise generally have some other kind of underlying conflict that is causing the sudden explosion. For example, imagine your spouse has a particularly quirky habit. For the most part, you ignore this habit and may even make a joke about the habit. Finally, one day you just explode and demand the habit must change. Now, it's possible that you let this conflict build for so long that it finally explodes. It's kind of like a geyser. According to Yellowstone National Park, here's how a geyser works:

The looping chambers trap steam from the hot water. Escaped bubbles from trapped steam heat the water column to the boiling point. When the pressure from the trapped steam builds enough, it blasts, releasing the pressure. As the entire water column boils out of the ground, more than half the volume is this steam. The eruption stops when the water cools below the boiling point.<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, sometimes people let irritations or underlying conflict percolate inside of them until they reach a boiling point, which leads to the eventual release of pressure in the form of a sudden, 'out of nowhere' conflict. In this case, even though the conflict has been building for some time, the eventual desire to make this conflict known to the other person does cause an immediate sense of urgency for the conflict to be solved.

## Emotions, Feelings, and Needs in Conflict

Emotions and feelings relate to harmony and discord in a relationship, so it's important to differentiate between the two. **Emotions** are our biophysical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment. This definition assumes emotions can be objectively measured by blood flow, brain activity, skin conductance, and nonverbal reactions to things. **Feelings**, on the other hand, are the responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality. So, there is an inherent relationship between emotions and feelings, but we do differentiate between them. Table 1 breaks down the differences between the two concepts.

<b>Emotions:</b>	<b>Feelings:</b>
Emotions tell us <b>what</b> we “like” and “dislike.”	Feelings tell us “ <b>how to live.</b> ”
Emotions state: “There are <b>good</b> and <b>bad actions.</b> ”	Feelings state: “There is a <b>right</b> and <b>wrong way to be.</b> ”
Emotions state: “ <b>The external world matters.</b> ”	Feelings state: “ <b>your emotions matter.</b> ”
Emotions establish our <b>initial attitude</b> toward reality.	Feelings establish our <b>long-term attitude</b> toward reality.
Emotions alert us to <b>immediate dangers</b> and prepare us for action.	Feelings alert us to <b>anticipated dangers</b> and prepares us for
Emotions ensure <b>immediate survival</b> of self (body and mind).	Feelings ensure <b>long-term survival</b> of self (body and mind)
<b>Emotions are Intense</b> but <b>Temporary.</b>	<b>Feelings are Low-key</b> but <b>Sustainable.</b>
<b>Joy:</b> is an emotion.	<b>Happiness:</b> is a feeling.
<b>Fear:</b> is an emotion.	<b>Worry:</b> is a feeling.
<b>Enthusiasm:</b> is an emotion.	<b>Contentment:</b> is a feeling.
<b>Anger:</b> is an emotion.	<b>Bitterness:</b> is a feeling.
<b>Lust:</b> is an emotion.	<b>Love:</b> is a feeling.
<b>Sadness:</b> is an emotion.	<b>Depression:</b> is a feeling.
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Table 1 Differentiating Emotions and Feelings

It's important to understand that we are all emotional beings. Being emotional is an inherent part of being a human. That's why we should avoid phrases like “don't feel that way” or “they have no right to feel that way.” When we negate someone else's emotions, we are negating that person as an individual and taking away their right to emotional responses. At the same time, though, no one else can make you “feel” a specific way. Our emotions are our emotions. They are how we interpret and cope with life. A person may set up a context where you experience an emotion, but you are the one who is still experiencing that emotion and allowing yourself to

experience that emotion. If you don't like "feeling" a specific way, then change it. We all have the ability to alter our emotions. Altering our emotional states (in a proactive way) is how we get through life. Maybe you just broke up with someone, and listening to music helps you work through the grief you are experiencing to get to a better place. For others, they need to openly communicate about how they are feeling in an effort to process and work through emotions. The worst thing a person can do is attempt to deny that the emotion exists.

Other research has demonstrated that handling negative emotions during conflicts within a marriage (especially on the part of the wife) can lead to faster de-escalations of conflicts and faster conflict mediation between spouses.<sup>16</sup> Our emotions often (but not always) translate into feelings.

## Emotional Awareness

Some people are better at recognizing and managing their emotions than others, we call this emotional awareness. **Emotional awareness**, or an individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why, is an extremely important factor in effective interpersonal communication. Unfortunately, our emotional vocabulary is often quite limited. One extreme version of not having an emotional vocabulary is called **alexithymia**, "a general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, there are many people who can accurately differentiate emotional states but lack the actual vocabulary for a wide range of different emotions. For some people, their emotional vocabulary may consist of good, bad, angry, and fine. Learning how to communicate one's emotions is very important for effective interpersonal relationships.<sup>18</sup> First, it's important to distinguish between our emotional states and *how we interpret* an emotional state the feelings that ensue. For example, you can feel sad or bitter, which may prompt you to feel alienated. Your sadness and bitterness may lead you to perceive yourself as alienated, but alienation is a perception of one's self and not an actual emotional state.

## "You" Statements Reveal How We Talk Matters

According to Marshall Rosenberg, the father of nonviolent communication, "You" statements ultimately are moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.<sup>19</sup> When we make moralistic judgments about others, we tend to deny responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Remember, when it comes to feelings, no one can "make" you feel a specific way. We choose the feelings we inhabit; we do not inhabit the feelings that choose us. When we make moralistic judgments and deny responsibility, we end up creating and perpetuating cycles of defensiveness where your individual needs are not going to be met by your relational partner. Behind every negative emotion is a need not being fulfilled, and when we start blaming others, those needs will keep getting unfilled in the process. Often this lack of need fulfillment will result in us demanding someone fulfill our need or face blame or punishment.

For example, “if you go hang out with your friends tonight, I’m going to hurt myself and it will your fault.” In this simple sentence, we see someone who disapproves of another’s behaviors and threatens to blame their relational partner for the individual’s behavior. In highly volatile relationships, this constant blame cycle can become very detrimental, and no one’s needs are getting met.

If you have heard about “you” statements it’s likely you’ve also heard about one solution to them: Using “I” statements. “I” statements focus on articulating your feelings and emotions. However, just observing behavior and stating how you feel only gets you part of the way there because you’re still not describing your need.

## Needs and Conflict

When we talk about the idea of “needing” something, we are not talking about this strictly in terms of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, though those are all entirely appropriate needs. At the same time, relational needs are generally not rewards like tangible items or money. Instead, Rosenberg categorizes basic needs that we all have falling into the categories: *autonomy*, *celebration*, *play*, *spiritual communion*, *physical nurturance*, *integrity*, and *interdependence* (Table 2). As you can imagine, any time these needs are not being met, you will reach out to get them fulfilled. As such, when we communicate about our feelings, they are generally tied to an unmet or fulfilled need. For example, you could say, “I feel dejected when you yell at me because I need to be respected.” In this sentence, you are identifying your need, observing the behavior, and labeling the need. Notice that there isn’t judgment associated with identifying one’s needs.

Area	Need
<b>Autonomy</b>	to choose one's dreams, goals, values
	to choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values
<b>Celebration</b>	to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
	to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)
<b>Play</b>	fun
	laughter
<b>Spiritual Communion</b>	beauty
	harmony
	inspiration
	order
	peace
<b>Physical Nurturance</b>	air
	food
	movement, exercise
	protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals
	rest
	sexual expression
	shelter
	touch
	water
<b>Integrity</b>	authenticity
	creativity
	meaning
	self-worth

Area	Need
<b>Interdependence</b>	acceptance
	appreciation
	closeness
	community
	consideration
	contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one’s power by giving that which contributes to life)
	emotional safety
	empathy
	honesty (the empowering honest that enables us to learn from our limitations)
	love
	reassurance
	respect
	support
	trust
understanding	
warmth	
<p>Source: Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life 2nd Ed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg, 2003–published by PuddleDancer Press and Used with Permission.                      For more information visit <a href="http://www.CNVC.org">www.CNVC.org</a> and <a href="http://www.NonviolentCommunication.com">www.NonviolentCommunication.com</a></p>	

**Table 2 Needs**



Research Spotlight



In 2020, researchers Anna Wollny, Ingo Jacobs, and Luise Pabel set out to examine the impact that trait EQ has on both relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping. Dyadic coping is based on Guy Bodenmann's Systemic Transactional Model (STM), which predicts that stress in dyadic relationships is felt by both partners.<sup>21</sup> So, if one partner experiences the stress of a job loss, that stress really impacts both partners. As a result, both partners can engage in mutual shared problem-solving or joint emotion-regulation.<sup>22</sup>

According to Bodenmann, there are three different common forms of dyadic coping:

- **Positive dyadic coping** involves the provision of problem- and emotion-focused support and reducing the partner's stress by a new division of responsibilities and contributions to the coping process.
- **Common dyadic coping** (i.e., joint dyadic coping) includes strategies in which both partners jointly engage to reduce stress (e.g., exchange tenderness, joint problem-solving).
- **Negative dyadic coping** comprises insufficient support and ambivalent or hostile intervention attempts (e.g., reluctant provision of support while believing that the partner should solve the problem alone).<sup>23</sup>

In the Wollny et al. (2000) study, the researchers studied 136 heterosexual couples. Trait EQ was positively related to relationship satisfaction. Trait EQ was positively related to positive dyadic coping and common dyadic coping but not related to negative dyadic coping.

Wollny, A., Jacobs, I., & Pabel, L. (2020). Trait emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction: The mediating role of dyadic coping. *The Journal of Psychology*, 154(1), 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2019.1661343>

## Gottman's Four Horseman of the Relational Apocalypse

In the study of interpersonal communication, understanding conflict and its resolution is crucial. Psychologist John Gottman identified four negative communication patterns that predict relationship failure, which he termed the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." These behaviors are Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling. Gottman's research, based on decades of observing couples, provides a framework for recognizing and addressing destructive patterns in relationships.<sup>51</sup>

## Criticism

Criticism involves attacking a partner's character or personality rather than focusing on specific behaviors. It often begins with phrases like "You always" or "You never," making it personal and generalized rather than situational. This pattern can erode the foundation of respect and understanding in a relationship. Criticism is prevalent in many relationships and is linked to increased relational dissatisfaction and the emergence of other negative behaviors. <sup>51</sup>

*Example: "You never think about how your actions affect others. You're so selfish."*

*Avoiding Criticism: Use a gentle startup by expressing feelings and stating a positive need. For instance, "I feel hurt when plans change without notice. Can we communicate better about our schedules?"*

## Contempt

Contempt is the most damaging of the Four Horsemen and involves expressing disdain or superiority. This can be through sarcasm, name-calling, eye-rolling, or hostile humor. Contempt conveys disrespect and creates a toxic emotional climate. According to Gottman, contempt is the single greatest predictor of divorce. Couples who exhibit contempt are more likely to divorce than those who do not. <sup>52</sup> Additionally, contemptuous behavior can negatively impact the immune system, with couples engaging in such exchanges experiencing higher stress levels and greater susceptibility to illness. <sup>51</sup>

*Example: "Oh, you're tired? You do nothing all day, unlike me."*

*Avoiding Contempt: Build a culture of appreciation and respect by regularly expressing gratitude and acknowledging your partner's efforts and qualities.*

## Defensiveness

Defensiveness occurs when one responds to perceived criticism by counter-attacking or playing the victim. This behavior escalates conflicts rather than resolving them and often involves making excuses or denying responsibility. Defensiveness is strongly correlated with conflict escalation, perpetuating cycles of argumentation and misunderstanding. <sup>52</sup> Couples who frequently exhibit defensiveness are less likely to resolve conflicts effectively, leading to prolonged disputes and increased relational strain.

*Example: "It's not my fault we're late. You always take forever to get ready."*

*Avoiding Defensiveness: Accept responsibility, even if it's partial. Respond with, "I see why you're upset. Let's figure out how we can manage our time better."*

## Stonewalling

Stonewalling happens when one partner withdraws from the interaction, shutting down and refusing to engage. This can be a response to feeling overwhelmed, but it leads to a lack of resolution and emotional distance. Stonewalling is more commonly observed in men than in women, as men are more likely to withdraw during conflict to self-soothe and avoid emotional flooding.<sup>53</sup> It is associated with increased physiological stress markers, such as elevated heart rate and blood pressure, which can further impede effective communication and conflict resolution.<sup>51</sup>

*Example: One partner stops responding, avoids eye contact, and remains silent during an argument.*

*Avoiding Stonewalling: Take a break to calm down and then return to the conversation. Practice self-soothing techniques and agree on a time to revisit the discussion constructively.*

Longitudinal research by Gottman and colleagues has demonstrated that the presence of the Four Horsemen in early stages of marriage is predictive of marital stability or instability over time. Couples exhibiting high levels of these negative behaviors early on are more likely to divorce within the first six years of marriage.<sup>53</sup> Interventions aimed at reducing the Four Horsemen and promoting positive communication behaviors have been shown to improve relationship satisfaction and decrease the likelihood of divorce. Couples who learn to replace criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling with healthier communication strategies report higher levels of marital satisfaction.<sup>51</sup>

Maintaining a positive-to-negative interaction ratio is essential for the health of relationships. Gottman's research indicates that successful relationships generally maintain a ratio of 5:1—five positive interactions for every negative one. This ratio is crucial for creating a positive emotional climate and mitigating the impact of negative interactions. In contrast, couples in distress often exhibit a ratio of 0.8:1, indicating more negative than positive interactions.<sup>51</sup>

## Conflict Management Strategies

Many researchers have attempted to understand how humans handle conflict with one another. Thomas's model focuses on the behavior individuals engage in when confronted with conflict.<sup>54</sup> Parties to a conflict attempt to implement their resolution mode by competing or accommodating in the hope of resolving problems. A major task here is determining how best to proceed strategically. That is, what tactics will the party use to attempt to resolve the conflict? Thomas has identified five modes for conflict resolution: (1) competing, (2) collaborating, (3) compromising, (4) avoiding, and (5) accommodating (see Table 3).

The choice of an appropriate conflict resolution mode depends to a great extent on the situation and the goals of the party (see Figure 1). According to this model, each party must decide the extent to which it is interested in satisfying its own concerns—called assertiveness—and the extent to which it is interested in helping satisfy the opponent's concerns—called cooperativeness. Assertiveness can range from assertive to

unassertive on one continuum, and cooperativeness can range from uncooperative to cooperative on the other continuum.

Once the parties have determined their desired balance between the two competing concerns—either consciously or unconsciously—the resolution strategy emerges. For example, if a union negotiator feels confident she can win on an issue that is of primary concern to union members (e.g., wages), a direct competition mode may be chosen (see the upper left-hand corner of Figure 1). On the other hand, when the union is indifferent to an issue or when it actually supports management’s concerns (e.g., plant safety), we would expect an accommodating or collaborating mode (on the right-hand side of the figure).

**Table 3 — Five Modes of Resolving Conflict**

<b>Conflict-Handling Modes</b>	<b>Appropriate Situations</b>
Competing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When quick, decisive action is vital—e.g., emergencies</li> <li>2. On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing—e.g., cost-cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline</li> <li>3. On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right</li> <li>4. Against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior</li> </ol>
Collaborating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When trying to find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised</li> <li>2. When your objective is to learn</li> <li>3. When merging insights from people with different perspectives</li> <li>4. When gaining commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus</li> <li>5. When working through feelings that have interfered with a relationship</li> </ol>
Compromising	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When goals are important but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes</li> <li>2. When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals</li> <li>3. When attempting to achieve temporary settlements to complex issues</li> <li>4. When arriving at expedient solutions under time pressure</li> <li>5. As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful</li> </ol>
Avoiding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When an issue is trivial, or when more important issues are pressing</li> <li>2. When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns</li> <li>3. When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution</li> <li>4. When letting people cool down and regain perspective</li> <li>5. When gathering information supersedes the immediate decision</li> <li>6. When others can resolve the conflict more effectively</li> <li>7. When issues seem tangential or symptomatic of other issues</li> </ol>
Accommodating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When you find you are wrong—to allow a better position to be heard, to learn, and to show your reasonableness</li> <li>2. When issues are more important to others than yourself—to satisfy others and maintain cooperation</li> <li>3. When building social credits for later issues</li> <li>4. When minimizing loss when you are outmatched and losing</li> <li>5. When harmony and stability are especially important.</li> <li>6. When allowing subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes.</li> </ol>

*Source:* Adapted from Thomas (1976). (*Credit:* Rice University/OpenStax/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

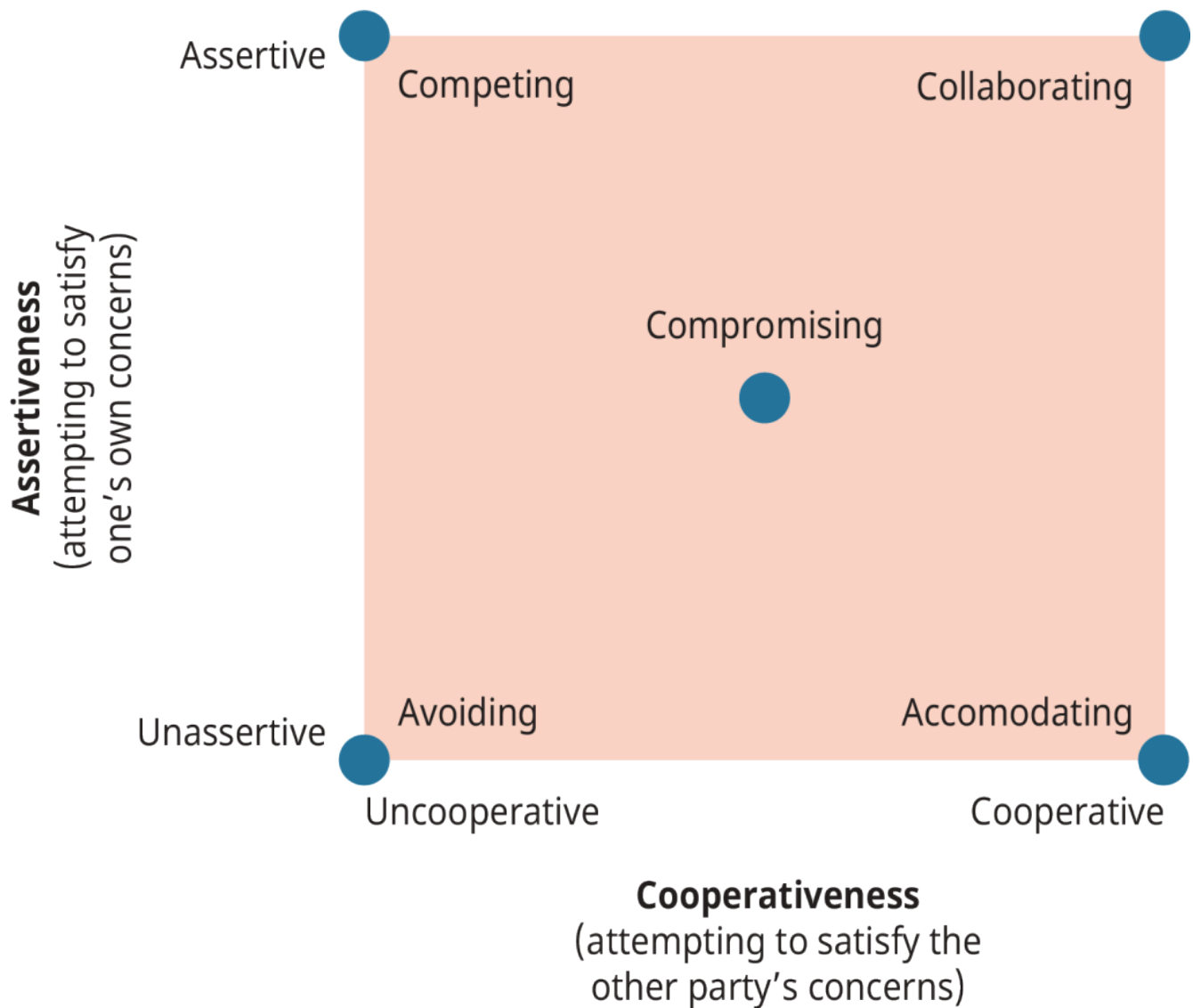


Figure 1: Approaches to Conflict Resolution. Adapted from Thomas (1976). (Credit: Rice University/ OpenStax/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

What is interesting in this process is the assumptions people make about their own modes compared to their opponents'. For example, in one study of executives, it was found that the executives typically described themselves as using collaboration or compromise to resolve conflict, whereas these same executives typically described their opponents as using a competitive mode almost exclusively.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the executives underestimated their opponents' concerns as uncompromising. Simultaneously, the executives had flattering portraits of their own willingness to satisfy both sides in a dispute.

Finally, as a result of efforts to resolve the conflict, both sides determine the extent to which a satisfactory resolution or outcome has been achieved. Where one party to the conflict does not feel satisfied or feels only partially satisfied, the seeds of discontent are sown for a later conflict, as shown in the preceding figure. One unresolved conflict episode can easily set the stage for a second episode. Action aimed at achieving quick

and satisfactory resolution is vital; failure to initiate such action leaves the possibility (more accurately, the probability) that new conflicts will soon emerge.

The last type of conflicting partners are collaborators. There are a range of collaborating choices, from being completely collaborative in an attempt to find a mutually agreed upon solution, to being compromising when you realize that both sides will need to win and lose a little to come to a satisfactory solution. In both cases, the goal is to use prosocial communicative behaviors in an attempt to reach a solution everyone is happy with. Admittedly, this is often easier said than done. Furthermore, it's entirely possible that one side says they want to collaborate, and the other side refuses to collaborate at all. When this happens, collaborative conflict management strategies may not be as effective, because it's hard to collaborate with someone who truly believes you need to lose the conflict.

Alan Sillars and colleagues created a taxonomy of different types of strategies that people can use when collaborating during a conflict. Table 10 provides a list of these common tactics.<sup>45</sup>

<b>Conflict Management Tactics</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
Descriptive Acts	Statements that describe obvious events or factors.	"Last time your sister babysat our kids, she yelled at them."
Qualification	Statements that explicitly explain the conflict.	"I am upset because you didn't come home last night."
Disclosure	Statements that disclose one's thoughts and feelings in a non-judgmental way.	"I get really worried when you don't call and let me know where you are."
Soliciting Disclosure	Questions that ask another person to disclose their thoughts and feelings.	"How do you feel about what I just said?"
Negative Inquiry	Statements allowing for the other person to identify your negative behaviors.	"What is it that I do that makes you yell at me?"
Empathy	Statements that indicate you understand and relate to the other person's emotions and experiences.	"I know this isn't easy for you."
Emphasize Commonalities	Statements that highlight shared goals, aims, and values.	"We both want what's best for our son."
Accepting Responsibility	Statements acknowledging the part you play within a conflict.	"You're right. I sometimes let my anger get the best of me."
Initiating Problem-Solving	Statements designed to help the conflict come to a mutually agreed upon solution.	"So let's brainstorm some ways that will help us solve this."
Concession	Statements designed to give in or yield to a partner's goals, aims, or values.	"I promise, I will make sure my homework is complete before I watch television."

**Table 10 Integrative Conflict Management Strategies**

## STLC Conflict Model

Abigail and Cahn created a very simple model when thinking about how we communicate during conflict.<sup>47</sup> They called the model the STLC Conflict Model because it stands for stop, think, listen, and then communicate (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 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.”<sup>48</sup>

## 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 discussed in other parts of this textbook, 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. 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.

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."<sup>42</sup>

## Mindfulness Activity

The STLC Model for Conflict is definitely one that is highly aligned with our discussion of mindful interpersonal relationships within this book. Taylor Rush, a clinical psychologist working for the Cleveland Clinic's Center for Neuro-Restoration, recommends seven considerations for ensuring mindfulness while engaged in conflict:



1. **Set intentions.** What do you want to be discussed during this interaction? What do you want to learn from the other person? What do you want to happen as a result of this conversation? Set your intentions early and check-in along the way to keep the conversation on point.
2. **Stay present to the situation.** Try to keep assumptions at bay and ask open-ended questions to better understand the other person's perspective and experiences.
3. **Stay aware of your inner reactions.** Disrupt the automatic feedback loop between your body and your thoughts. Acknowledge distressing or judgmental thoughts and feelings without reacting to them. Then check them against the facts of the situation.
4. **Take one good breath before responding.** A brief pause can mean all the difference between opting for a thoughtful response or knee-jerk reaction.
5. **Use reflective statements.** This is a tried and true strategy for staying present. It allows you to fully concentrate on what the other person is saying (rather than form your rebuttal) and shows the other person you have an interest in what they are actually saying. This will make them more likely to reciprocate!
6. **Remember, it's not all about you.** The ultimate objective is that both parties are heard and find the conversation beneficial. Try to actively take the other person's perspective and cultivate compassion (even if you fundamentally do not agree with their position). This makes conflict escalation much less likely.
7. **Investigate afterward.** What do you feel now that the conversation is over? What was the overall tone of the conversation? Do you feel like you understand the other person's perspective? Do they understand yours? Will this require further conversation or has the issue been resolved? Asking these questions will help you to hone your practice for the future.<sup>50</sup>

For this activity, we want you to think back to a recent conflict that you had with another

person (e.g., coworker, friend, family member, romantic partner, etc.). Answer the following questions:

1. If you used the STLC Model for Conflict, how effective was it for you? Why?
2. If you did not use the STLC Model for Conflict, do you think you could have benefited from this approach? Why?
3. Looking at Rush's seven strategies for engaging in mindful conflict, did you engage in all of them? If you didn't engage in them all, which ones did you engage in, and which ones didn't you engage in? How could engaging in all seven of them helped your conflict management with this person?
4. If you haven't already, take a moment to think about the questions posed in #7 of Rush's list. What can you learn from this conflict that will help prepare you for future conflicts with this person or future conflicts more broadly?

### Key Takeaways

- A conflict occurs when two people perceive differing goals or values, and if the two parties do not reach a solution, the interpersonal relationship could be seriously fractured. An argument, on the other hand, is a difference of opinion that occurs between two people during an argument. The primary difference between a conflict and an argument involves the emotional volatility of the situation. However, individuals with a low tolerance for disagreement may perceive any form of argument as interpersonal conflict.
- Emotions are our physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment; whereas, feelings are the responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.
- Emotional awareness involves an individual's ability to recognize their feelings and communicate about them effectively. One of the common problems that some people have with regards to emotional awareness is a lack of a concrete emotional vocabulary for both positive and negative feelings. When people cannot adequately communicate about their

feelings, they will never get what they need out of a relationship.

- One common problem in interpersonal communication is the overuse of “You” statements. “I” statements are statements that take responsibility for how one is feeling. “You” statements are statements that place the blame of one’s feelings on another person. Remember, another person cannot make you feel a specific way. Furthermore, when we communicate “you” statements, people tend to become more defensive, which could escalate into conflict.
- Thomas’ Conflict Management Grid suggests there are multiple ways to approach conflict, none is superior but each balances one’s own and a partner’s needs.
- Gottman’s four horsemen of the relational apocalypse are strong predictors of relational failure due to repeated conflict.
- Dudley Cahn and Ruth Anna Abigail’s STLC method for communication is very helpful when working through conflict with others. STLC stands for stop, think, listening, and communicate. Stop and time to be present within the conflict itself and prepare. Think through the real reasons for the conflict and what you want as an outcome for the conflict. Listen to what the other person says and try to understand the conflict from their point-of-view. Communicate in a manner that is assertive, constructive, and aware of your overall message.

## Key Terms

### **accidental communication**

When an individual sends messages to another person without realizing those messages are being sent.

### **alexithymia**

A general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way.

### **argument**

A verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.

**avoidance**

Conflict management style where an individual attempt to either prevent a conflict from occurring or leaves a conflict when initiated.

**coercive power**

The ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts.

**compliance**

When an individual accepts an influencer's influence and alters their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

**conflict**

An interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations, resources, and/or values.

**disagreement**

A difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people.

**distributive conflict**

A win-lose approach, whereby conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses.

**Dunning-Kruger effect**

The tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have nothing to back up that perception.

**emotional awareness**

An individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why.

**emotions**

The physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment.

**emotional intelligence**

An individual's appraisal and expression of their emotions and the emotions of others in a manner that enhances thought, living, and communicative interactions.

**expert power**

The ability of an individual to influence another because of their level of perceived knowledge or skill.

**expressive communication**

Messages that are sent either verbally or nonverbally related to an individual's emotions and feelings.

**feelings**

The responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.

**identification**

When an individual accepts influence because they want to have a satisfying relationship with the influencer or influencing group.

**influence**

When an individual or group of people alters another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors through accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communication.

**informational power**

A social agent's ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through information.

**integrative conflict**

A win-win approach to conflict, whereby both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial.

**interdependence**

When individuals involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important.

**internalization**

When an individual adopts influence and alters their thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors because doing so is intrinsically rewarding.

**legitimate power**

Influence that occurs because a person (P) believes that the social agent (A) has a valid right (generally based on cultural or hierarchical standing) to influence P, and P has an obligation to accept A's attempt to influence P's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

**power**

The degree that a social agent (A) has the ability to get another person(s) (P) to alter their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

**procedural disagreements**

Disagreements concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented.

**referent power**

A social agent's (A) ability to influence another person (P) because P wants to be associated with A.

**reward power**

The ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts.

**rhetorical communication**

Purposefully creating and sending messages to another person in the hopes of altering another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors.

**substantive disagreement**

A disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue.

**tolerance for disagreement**

The degree to which an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.

**“you” statements**

Moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.

Key Takeaways

- The terms disagreement and argument are often confused with one another. For our purposes, the terms refer to unique concepts. A disagreement is a difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people; whereas, an argument is a verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.
- There are two general perspectives regarding the nature of conflict. The first perspective sees conflict as a disruption to normal working systems, so conflict is inherently something that is dangerous to relationships and should be avoided. The second perspective sees conflict as a normal, inevitable part of any relationship. From this perspective, conflict is a tool that can either be used constructively or destructively in relationships.

- According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict consists of four unique parts: 1) interdependence between or among the conflict parties, (2) incompatible goals/means, (3) conflict can adversely affect a relationship if not handled effectively, and (4) there is a sense of urgency to resolve the conflict.

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## Chapter Attribution:

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# FRIENDSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

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## Learning Objectives

- Evaluate friendship characteristics.
- Differentiate among the factors of friendship formation and Rawlins' seven stages and types of friendship.
- Understand friendships in different contexts.

When you hear the words “friend” or “friendship,” what comes to mind? In today’s society, the words “friend” and “friendship” can refer to a wide range of different relationships or attachments. We can be a “friend” of a library, museum, opera, theatre, etc.... We can be a “friend” to someone “in need.” We can “friend” thousands of people on social media platforms like Facebook. We can develop friendships with people in our day-to-day lives at work, in social groups, at school, at church, etc.... Some people see their parents/guardians, spouses, and siblings as “friends.” Many of us even have one or more “best friends.” So, when we look at all of these different areas where we use the word “friend,” do we mean the same thing? For this chapter, we’re going to delve into the world of interpersonal friendships.

Beverly Fehr was one of the first scholars to note the problem related to defining the term “friendship,” “Everyone knows what friendship is – until asked to define it. There are virtually as many definitions of friendship as there are social scientists studying the topic.”<sup>1</sup> Table 1 presents some sample definitions that exist in the literature for the terms “friend” or “friendship.”

Type	Definition
Anthropological	“A friendship-like relationship is a social relationship in which partners provide support according to their abilities in times of need, and in which this behavior is motivated in part by positive affect between partners.” <sup>2</sup>
Clinical Psychology	“[S]omeone who likes and wishes to do well for someone else and who believes that these feelings and good intentions are reciprocated by the other party.” <sup>3</sup>
Dictionary	“The emotions or conduct of friends; the state of being friends.” <sup>4</sup>
Evolutionary	“Friendship is a long-term, positive relationship that involves cooperation.” <sup>5,6</sup>
Friendship as Love	“The etymology of word <i>friend</i> connects its meaning with love, freedom and choice, suggesting an ideal definition of friendship as a voluntary relationship that includes a mutual and equal emotional bond, mutual and equal care and goodwill, as well as pleasure.” <sup>7</sup>
Legal	“Friendship is a word of broad and varied application. It is commonly used to describe the undefinable relationships which exist not only between those connected by ties of kinship or marriage, but as well between strangers in blood, and which vary in degree from the greatest intimacy to an acquaintance more or less casual.” <sup>8</sup>
Personality	“[V]oluntary, mutual, flexible, and terminable; relationships that emphasize equality and reciprocity, and require from each partner an affective involvement in the total personality of the other.” <sup>9</sup>
Philosophy	“[A] distinctively personal relationship that is grounded in a concern on the part of each friend for the welfare of the other, for the other’s sake, and that involves some degree of intimacy.” <sup>10</sup>
Social Psychology	“[V]oluntary or unrestrained interaction in which the participants respond to one another personally, that is, as unique individuals rather than as packages of discrete attributes or mere role occupants.” <sup>11</sup>

Table 1 Defining Friendship

As you can see, there are several different ways that scholars can define the term “friendship.” So, we must question whether defining the term “friendship” is the best way to start a discussion of this topic.



Figure 1. Interpersonal Communication

## Friendship Relationships

Defining “friend” and “friendship” isn’t an easy thing to do. Many researchers identify characteristics of friendships rather than offer a full definition. We all probably all see our friendships as different or unique, which is one of the reasons why defining the terms is so hard. For our purposes in this chapter, we’re going to go along with the majority of friendship scholars and not provide a strict definition for the term friend.

## Friendship Characteristics

William K. Rawlins, a communication scholar and one of the most influential figures in the study of friendship, argues that friendships have five essential characteristics that make them unique from other forms of interpersonal relationships: voluntary, personal, equality, involvement, and affect (Figure 2).<sup>13</sup>

## All Friendships are Essentially Voluntary

There's an old saying that goes, "You can't choose your family, but you can choose your friends." This saying gets at the basic idea that friendship relationships are voluntary. Friendships are based out of an individual's free will to choose whom they want to initiate a friendship relationship with. We go through our lives constantly making decisions to engage in a friendship with one person and not engage in a friendship with another person. Each and every one of us has our reasons for friendships. For example, one of our coauthors originally established a friendship with a peer during graduate school because they were the two youngest people in the program. In this case, the friendship was initiated because of demographic homophily but continues almost 20 years later because they went on to

establish a deeper, more meaningful relationship over time. Take a second and think about your friendships. Why did you decide to engage in those friendships? Of course, the opposite is also true. We meet some people and never end up in friendship with them. Sometimes it's because you're not interested, or the other person isn't interested (voluntariness works both ways). We also choose to end some friendships when they are unhealthy or no longer serve a specific purpose within our lives.

## Friendships are Personal Relationships that are Negotiated Between Two Individuals

The second quality of friendships is that they are personal relationships negotiated between two individuals. In other words, we create our friendships with individuals, and we negotiate what those relationships look like with that other individual. For example, let's imagine you meet a new person named Kris. When you enter into a relationship with Kris, you negotiate what that relationship will look like with Kris. If Kris happens to be someone who is transgendered, you are still entering into a relationship with Kris and not everyone who is transgendered. Kris is not the ambassador for all things transgendered for us, but rather a unique individual we decide we want to be friends with. Hence, these are not group relationships; these are individualized, personal relationships that we establish with another person.



Figure 2. Friendship Characteristics

## Friendships Have a Spirit of Equality

The next characteristic of friendships is a spirit of equality. “Although friendship may develop between individuals of different status, ability, attractiveness, or age, some facet of the relationship functions as a leveler. Friends tend to emphasize the personal attributes and styles of interaction that make them appear more or less equal to each other.”<sup>14</sup> Now, it’s important to note that we’re not always talking about a 50/50 split in everything is what makes a friendship equal. Friendships ebb and flow over time as the desires, needs, and interests change. For example, it’s perfectly possible for two people from very different social classes to be friends. In this case, the different social classes may put people at an imbalance when it comes to financial means, but this doesn’t mean that the two cannot still have a sense of equality within the relationship. Here are some ways to ensure that friendships maintain a spirit of equality:

1. Both friend’s needs and desires are important, not just one person’s.
2. Both friends are curious about their friend’s personal lives away from the friendship.
3. Both friends show affection in their ways.
4. Both friends demonstrate effort and work in the relationship.
5. Both friends encourage each other’s goals and dreams.
6. Both friends are responsible for mutual happiness.
7. Both friends decide what activities to pursue and how to have fun.
8. Both friends are mutually engaged in conversations.
9. Both friends carry each other’s burdens.
10. Both friends desire for the relationship to continue and grow.

## Friendships Have Mutual Involvement

The fourth characteristic of friendships is that they involve mutual involvement. For friendships to work, both parties have to be mutually engaged in the relationship. Now, this does not mean that friends have to talk on a daily, weekly, or even monthly basis for them to be effective. Many people establish long-term friendships with individuals they don’t get to see more than once a year or even once a decade. For example, my father has a group of friends from high school once a year. His friends and their spouses pick a location, and they all meet up once a year for a week together. For the rest of the year, there are occasional emails and Facebook posts, but they don’t interact much outside of that. However, that once a year get together is enough to keep these long-term (70+ years at this point) friendships healthy and thriving.

As you can see, the concept of “mutual involvement” can differ from one friendship pair to another. Different friendship pairs collaborate to create their sense of what it means to be a friend, their shared social reality of friendship. “This interpersonal reality evolves out of and furthers mutual acceptance and support, trust and confidence, dependability and assistance, and discussion of thoughts and feelings.”<sup>15</sup> One of the

reasons why defining the term “friendship” is so difficult is because there are as many friendship realities as there are pairs of friends. Although we see common characteristics across them (as we’re discussing here), it’s important to understand that within these characteristics are many ways these get exhibited.

## Friendships Have Affective Aspects

The final characteristic of friendships is the notion of affect. **Affect** refers to “any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. Often described in terms of positive affect or negative affect, both mood and emotion are considered affective states.”<sup>16</sup> Built into the voluntariness, personal, equal, and mutually involved nature of friendships is the inherent caring and concern that we establish within those friendships, the affective aspects. Some friends will go so far as to say that they love each other. Not in the *eros* or romantic sense of the term, but instead in the *philia* or affectionate sense of the term. People often use the term “platonic” love to describe the love that exists without physical attraction based on the writings of Plato. However, Aristotle, Plato’s student, believed that *philia* was an even more profound form of dispassionate, virtuous love that existed in the loyalty of friends void of any sexual connotations.

All friendships are going to have affective components, but not all friendships will exhibit or express affect in the same ways. Some friendships may exhibit no physical interaction at all, but this doesn’t mean they are not intimate emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually. Other friendships could be very physically affective, but have little depth to them in other ways. Every pair of friends determines what affect will be like within that friendship pairing. However, both parties within the relationship must have their affect needs met. Hence, people often need to have conversations with friends about their needs for affection.

## Dialectical Approaches to Friendships

Earlier in this book, we introduced you to the dialectical perspective for understanding interpersonal relationships. Rawlins proposed a dialectical approach to friendships.<sup>22</sup> The dialectics can be broken down into two distinct categories: contextual and interactional.

### Contextual Dialectics

The first category of dialectics is **contextual dialectics**, which are dialectics that stem out of the cultural order where the friendship exists. If the friends in question live in the United States, then the prevailing social order in the United States will impact friendship; however, if the friends are in Malaysia, then the Malaysian culture will be the prevailing social order that impacts the friendship. There are two different dialectics that Rawlins labeled as contextual: private/public and ideal/real.

## Private/Public

The first friendship dialectic is the private/public dialectic. Let's start by examining the public side of friendships in the United States. Sadly, they aren't given much credence in the public space. For example, there are no laws protecting friendships. Your friends can't get health benefits from your job. Religious bodies don't recognize your friendships. As you can see, we're comparing friendships here to marriages, which do have religious and legal protections. In fact, in the legal system, the family often trumps friends unless there is a power of attorney or will.

As a significant historical side note, one of the biggest problems many gay and lesbian couples faced before marriage legalization was that their intimate partners were perceived as "friends" in the legal system. Family members could swoop in when Partner A passed and evict and confiscate all of Partner A's money and property unless there was an iron-clad will leaving the money and property to Partner B. From a legal perspective, marriage equality was very important in ensuring the rights of LGBTQIA individuals and their spouses.

On the opposite end of this dialectic, many friendship bonds are as strong if not stronger than familial or marital bonds. We voluntarily enter into friendships and create our sense of purpose and behaviors outside of any religious or legal context. In essence, these friendships are autonomous and outside of social strictures that define the lines of marital bonds. Instead of having a religious organization dictate the morality of a relationship, friendships ultimately develop their sense of morality that is based within the relationship itself.

## Ideal/Real

From the moment we are born, we start being socialized into a wide range of relationships. Friendship is one of those relationships. We learn about friendships from our family, schools, media, peers, etc.... With each of these different sources of information, we develop an ideal of what "friendship" should be. However, friendships are not ideals; they are real, functioning relationships that plusses and minuses. This dialectic also impacts how we communicate and interact within the friendship itself. If our culture tells us that people must be reserved and respectful in private, then a simple act of laughing with another person could be an outward sign of friendship.

## Interactional Dialectics

It's important to understand that friendships change over time; along with how we interact within those friendships. For communication scholars, Rawlins **interactional dialectics** help us understand how communicative behavior happens within friendships.<sup>23</sup> Rawlins noted four primary communicative dialectics for friendships: independence/dependence, affection/instrumentality, judgment/acceptance, and expressiveness/protectiveness.

## Independence/Dependence

First and foremost, friendships are voluntary relationships that we choose. However, there is a constant pull between the desire to be an independent person and the willingness to depend on one's friend. We strive for independence in our relationships to feel like an individual. You may do a lot of activities by yourself without a friend. On the other side, we also depend on our friendships. You could have a friend that you do almost everything with, and it gets to the point that people see you as a duo and are shocked when both of you aren't together. In these highly dependent friendships, individual behavior is probably very infrequent and more likely to be resented. Let's look at a quick example. It's a Friday afternoon, and you're done with class or work. A movie you've wanted to see just came out, so you go and watch a matinee. You decided to go alone to the movie (independence). This could be normal for your friendships. Now, if you went to the movie alone in a highly dependent friendship, your friend may be upset or jealous because you didn't wait to see it with them. Now you may have had the right to engage as an independent person, but a friend in a highly dependent friendship would see this as a violation.

Ultimately, all friendships have to negotiate independence and dependence. As with the establishment of any friendship norm, the pair involved in the relationship needs to decide when it's appropriate to be independent and when it is appropriate to be dependent. Maybe you need to check-in via text 20 times a day (pretty dependent) or talk on the phone once a year; in both cases, friendships are different and are in constant negotiation. It's also important to note that a friendship that was once highly dependent can become highly independent and vice versa.

## Affection/Instrumentality

The second interaction dialectic examines the intersection of affection as a reason for friendship versus instrumentality (the agency or means by which a person accomplishes their goals or objectives). As Rawlins noted, "This principle formulates the interpenetrated nature of caring for a friend as an end-in-itself and/or as a means to an end."<sup>24</sup> We already discussed the importance of affection in a friendship, but haven't examined the issue of friendships and instrumentality. In friendships, the issue of instrumentality helps us understand the following question, "How do we use friendships to benefit ourselves?" Some people are uncomfortable with this question and find the idea of instrumentality very anti-friendship. Ever had a really bad day and all you needed was a hug from your best friend? Well, was that hug a sign of affection (maybe), but you used that friendship to get something you wanted/needed. We all do this to varying degrees within friendships. Maybe you don't have a washer and dryer in your apartment, so you go to your best friend's place to do laundry. In that situation, you are using your friend and that relationship to achieve a need that you have (wearing clean clothes).

The problem of instrumentality arises when one party feels that they are being used and taken for granted within the friendship itself or if one friend stops seeing these acts as voluntary and starts seeing them as obligatory. First, there are times when there is an imbalance in friendships, and one friend feels that they are

being taken advantage of. Maybe the friend with the washer and dryer starts realizing that the only time his “friend” really reaches out to see if he’s available to hang out is when the “friend” needs to do laundry. Second, sometimes acts that were initially voluntary become seen as obligatory. Maybe the friend who needs to wash their clothes starts to see what was once a nice, voluntary gesture as an obligation. If this happens, then the use of the washer and dryer becomes part of the rules of the friendship, which can change the dynamic of the relationship if the person with the washer and dryer isn’t happy about being used in this way.

## Judgment/Acceptance

In our friendships, we expect that these relationships are going to enhance our self-esteem and make us feel accepted, cared for, and wanted. On the other hand, interpersonal relationships of all kinds are marked by judgmental messages. Ronald Liang argued that all interpersonal messages are inherently evaluative.<sup>25</sup> So, how do we navigate the need to be accepted and the reality of being judged? A lot of this is involved in the negotiation of the friendship itself. Although we may not appreciate receiving criticism from others, Liang argues that criticism demonstrates to another person that we value them enough to judge.<sup>26</sup> Now, can criticism become toxic, yes? Maybe you’ve experienced a friend who criticized everything about you. Perhaps it got to the point where it felt that you needed to change pretty much everything about how you look, act, think, feel, and behave just to be “good enough” for your friend. If that’s the case, then that friend is clearly not criticizing you for your betterment but for their desires.

## Expressiveness/Protectiveness

The final interactional dialectic is expressiveness/protectiveness. This dialectic questions the degree to which we want to express ourselves in our friendships while also protecting ourselves. As we discussed earlier in this book, social penetration theory starts with the basic idea that in our initial interactions with others we disclose a wide breadth about ourselves. Still, these are primarily surface level topics (e.g., what’s your major, what are your hobbies, where are you from, etc.). As time goes on, the number of topics we express decreases, but they become more personal (depth). In a friendship relationship, we have to navigate this breadth and depth in deciding what we express and what we protect.

Ultimately, this is an issue of vulnerability. When we open ourselves up to people and express those deeper parts of ourselves, there is an excellent likelihood that disclosure of these areas could cause greater harm to the individual self-disclosing if the information got out. For example, if a friend disclosed their sexual orientation with you, and you share that with their parents, it could violate the confidentiality they expected. All friendships are an exploration of what can be expressed and what needs to be protected. We all have some friends that we keep at arm’s length because we know we need to protect ourselves because they tend to gossip. At the same time, we have other friends who get to see the real us as we protect less and less of ourselves in those friendships. No one will ever completely know what’s going on in our heads, but deep friendships probably come the closest and also make us the most vulnerable.

### Key Takeaways

- Rawlins proposed five specific characteristics of friendships: voluntary, personal, equality, involvement, and affect.
- Rawlins' dialectical approach to communication breaks friendship down into two large categories of dialectical tensions: contextual (private/public & ideal/real) and interactional (independence/dependence, affection/instrumentality, judgment/acceptance, and expressiveness/protectiveness).

## Stages and Types of Friendships

In Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's musical "Merrily We Roll Along," the story follows the careers and friendships of three people trying to make it in New York City. One song in the show has always stuck out because of its insightful message about friendship, "[Hey Old Friends.](#)" In the musical, three friends Mary, Charlie, and Frank get together after not having seen each other for a while. The purpose of the song is to discuss how some friendships can persist even when we aren't in each other's lives daily. You can see a clip from the rehearsal at the [New York City Center's Encore](#)'s production starring Celia Keenan-Bolger (Mary), Colin Donnell (Frank) and Lin-Manuel Miranda (Charley). In this short song, we learn a lot about the nature of this group's friendship and their enduring desire to be close to one another through the ins and outs of life.

## Friendship Formation

Researcher Beverley Fehr studied how friendships are initiated. Fehr found many factors that impact the possibility for two people to become friends; these include environmental, situational, individual, and dyadic factors.<sup>27</sup> Environmental factors relate to the proximity and physical distance between individuals. The closer two people live near each other, the more likely they will become friends. In residence halls, having a room closer to someone increases the probability of becoming friends. If the environmental factors are not right, a friendship is unlikely to form.

Situational factors include the probability of future interactions, the frequency of interacting, and availability. If you think you'll never see this person again, then you likely not try to form a friendship. If you interact with a person regularly, research suggests that you'll start to like them more. The final situational factor

is availability. Even though you may see someone regularly and will in the future, you may not become friends. Both people must be ready and able to start a new friendship. Some may have lots of relationships already and may not have the time to invest in a new one. Beyond the situational factors, there are still individual and dyadic considerations.

Individual factors help people to determine how to exclude or include potential friends. There are many reasons why you may decide you don't want someone to be your friend, including personality characteristics, habits, and attributes. Fehr found that the main reasons to include a friend are their physical attractiveness, social skills, and responsiveness. Physical attractiveness and social skills are desirable attributes. Researchers have found that people who are more responsive appear more interested and likable.

Finally, dyadic factors consider the interplay between each person in the potential friendship. Friendships should have reciprocal liking, meaning that both individuals should like each other. Friendships also need self-disclosure. As we have discussed in earlier chapters, self-disclosure can increase our ability to be liked and how much we like others. Other dyadic factors include sharing humor and fun times. The last dyadic factor is similarity. Individuals are more likely to become friends with those they are similar to.<sup>28</sup>

There are multiple factors that impact the chance that a friendship will form. Environmentally, your proximity to another person plays a large role in becoming friends. Situationally, both people must think they can invest in a new friend. Individually, people have criteria for who they would and would not want to be friends with. Dyadically, the interactions between both matters.

## Stages of Friendships

As we've already discussed, friendships are not static relationships we're born with. Instead, these relationships are dynamic, and we grow with them. To help us understand how we ultimately form friendships, William Rawlins broke this process into seven stages of friendships (Figure 3).<sup>29</sup>

## Role Delimited Interaction

The first stage of friendship is called role delimited interaction. The basic idea behind this stage is that we all exist in a wide range of roles within our lives: shopper, salesperson, patient, driver, student, parent/guardian, spouse, etc.... In each of these different roles, we end up interacting with a wide range of different people. For example, imagine you're just sitting down in a new class in college, and you talk to the stranger sitting next to you named Adilah. In this case, you are both interacting within your roles as students. Outside of those roles and that context, you may never meet and never have the opportunity even to develop a social relationship with this other person. This does not discount the possibility of random, chance encounters with other people. Still, most of our interpersonal relationships (outside of our family) stem from these roles and the communicative contexts they present.



Figure 3. Stages of Friendship

## Friendly Relations

From role delimited interaction, we may decide to move to the second stage of friendship, friendly relations. These relations are generally positive interactions, but they still exist within those same roles. In our example, we start chatting with Adilah before the beginning of each class. At this point, though, most of our interactions are still going to be within those roles, so we end up talking about the class, fellow students, the teacher, homework assignments, etc.... Notice that there is not a lot of actual self-disclosure happening within friendly relations. Some people can maintain friendly relations with others for years. For example, you may interact with coworkers, religious association members, neighbors within this type of relationship without them ever progressing to the next stage of friendship. According to Rawlins, friendly relationships move towards friendships because they start to exhibit four specific communication behaviors:

1. moves away from what is required in the specific role relationship,
2. fewer lines and less stereotyped interaction,
3. individual violations of public propriety, and
4. greater spontaneity.<sup>30</sup>

First, we start interacting in a manner that doesn't resemble the original roles we had. In our example, we start

interacting in a manner that doesn't resemble the roles of students when they first meet. Second, we move away from lines of communication that are stereotypes for our roles. For example, some possible stereotyped lines for two students could include, "what did you think of the homework;" "did you bring your book with you today;" "see you next class;" etc... In each of these lines, we enact dialogue that is expected (or stereotyped) within the context of the class itself. Third, more of our normal selves will start to seep into our interactions, which are called violations of public propriety. Maybe one day Adilah turns to you before class, saying, "That reading for homework was such a waste of time." In this case, Adilah is giving you a bit more insight into who she is as a person. "These violations of public propriety single an individual out as having an essential side which is not so easily circumscribed by the protocol of a situation."<sup>31</sup> Lastly, we see increased spontaneity in our interactions with the other person. Over time, these interactions, although still interacting within their formal roles, take on more social and less formalized tones. Maybe one day Adilah tells you a joke or shares a piece of gossip she heard. In this case, Adilah she's starting to be more spontaneous and less structured in her interactions with us.

## Moves-Toward-Friendship

At some point, people decide to interact with one another outside of the roles they originally embodied when they initially met. This change in roles is a voluntary change. In our example, maybe one day Adilah invites you to get coffee after class, and then another day, you ask her to get lunch before class. Although it's possible that a single step outside of those roles could be enough that a friendly relation is moving towards a friendship, there is generally a sequence of these occurrences. In our example here, Adilah may have made the first move inviting us to coffee, but we then reciprocated later by asking her to lunch. In both of these cases, we are starting to step outside of the original friendly relation and changing the nature of our original interactions.

## Nascent Friendship

When one enters into the nascent stage of friendship, the friends are no longer interacting within their original roles, and their interactions do follow the stereotypes associated with those roles. Eventually, we start to develop norms for how we communicate with this other person that is beyond those original roles and stereotypes. Ultimately, this stage is all about developing those norms. We develop norms for what we talk about, when we talk, and how we talk. Maybe Adilah makes it very clear that she doesn't want to talk about politics or religion, and we're perfectly OK with that. Maybe we keep the bulk of our interaction before and after class, or we start having lunch together before class or coffee after class. The norms will differ from friendship to friendship, but these norms allow us to set parameters on the relationship in this early stage. These norms are also important because keeping them demonstrates that we can be trusted. And when we show we can be trusted over time, the level of intimacy we can develop within our relationship also increases.

It's also during this period that others start to see you more and more as a pair of friends, so other; external

forces may begin to impact the development of your friendship as well. In our case, maybe Adilah has a sister who also goes to the school, so she starts hanging out with both of you from time to time. Maybe we have a significant other, and they start hanging out as well. Even though we may have these distractions, we should keep faithful to the original friendship. For example, if we start spending more time with Adilah's sister than Adilah, then we aren't faithful to the original friendship. Lastly, our friendship crystalizes, and others start to see you as a pair. You are seen increasingly as a "duo."

## Stabilized Friendship

Ultimately nascent friendships evolve into stabilized friendships through time and refinement. It's not like one day you wake up and go, "My friendship has stabilized!" It's much more gradual than that. We get to the point where our developed norms and interaction patterns for the friendship are functioning optimally for both parties, and the friendship is working smoothly. In nascent friendships, the focus is on the duo and developing the friendship. In stabilization, we often bring in new friends. For example, if we had found out that Adilah had coffee with another person from our class during the nascent stage of friendship, we may have felt a bit hurt or jealous by this "outsider" intruding on our growing friendship." As stabilized friends, we realize that Adilah having coffee with someone else isn't going to impact the strength of the relationship we already have. If anything, maybe Adilah will find other friends to grow the friendship circle. However, like any relationship, both parties still must make an effort to make the friendship work. We need to reaffirm our friendships, spend time with our friends, and maintain that balance of equity we discussed earlier in this chapter).

Rawlins also notes that friendships in the stabilized stage can represent three different basic patterns: active, dormant, and commemorative.<sup>32</sup> **Active friendships** are ones where there is a negotiated sense of mutual accessibility and availability for both parties in the friendship. **Dormant friendships** "share either a valued history or a sufficient amount of sustained contact to anticipate or remain eligible for a resumption of the friendship at any time."<sup>33</sup> These friends may not be ones we interact with every day, but they are still very much alive and could take on new meaning and grow back into an active friendship if the time arises. And **commemorative friendships** are ones that reflect a specific space and time in our lives, but current interaction is minimal and primarily reflects a time when the two friends were highly involved in each other's lives. With commemorative friendships, we still see ourselves as friends even though we don't have the consistent interaction that active friendships have.

In a study conducted by Sara LaBelle and Scott Myers, the researchers set out to determine what types of relational maintenance strategies do people use to keep their friendships going across the three different types of friendship patterns (active, dormant, & commemorative).<sup>34</sup> Using the seven relational maintenance behaviors (positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talks, assurances, tasks, & networks),<sup>35</sup> the researchers recruited participants over the age of 30 to examine relational maintenance and friendship types. All three friendship types used positivity, relational talks, and networks to some degree. However, active

friendships were more likely to use understanding, self-disclosure, assurances, and tasks to maintain their friendships than commemorative friendships.

## Waning Friendship

Unfortunately, some friendships will not last. There are many reasons why friendships may start to wane or decrease in importance in our lives. There are three primary reasons Rawlins discusses why this happens: “an overall decline in affect, an individual or mutual decision to let it wane based on identifiable dissatisfaction with the relationship, or a significant, negative, relational event which precipitates an abrupt termination of the friendship.”<sup>36</sup> First, some relationships wane because there is a decrease in emotional attachment. Some friends stop putting in the time and effort to keep the friendship going, so it’s not surprising that there is a decrease in emotional attachments. Second, both parties may become dissatisfied with the relationship and decide to take a hiatus or spend more time with other friends. Lastly, something could happen, a relationship destroying event. You find out that Adilah had an affair with your romantic partner. Adilah broke a promise to you or told someone one of your secrets. Adilah started yelling at you for no reason and physically assaulted you.

There is a wide range of different events that could end a friendship. In a study conducted by a team of researchers led by Amy Janan Johnson, the researchers interviewed college students about why their friendships had terminated.<sup>37</sup> The most common reasons listed for why relationships fell apart were 1) romantic partner of self or friend, 2) increase in geographic distance, 3) conflict, 4) not many common interests, 5) hanging out with different groups or different friends, and 5) other. Now, females and males in the study did report differences in the likelihood that these five reasons led to deterioration. Females reported that conflict was a greater reason for friendship deterioration than males. And males reported not having many common interests was a greater reason for friendship deterioration than females. Females and males did not differ in the other three categories. It’s important to note, that while this set of findings is interesting, it was conducted using college students, so it may not apply to older adults.

## Post-Friendship

The final stage of the friendship is what happens after the friendship is over. Even if a friendship ended on a horrible note, there are still parts of that friendship that will remain with us forever. That friendship will impact how we interact with friends and perceive friendships forever. You may even have symbolic links to your friends: the nightclubs you went to, the courses you took together, the coffee shops you frequented, the movies you watched, etc.... all are links back to that friendship. It’s also possible that the friendship ended on a positive note and you still periodically say hello on Facebook or during the holidays through card exchanges. Just as all friendships are unique, so are their experiences of post-friendship reality.

## Research Spotlight



In 2019, KU's Jeffrey Hall was interested in the amount of time it took for people to become friends.<sup>17</sup> Through two studies, the first consisting of adults who recently relocated to a new geographic location, and the second, a longitudinal study of first-year college students, Hall found the amount of time spent together in hours was related to friendship closeness.

Depending on how much time passes between meeting a person, there is approximately a 50% chance of transitioning into a new category for each friendship type.

- Acquaintances to casual friends: 40-60 hours
- Casual friends to friends: 80-100 hours
- Friends to good/best friends: 120-160 hours

Talking regularly with friends and spending time doing leisurely activity also predicted friendship closeness. Hall found that it takes many hours for a friendship to develop, and even more time for two people to become close friends.

Hall, J. A. (2019). How many hours does it take to make a friend? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(4), 1278-1296. doi:10.1177/0265407518761225

## Types of Friendships

Rawlins also created 3 types of friendships.<sup>73</sup> These include active, dormant, and commemorative. Active friendships can be thought of as the close friendships you currently have. These are friends you communicate

with regularly and know what is going on in each other's lives. Dormant friendships are relationships that you may have fallen out of touch with. However, with dormant friends, you could send a message or call to pick up where you left off. Think of these as friends you used to be close with but haven't spoken to recently. Commemorative friends are past friendships that you no longer maintain or think about. These are your friends from the past who you are unlikely to ever speak to again. In the era of social media however, these friendship types may feel a bit different. Dr. Natalie Pennington, who received their Ph.D. from KU, recently conducted a study about these friendships over social media. Pennington found that people keep dormant and commemorative friendships on social media for "potential reconnection, perceived social capital, and nostalgia."<sup>74</sup> These three types of friendships can help us understand our current and past relationships.

## Good and Bad Friendships

Another system for understanding friendships is to think of them regarding two basic psychological constructs: health and enjoyment. First, is the relationship a healthy one for you to have. Although this is a concept that is more commonly discussed in romantic relationships, friendships can also be healthy or nonhealthy (Table 2).

<b>Healthy</b>	<b>Unhealthy</b>
Mutual respect	Contempt
Trust	Suspicion
Honesty	Untruthful
Support	Hinder
Fairness/Equality	Unjust/Inequity
Separate Identities	Intertwined Identities
Open Communication	Closed Communication
Playfulness/Fondness	Sober/Animus
Self-Esteem Enhancing	Self-Esteem Destroying
Fulfilling	Depressing
Acceptance	Combative
Affectionate/Loving	Cold/Indifferent
Comforting	Stressful
Genuine/Benevolent	Manipulative/Exploitive
Beneficial	Damaging
Healthful	Toxic

Table 2 Healthy vs. Unhealthy Friendships

In addition to the health of a friendship, you must also question if the friendship is something that is ultimately enjoyable to you as a person. Does this friendship give you meaning of some kind? Ultimately, we can break this down into four distinct types of friendship experiences people may have (Figure 5).

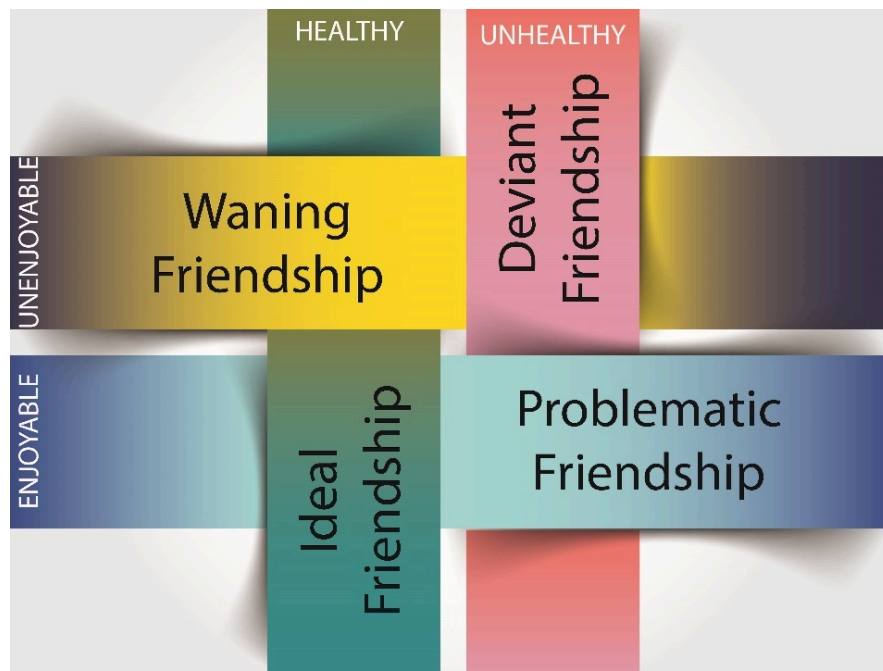


Figure 5. Four Types of Friendships

## Ideal Friendship

The first category we label as “ideal friends” because these relationships are both healthy and enjoyable. In an ideal world, the majority of our relationships would fall into the category of ideal friendships.

## Waning Friendship

The second category we label as “waning friendship” because these friendships are still healthy but not enjoyable anymore. Chances are, this friendship was an ideal friendship at some point and has started to become less enjoyable over time. There’s a wide range of reasons why friendships may stop being enjoyable. It’s possible that you no longer have the time to invest in the friendship, so you find yourself regretting the amount of time and energy that’s necessary to keep the friendship floating.

## Problematic Friendship

The third category of friendship, which we classify as problematic friendships, is tricky because these are enjoyable, but they are not healthy for us. Ultimately, the friend we have could be a lot of fun to hang out with, but they also could be more damaging to us as people. Instead of supporting us, they make fun of us. Instead of treating us as equals, they hold all the power in the relationship. Instead of being honest, we always know they’re lying to us. Ultimately, we must question why we decide to stay in these relationships.

## Deviant Friendship

The final category of friendships we may have is deviant friendships, more commonly referred to as toxic friendships. For our purposes here, we use the term “deviant” because it refers to any behavior that violates behavioral norms. In this case, any friendship situation that is clearly outside the parameters of what is a healthy and enjoyable friendship is not the norm. Unfortunately, sometimes people get so stuck in these friendships that they stop realizing that these friendships aren’t normal at all. Others may think that their deviant friendships are the only kinds of friendships they can get and/or deserve. It’s entirely possible that a deviant friendship started as perfectly healthy and normal, but often these were somewhat problematic in their early stages and eventually progressed into fully deviant friendships.

Deviant Friends:

- Use criticism and insults as weapons.
- Use guilt to get you to cave-in to their desires and whims.
- Immediately assume you’re lying (probably because they are).
- Disclose your personal secrets.
- Are very gossipy about others, and are probably gossipy about you as well.
- Only care about their own desires and needs.
- Use your emotions as weapons to attack you psychologically.
- Pass judgment on you and your ideas based on their own with little flexibility.
- Are stuck up and only really turn to you when they need you.
- Can be obsessively needy, but then are very hard to please.
- Are inconsistent, so predicting how they will think or behave can be very hard if not impossible.
- Put you in competition with their other friends for affection and attention.
- Conversations tend to be all about them and their desires and needs.
- Make you feel that being your friend is a chore for them.
- Make you feel as if you’ve lost control over your own life and choices.
- Cross major relationship boundaries and violate relationship norms without apology.
- Express their jealousy of your other friendships and relationships.

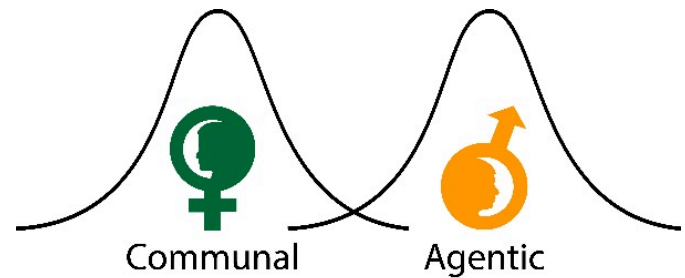
## Friendships in Different Contexts

So far in this chapter, we’ve explored the foundational building blocks for understanding friendships. We’re now going to break friendships down by looking at them in several different contexts: gender and friendships and cross-group friendships.

## Gender and Friendships

From a highly traditional perspective on the notion of same and opposite sex friendships, researchers generally compared notions of communal and **agentic friendships**. **Communal friendships** were marked by intimacy, personal/emotional expressiveness, amount of self-disclosure, quality of self-disclosure, confiding, and emotional supportiveness.<sup>42</sup> Agentic friendships, on the other hand, were activity-centered. If you look at Figure 6, you'll see three curves associated with these concepts. The first one shows women being communal and men being agentic in their friendships, which was a common perspective on the nature of gender differences and friendships. In reality, research demonstrated that both males and females can have communal relationships even though women report notably higher levels of communality in their friendships (second set of curves). As for agency, women and men were found to both have agentic friendships, and there was considerable overlap between the two groups here, with men being slightly more agentic (seen in the third set of curves).

A great deal of research in friendship has focused on sex differences between males and females with regard to friendship. In this section, we're going to start by looking at some of the research specifics to same-sex friends and then opposite sex friendships. We'll end this section discussing a different way of thinking about these types of relationships.



### Same-Sex Friendships

For a lot of research, we use the term “same-sex” to refer to two individuals of the same biological sex as friends. Gerald Phillips and Julia Wood argue that there are four primary reasons females develop friendships with the same-sex: activities, personal support, problem-solving, and reciprocation.<sup>43</sup> However, these four categories are different, whether looking at female or male friendships. For female same-sex friendships, the first reason is activity. These are friendships that tend to develop around a specific activity: working out, church, social clubs, etc.... For the most part, these friendships stay confined to the activity itself and provide a chance for conversation and noncommittal associations. The second reason is personal support. It's this second

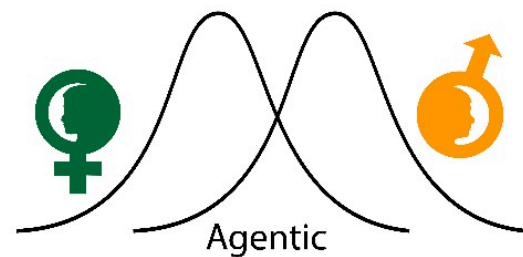
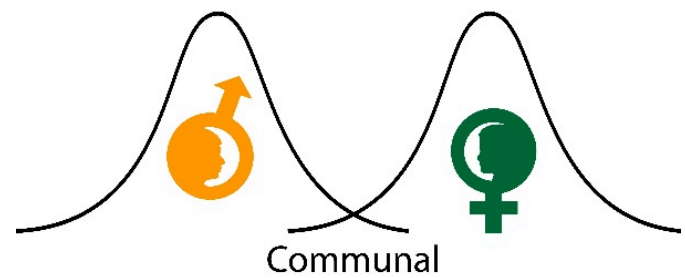


Figure 6. Communal vs. Agentic Friendships

category that many highlight when discussing the differences between female and male friendships. Personal support involves friendships where an individual has a personal confidant with whom they can share their deepest, darkest secrets, concerns, needs, and desires. These friendships are often highly stable friendships and tend to last for a long time. By nature, these friendships tend to be highly communal, which is why we generally discuss them as a key reason for female same-sex friendships. Third, all of us have areas where we're skillful and lack skill. We often develop friendships with people who have skills that are complementary to our own. Consciously or subconsciously, we develop friendships with others out of a need to problem solve our daily lives. For example, an information technology specialist may become friends with an accountant. In their friendship, they provide complementary support: computer help and financial advice. Finally, females tend to view their friendships as highly reciprocal. They expect to get out of a friendship what they put into a friendship; it's a mutual exchange. If a female feels her friend is not putting into a relationship the same amount of time and energy, she is less likely to keep sustaining that friendship.

As for male-male friendships, research shows us that they're not drastically different though their friendships may be framed differently. They still create friendships because of recreation, personal support, problem-solving, and reciprocation. And these relationships can be just as intimate as their female counterparts, but the relationships may look a bit more distinct. First, many male friendships are based around activities: church, work, hobbies, social clubs, etc.... These friendships are less about having conversations and more about engaging in the activity at hand. These friendships are not going to be as communal as female friendships that develop around recreation. Often people mistake these male friendships as being less "intimate" because they do not disclose a lot of information, and there isn't necessarily a lot of talk involved, but males do find these relationships perfectly fulfilling.

Phillips and Woods noted that men often view friendships in terms of teams; you have allies and team members. In essence, they create their tight-knit circles of in and out-group members based on "team" status. Part of this team status involves performing favors for each other and siding with one another. It's the whole "I've got your back" mentality. We should also note that males are more likely to be friends who are the most like them: similar majors, similar religious, similar rungs of the social hierarchy, similar socioeconomic status, similar attitudes, similar interests, etc.... Research has even shown that males are more likely to have male friends who are equally physically attractive.<sup>44</sup> One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that males are more likely to develop relationships based on social hierarchies. If attractive males are on a higher rung of a social hierarchy, then it's not surprising that the matching effect occurs.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that the expectations of same-sex friendships are mostly the same for males and females. Both expect their friends to be trustworthy, loyal, genuine, and committed to the friendship.<sup>18</sup> Further, research has shown that there is more overlap between female-female and male-male friendships than there are actual differences.

## Opposite Sex Friendships

"Friendship between a woman and a man? For many people, the idea is charming but improbable."<sup>46</sup> William

Rawlins originally wrote this sentence in 1993 at the start of a chapter about the problems associated with opposite sex or cross-sex friendships. What do you think? J. Donald O'Meara discusses five distinct challenges that cross-sex relationships have: emotional bond, sexuality, inequality and power, public relationships, and opportunity structure.<sup>47,48</sup>

## Emotional Bond

First, and foremost, in Western society females and males are raised to see the opposite sex as potential romantic partners and not friends. One of the inherent problems with cross-sex friendships is that one of the friends may misinterpret the friendship as romantic. From an emotional sense, the question that must be answered is how do friends develop a deep-emotional or even loving relationship with someone of the opposite sex. William Rawlins did attempt to differentiate between five distinct love styles that could help distinguish the types of emotional bonds possible: friendship, Platonic love, friendship love, physical love, and romantic love.<sup>49</sup>

O'Meara correctly surmises that the challenge for cross-sex friendships is finding that shared sense of love without one partner slipping into one of the other four categories of love because often the emotions associated with all five different types of love can be perceived similarly.

## Sexuality

As the obvious next step in the progression of issues related to cross-sex friendships is sexuality. Inherent in any cross-sex friendship between heterosexual couples is sexual attraction. Sexual attraction may not be something initial in a relationship. Still, it could develop further down the line and start to blur the lines between someone's desire for friendship and a sexual relationship. In heterosexual cross-sex friendship, it is possible for latent or manifested sexual attraction. Even if one of the parties involved in the friendship is completely unattracted to the other person, it doesn't mean that the other friend isn't sexually attracted. As such, like it or not, there will always be the issue of sexuality in cross-sex friendships once people hit puberty. Now it's perfectly possible that both parties within a friendship are mutually sexually attracted to each other and decide openly not to explore that path. You can find someone sexually attractive and not see them as a viable sexual or romantic partner. For example, maybe you both decide not to consider each other viable sexual or romantic partners because you're already in healthy romantic relationships, or you may realize that your friendship is more important.

## Inequality and Power

We live in a society where men and women are not treated equally. As such, there will always be a fact of inequality and power-imbalance between people in cross-sex friendships created by our society. Females are more likely to get their emotional needs through same-sex friendships. However, males are also more likely

to get their emotional needs met through opposite sex friendships. This dependence on the opposite sex for emotional needs and support places females in a subordinate position of needing to fulfill those needs.

## Public Relationships

The next challenge for cross-sex friendships involves the public side of friendships. The previous three challenges were all about the private inner workings of the friendship between a female and a male (internal side). This challenge is focused on public displays of cross-sex friendships. First, it's possible that others will see a cross-sex friendship as a romantic relationship. Although not a horrible thing, this could give others the impression that a pair of friends are not available for romantic relationships. Or if one of the friends is seen on a date, that the friend is clearly cheating on their significant other. Second, it's possible that others won't believe the couple as "simply being friends." This consistent devaluing of cross-sex friendships and the favoring of cross-sex romantic relationships in our society puts a lot of stress on cross-sex friendships. This devaluing of friendships over romantic relationships can also be seen as a tool to delegitimize cross-sex friendships. Third, it's possible that others may question the sexual orientation of the individual's involvement in the opposite sex friendship. If a male is in a friendship relationship with a female, he may be labeled as gay or bisexual for not turning that cross-sex friendship into a romantic one. The opposite is also true. Lastly, public cross-sex friendships can cause problems for cross-sex romantic partners. Although not always the case, it may be very difficult for one member of a romantic relationship to conceive that their partner is in a close friendship relationship with the opposite sex that is not romantic or sexual. For individuals who have never experienced these types of emotional connections, they may assume that it is impossible and that the cross-sex friends are just "kidding themselves." Another possible problem for romantic relationships is that the significant other becomes jealous of the cross-sex friend because they believe that, as the significant other, they should be fulfilling any role a cross-sex friend is.

## Postmodern Friendships

In the previous section, we looked at some of the basic issues of same-sex and cross-sex friendships; however, a great deal of this line of thinking has been biased by heteronormative patterns of understanding.<sup>52</sup> The noted absence of LGBTQIA individuals from a lot of the friendship literature is nothing new.<sup>53</sup> However, we have needed newer theoretical lenses to help us break free of some of these historical understandings of friendship. "Growing out of poststructuralism, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies, queer theory has been favored by those scholars for whom the heteronormative aspects of everyday life are troubling, in how they condition and govern the possibilities for individuals to build meaningful identities and selves."<sup>54</sup> By taking a purely heteronormative stance at understanding friendships, friendships scholars built a field around basic assumptions about gender and the nature of gender.<sup>55</sup>

Monsour, a friendship researcher, asked a group of friendship scholars about the definition of "friendship"

and found there was little to no consensus. How then, Monsour argues, can researchers be as clear in their attempts to define “gender” and “sex” when analyzing same-sex or opposite sex friendships.<sup>56</sup> As part of his discussion questioning the nature of gender and sex and how it’s been used by friendship scholars, Monsour provided the following questions for us to consider:

- What does it mean to state that two individuals are in a same-sex or opposite sex friendship and/or that they are of the same or opposite sex from one another?
- What decision rules are invoked when deciding whether a particular friendship is one or the other?
- Why must the friendship be one or the other?
- If friendship scholars and researchers believe that all friendships are either same–sex or opposite–sex (and it appears that most do), at a minimum there should be agreement about what constitutes biological sex. What biological traits make a person a female or a male?
- Are they absolute?
- Are they universal?<sup>57</sup>
- As part of this discussion, Monsour provides an extensive list of areas of controversy related to the terms used for binary gender identity.
- What about individuals who are intersexed?
- What about individuals with chromosomal differences outside of traditional XX and XY (e.g., X, Y, XYY, XXX, XXY, etc.)? Heck, there are even some XX<sub>males</sub> and XY<sub>females</sub> who develop because of chromosomal structural anomalies SRY region on the Y chromosome.
- What about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people?
- What about people who are transgendered or transsexual?
- What about people who are asexual?

Hopefully, you’re beginning to see that the concept of ascribing same-sex and opposite sex friendships simply based on 46-chromosomal pairs of either XX or XY who are cisgendered and heterosexual may not be the best or most complete way of understanding friendships.

We should also note that research in the field of communication has noted that an individual’s biological sex contributes to maybe 1% of the differences between “females” and “males.”<sup>58</sup> So, why would we use the words “same” and “opposite” to differentiate friendship lines when there is more similarity between groups than not? As such, we agree with the definition and conceptualization of the term created by Mike Monsour and William Rawlins’ “postmodern friendships.”<sup>59</sup> A **postmodern friendship** is one where the “participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific friendships. This co-construction involves negotiating and affirming (or not) identities and intersubjectively creating relational and personal realities through communication.”<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, this perspective allows individuals to create their own friendship identities that may or may not be based on any sense of traditional gender identities.

## Cross-Group Friendships

Social identity theory **Social Identity Theory** is applicable to cross-group friendships.<sup>19</sup> As we noted above, research has found that one of the biggest factors in friendship creation is the groups one belongs too (more so for males than females). In this section, we're going to explore issues related to cross-group friendships. A **cross-group friendship** is a friendship that exists between two individuals who belong to two or more different cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, etc.). "The phrase, 'Some of my best friends are...' is all too typically used by individuals wanting to demonstrate their liberal credentials. 'Some of my best friends are... gay.' 'Some of my best friends are... Black.' People say, 'Some of my best friends are...' and then fill in the blank with whatever marginalized group which they care to exonerate themselves."<sup>61</sup> Often when we hear people make these "Some of my best friends are..." statements, we view them as seriously suspect and question the validity of these relationships as actual "friendships." However, many people develop successful cross-group friendships.

It's important to understand that our cultural identities can help us feel that we are part of the "in-group" or part of the "out-group" as well. Identity in our society is often highly intertwined with marginalization. As noted earlier, we also know that males are more likely to align themselves with others they perceive as similar. Females do this as well, but not to the same degree as males. In essence, most of us protect our group identities by associating with people we think are like us, so it's not surprising that most of our friendships are with people that demographically and ideologically similar to us. And to a certain extent, judge members of different out-groups based on our ethnocentric perceptions of behavior. For example, some people ask questions like, "why does my Black friend talk about race so much;" "does my friend have to act 'so' gay when we're in public;" or "I like my friend, but does she always have to talk to me about her religion." In these three instances (race, sexual orientation, and religion), we see examples of judging someone's communicative behavior based on their own in-group's communicative behavioral norms. Especially for people who are marginalized, being marginalized is a part of who they are that cannot be separated from how they think and behave. Maybe a friend talks about race because they are part of a marginalized racial group, so this is their experience in life. "This is actually normal and understandable behavior on the part of these different groups. They are not the ones who make it the focus of their lives. Society—the rest of us—makes race or orientation or gender an issue for them—an issue that they cannot ignore, even if they wanted to. They have to face it every waking moment of their lives."<sup>62</sup> People who live their lives in marginalized groups see this marginalization as part of their daily life, and it's intrinsically intertwined with their identity.

Many of us will have the opportunity to develop cross-group friendships throughout our lives. As our society becomes more diverse, so has the likelihood of developing cross-group friendships. In a large research project examining the outcomes associated with cross-group friendships, the researchers found two factors were the most important when it came to developing cross-group friendships: racism and exposure to cross-group friendships. First, individuals who are racist are less likely to engage in cross-group friendships.<sup>63</sup>

Second, actual exposure to cross-group friendships can lead to more intergroup contact and more positive attitudes towards members in those groups.

Ultimately, successful cross-group friendships succeed or fail based on two primary factors: time and self-disclosure.<sup>64</sup> First, successful cross-group friendships take time to develop, so don't expect them to happen overnight. Furthermore, these relationships will take more time to develop as you navigate your cultural differences in addition to navigating the terms of the friendship itself. Now, it's important that when we use the word "time" here, we are not only discussing both longitudinal time, but also the amount of time we spend with the other person. The more we interact with someone from another group, the stronger our friendship will become.

Second, successful cross-group friendships involve high amounts of self-disclosure. We must be open and honest with our thoughts and feelings. We need to discuss not only the surface level issues in our lives, but we need to have deeper, more meaningful disclosures about who we are as individuals and who we are as individuals because of our cultural groups. One of our coauthor's best friend is from a different racial background. All of our coauthors grew up in the Southern part of the United States, and our coauthor's friend also grew up in the inner-city area in Los Angeles. When the two of them met, they had very different lived experiences related to both race and geographic differences. Their connection was almost instantaneous, but the friendship grew out of many long nights in conversations over many years.

### Key Takeaways

- Research has shown that there is more overlap between female-female and male-male friendships than there are actual differences.
- J. Donald O'Meara proposed five distinct challenges that cross-sex relationships have: emotional bond, sexuality, inequality and power, public relationships, and opportunity structure.
- The two factors that have been shown to be the most important when developing cross-group friendships are time and self-disclosure.

### Key Terms

**active friendships**

Type of stabilized friendship where there is a negotiated sense of mutual accessibility and availability for both parties in the friendship.

**affect**

“Any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. Often described in terms of positive affect or negative affect, both mood and emotion are considered affective states.”

**agentic friendships**

Friendships marked by activity.

**commemorative friendships**

Type of stabilized friendship that reflects a specific space and time in our lives, but current interaction is minimal and primarily reflects a time when the two friends were highly involved in each other's lives.

**communal friendships**

Friendships marked by intimacy, personal/emotional expressiveness, amount of self-disclosure, quality of self-disclosure, confiding, and emotional supportiveness.

**contextual dialectics**

Friendship dialectics that stem out of the cultural order where the friendship exists.

**cross-group friendship**

Friendship that exists between two individuals who belong to two or more different cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, etc.).

**dormant friendships**

Type of stabilized friendship that “share either a valued history or a sufficient amount of sustained contact to anticipate or remain eligible for a resumption of the friendship at any time.”

**interactional dialectics**

Friendship dialectics that help us understand how communicative behavior happens within friendships

**postmodern friendships**

Friendship where the “participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific

friendships. This co-construction involves negotiating and affirming (or not) identities and intersubjectively creating relational and personal realities through communication.”

### **Social Identity Theory**

Theory about how one's self-concept is based on group membership.

## Chapter Wrap-Up

Friendships are a very important part of our interpersonal relationships. As such, we should never take our friendships for granted. For this reason, it's important to remember that friendships (like all relationships) take work. In this chapter, we started by exploring the nature and characteristics of friendships. We then examined the stages and types of friendships. We ended this chapter by exploring friendships in several different contexts.

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# FAMILY AND MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS

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## Learning Objectives

- Describe the term “family communication patterns” and the two basic types of family communication patterns.
- Explain family systems theory and its utility for family communication researchers.
- Understand the three different types of marital relationships.
- Differentiate sibling relationship types and maintenance strategies.

Families are one of the essential relationships that all of us have in our lifetimes. Admittedly, there are a wide range of family types: adopted families, foster families, stepfamilies, nuclear families, and the families we make. According to the latest research from the [US Census Bureau](#), there are a wide range of different types of households in the United States today:

- Family households (83.48 Million)
- Married couple households (61.96 Million)
- Married couple households with own children (31.29 Million)
- Married couple households without own children (30.67 Million)
- Male householder, with own children (3.81 Million)
- Male householder, without own children (2.67 Million)
- Female householder, with own children (12.33 Million)
- Female householder, without own children (2.72 Million)

This chapter is going to explore the different types of family relationships and then end by looking at marriage.

## Family Relationships

We interact within our families and begin learning our family communication pattern from the time we are born. Families are comparable to cultures in that each family has its own values, rituals, customs, beliefs, values, and practices. Interactions with other families reveal that there are vast differences between families. You may notice that the family down the street yells at each other almost constantly. Yelling is their baseline interaction, whereas another family never raises their voices and may seem to speak so infrequently that it appears that they have nothing to talk about within their family unit. These differences and our tendency as humans to make comparisons cause individuals to assess the value of the various styles of family communication.



“We are Family!” by Jack Duval is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

## Defining Family

One of the biggest challenges for family researchers has been to define the “family.” The ambiguity of the term “family” has often been seen in the academic literature. The definition of the family developed by Ernest W. Burgess was the first widely used definition by academics.<sup>1</sup> The term “family” was described as “two or more persons joined by ties of marriage, blood, or adoption; constituting a single household; interacting and communicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister; and creating and maintaining a common culture.”<sup>2</sup> According to Burgess a family must be legally tied together, live together, interact together, and maintain a common culture together. The first three aspects of Burgess’ definition are pretty easy to conceptualize, but the concept of common culture deserves further explanation. Common culture consists of those communication interactions (day-to-day communication) and cultural tools (communication acts learned from one’s culture previous to the marriage) that each person brings into the marriage or family. Burgess’ definition of the family was useful because he was the first to examine the family structure’s attempt to maintain a common culture, but it also has many serious problems that cannot be ignored. Burgess’ definition of the word “family” excludes single parent families, commuter families, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgendered/transsexual families, and families who do not choose to, or are unable to, have children.

After examining the flaws of Burgess’ definition of the word “family,” an anthropologist, George Peter Murdock, attempted to define the family, “Social group characterized by common residence, economic

cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.”<sup>3</sup> Once again, this definition only allows for heterosexual couples who have children to be considered a family because of the “socially approved” sexual relationship clause.

Another problem with this definition deals with the required inclusion of children for a couple to be labeled as a family. Many couples are unable to have children. Yet other couples opt not to have children. Does this really mean that they are not families? Couples, with or without children, should be considered as family units. All in all, this definition gave more direction than the Burgess one, but it is still extremely ambiguous and exclusive.

Another anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, was looking at tribal familial structures all over the world at the turn of the century and defined the family as having 1) boundaries, 2) common residence, and 3) mutual affection for one another.<sup>4</sup> Malinowski’s definition deals primarily with the fact that in different cultures around the world, a family member may include anyone from the immediate family of origin who gave birth to a person, to any member of the society into which one is born. Many African tribes see the tribe as being the family unit, and the tribe takes it upon itself to raise the children.

The United States’ societal concept of the term “family” became very rigid during the 1950s when the family was depicted by social norms and the media as a mother, father, 2.5 offspring, and the family dog living together behind a white picket fence in the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> Though this is currently what many Americans picture as the typical 1950s’ family, the reality was considerably different. According to Steven Mintz and Susan Kellog the family structure was very weak in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Women started using tranquilizers as a method for dealing with normal household duties, and the divorce rate skyrocketed when compared with the 1940s. Currently, only around seven percent of U.S. families participate in the so-called “traditional” 1950s-style family.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1970s, a variety of psychologists attempted to define the term “family.” Arthur P. Bochner defined the family as “an organized, naturally occurring relational interaction system, usually occupying a common living space over an extended time, and possessing a confluence of interpersonal images which evolve through the exchange of messages over time.”<sup>8,9</sup> Though this definition is broad enough to allow for a variety of relationships to be considered families, the definition is too vague. It has allowed almost anything to be considered a family. Take, for example, individuals who live in a dormitory setting either at a college or in the military. The first part of Bochner’s definition of family is that it has an organized, naturally occurring relational interaction system. In essence, this means that any group that has organization and interacts through various relationships accomplishes part of what it means to be a family. People who live in dormitories interact through various relationships on a regular basis. Whether it be relating with one’s roommate or with the other people who live in the rooms next to you, people in dorms do interact. Dormitories are generally highly organized. People are required to listen to complex directors and Resident Assistants (on a collegiate level). Also, with the myriad of dormitory softball teams and other activities, interaction occurs regularly.

The second part of Bochner’s definition of the family deals with occupying a common living space for an

extended period. People who live in college dormitories do so for around a year. To many transient people, this can be seen as an extended period. The extended time clause is very awkward simply because of its ambiguity.

The last aspect of Bochner's definition of the family deals with the possession of interpersonal images that evolve through communication. Many people who live in the same space will start to acquire many stories and anecdotes concerning those people with whom they are in close proximity.

A family has an ongoing relationship that is constantly functioning even when the individuals are forced to live apart from the family of origin. Once again, here is a definition that does not allow for a concise explanation that can be easily applied when analyzing a family unit.

To understand the concept of a family, the definitions should be combined in such a way that all types of family structures (e.g., single parent, LGBTQIA, non-married parents, etc.) are included. For our purposes a **family** is defined as two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; living together or apart by choice or circumstance; having interaction within family roles; creating and maintaining a common culture; being characterized by economic cooperation; deciding to have or not to have children, either own or adopted; having boundaries; and claiming mutual affection. This does not necessarily say that all types of families are healthy or legal, but that all cohabiting groups that consider themselves to be families should be researched as such to understand the specific interactions within the group. Though one may disagree with a specific family group, understanding the group through a family filter can lend itself to a better understanding than could be reached by analyzing the group through an organizational filter. To understand this definition of family, an analysis of the various aspects of this study's definition shall be done to help clarify this definition.

## Marriage, Blood, Adoption, or Choice

The first part of the definition says that a family is "two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice." This part of the definition allows for a variety of family options that would not be accepted otherwise. This definition also allows for children who become part of a foster family to have a family that they can consider their own, even if they are switched from family to family. Non-married couples who consider themselves a family should also be researched as such. This aspect of the definition does open itself to some family types that are seen as illegal (e.g., family members marrying each other). This definition does not attempt to create a legal definition of family as much as it attempts to create a definition under which the family can be studied. As mentioned earlier, not all forms of family are necessarily healthy or legal. This part of the definition opens the field of family study while the remaining criteria narrow the focus so that not just any group can call itself a family.

## Cohabitation

The second part of the definition of family indicates that the cohabitants may live together or apart by choice

or circumstance. There are a variety of married couples who are not able to live in the same place because of occupation. According to Naomi Gerstel and Harriet Engel Goss, a commuter family is such a family:

The existence of marriages in which spouses separate in the service of divergent career demands at least suggests a need to question both the presupposition that coresidence is necessary for marital viability and its corollary that husbands and wives necessarily share economic fates. Dubbed “commuter,” “long-distance” or “two location” families, these marriages entail the maintenance of two separate residences by spouses who are apart from one another for periods ranging from several days per week to months at a time.<sup>10</sup>

These marriages, seen as nontraditional by many, are becoming an increasingly more common occurrence within the United States. Any member of the military who is stationed in the United States and sent to other parts of the world without their family experiences the problems caused by commuter marriages. Just because these families are not able to live under the same roof does not mean that they are not a family.

## Family Roles

The third criterion of the definition of “family” suggests that the persons interact within family roles. These roles include such terms as mom, dad, son, daughter, wife, husband, spouse, and offspring. When an adult decides to be the guardian either by birth, adoption, or choice, the adult has taken on the role of a father or mother. When a group takes on the roles of parental figures and child figures, they have created a family system within which they can operate. Some of these roles can be related to the understanding of extended family as well, such as grandmother, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, and the like. These roles and the rules that cultures associate with them have a definite impact on how a family will function.

## Common Culture

The fourth aspect, creating a common culture, stems directly from Burgess’ definition.<sup>11</sup> Couples bring other aspects (communicative acts, history, cultural differences, etc.) of their lives into the family to create the new subculture that exists in the new family. This can be done whether you have two men, a mother and daughter, or a husband and wife. When a couple joins to create a family unit, they are bringing both of their cultural backgrounds to the union, thus creating a unique third family culture that combines the two initial family cultures.

## Economic Cooperation

The fifth trait of a family deals with economic cooperation, or the general pooling of family resources for the benefit of the entire family. Economic cooperation is typically thought of in the context of nuclear families, but in commuter families, both units typically pool their resources in order to keep both living establishments

operational. Even though the family is unable to live together, the funds from both parties are used for the proper upkeep and maintenance of each location. In many instances, overseas military men and women will send their paychecks to their families back in the states because they will not need the money while they are out at sea or abroad, and their families still have bills that must get paid. Economic cooperation allows families who have dual earners to establish a more egalitarian relationship between the spouses since no one person is seen as the worker and the other as the non-worker.

## Children

The sixth component of the definition of a family deals with children as a component of a family. Many researchers (Burgess, 1926; Murdock, 1949; Bailey, 1988) have said that for a family to exist, it must have offspring.<sup>12</sup> This would mean that a couple who is infertile and only wants to raise children if they are biologically related would not be considered a family. This also prevents couples who do not desire to have children from achieving a family status. There are many unions of people who are not able to have children or do not desire to have children who are clearly families.

## Established Boundaries

The seventh characteristic of a family deals with the need for the family to establish boundaries. Family boundaries is a concept that stems from family systems theory. According to Janet Beavin Bavelas and Lynn Segal, boundaries are those aspects of a family that prevent the family from venturing beyond the family unit.<sup>13</sup> Boundaries function as a means for a family to determine the size and the scope of family interactions with the greater system or society. The family can let information into the family or exclude it from the family.

Families do not function entirely in conjunction with the system of which they are a part. Families must filter information or risk information overload. Families have naturally occurring and created boundaries that decide how a family should and should not operate. Many families create boundaries that deal with religious discussion, or they do not allow for any rejection of the family's religious beliefs on any level. This is an example of a boundary that a family can create. Conversely, there are boundaries that a family must respect because of societal laws. Understanding these boundaries is necessary because it allows the researcher a greater understanding of the context in which the family lives.

## Love and Trust

The eighth, and final, trait of a family, mutual affection, deals with the concept of love and trust that a family tends to possess to help them journey through conflict situations. Mutual affection also means that an individual must have a desire to be within the family or possess the freedom to leave the family system when they are of age. Families are not coercive entities but entities in which all participants can make personal

decisions freely belong. Leaving the family system does not guarantee that a member of a family will be able to lose all connections to the family itself. Besides, the family will have had an impact on members that will affect them even if they leave the family of origin and cut all ties.

Understanding the definitions presented about the family and their obvious limitations will help the understanding of the usefulness of this new definition. Too often, definitions of the word “family” have been so narrow in scope that only some families were studied, and thus the research into the family came from only a very narrow and rigid perspective. Defining what constitutes a family is a difficult task, but without a clear definition, the study of family communication cannot be done effectively.



Figure 1 Definition of Family

## Family Communication Patterns

Two communication researchers, Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee, found that most models of families relied on dichotomous ideas (e.g., autocratic/democratic, controlling/permissive, modern/traditional; etc.).<sup>14</sup> Instead of relying on these perspectives, McLeod and Chaffee realized that family communication happens along two different continuums: socio-orientation and concept-orientation. In a series of further studies, David Ritchie and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick identified two family communication patterns: conformity orientation and conversation orientation.<sup>15, 16</sup>

## Socio-Orientation

To McLeod and Chaffee, **socio-oriented** (conformity oriented) families are indicated by “the frequency of (or emphasis on) communication that is designed to produce deference, and to foster harmony and pleasant social relationships in the family.”<sup>17</sup> Families high in socio-orientation tend to communicate a similarity of attitudes, beliefs, and values. Similarity and harmony are valued while conflicts are avoided. Family members maintain interdependence within a hierarchical structure. One of the authors comes from a family where similarity and harmony were valued to the extent that any amount of disagreement was frowned upon. The parent never (literally) argued or disagreed in front of the children. Despite the desires of her parents, the personalities of the children soon emerged and revealed that neither child could go along with total similarity and harmony. One child dealt with this difference by learning to keep his opinions to himself. The other sibling, who happened to be the oldest child, never learned to keep her opinion to herself. Her communication style simply did not align with the conformity orientation friction was the result. You may have similar experiences if your communication style is different from your family’s communication orientation.

## Concept-Orientation

To McLeod and Chaffee, **concept-oriented** (conversation oriented) families use “positive constraints to stimulate the child to develop his own views about the world, and to consider more than one side of an issue.”<sup>18</sup> High concept-orientation families engage in open and frequent communication. Family life and interactions are perceived to be pleasurable. Self-expression is encouraged when attempting to make family decisions. Parents/guardians and children communicate in such a way that parents/guardians socialize and educate their children. Understanding the communication pattern within a family can lead to the ability to adapt to the family communication pattern rather than consistently communicating in a manner that is uncomfortable within the family structure.

## Four Combinations

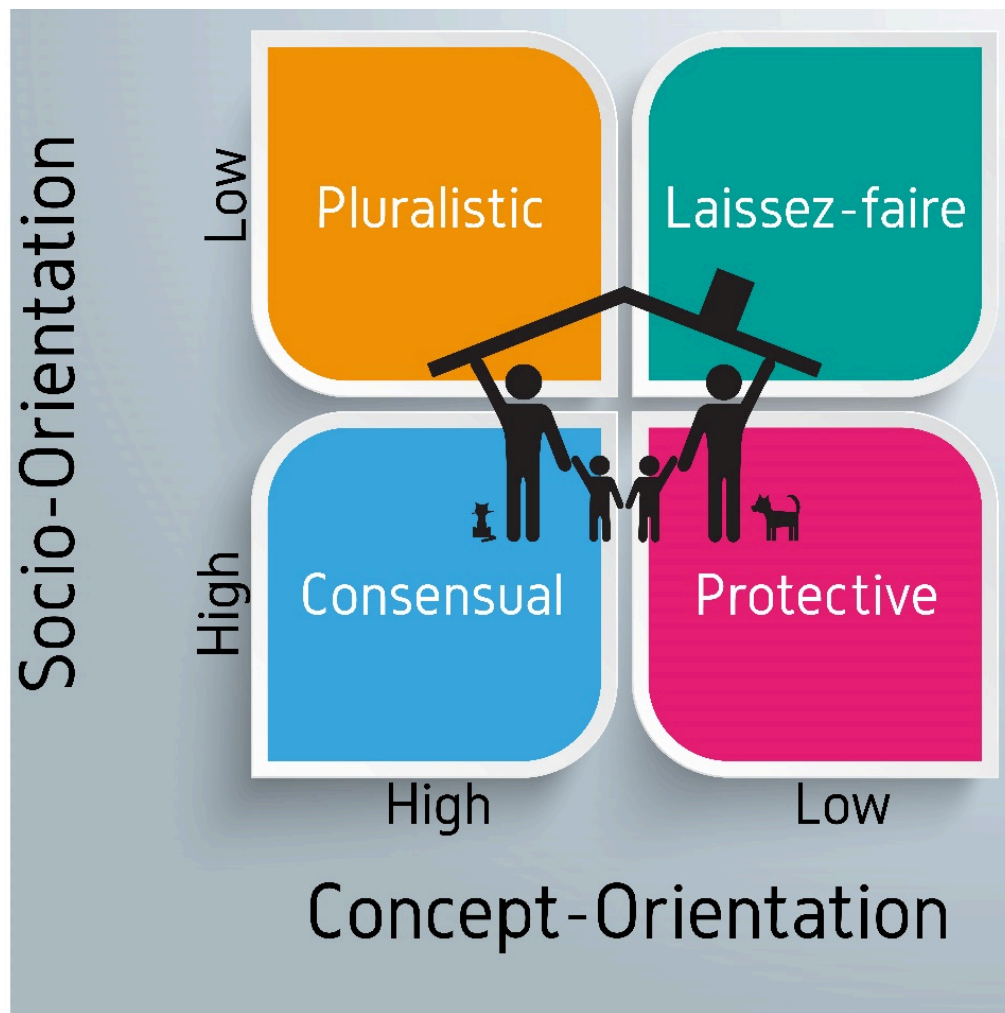


Figure 2. Family Communication Pattern

To further explain the concepts of socio- and concept-orientations, Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee broke the combinations into four specific categories (Figure 2).

### Consensual

The first family communication pattern is the consensual family, which is marked by both high levels of socio- and concept-orientation (high conversation and conformity). The term “consensual” is used here because there is a tendency in these families to strive for or have pressure for agreement between parents/guardian and children. Children are encouraged to think outside the box as long as it doesn’t impact the parents/guardians’ power or the family hierarchy. However, “These conflicting pressures may induce the child to retreat from the parent/guardian-child interaction. There is some evidence of ‘escape’ by consensual children, such as strikingly heavy viewing of television fantasy programs.”<sup>19</sup>

## Protective

The second type of family communication pattern is the protective family, which is marked by high levels of socio-orientation and low levels of concept-orientation (high conformity, low conversation). In these families, there tends to be a strong emphasis on child obedience and family harmony. As such, children are taught that they should not disagree with their parents/guardians openly or engage in conversations where differences of opinion may be found. McLeod and Chaffee noted that parents/guardians strive to protect their children from any kind of controversy, which may actually make them more vulnerable to outside pressures and persuasion because they have not been taught how to be critical thinkers.

## Pluralistic

The third type of family communication pattern is pluralistic, which is the opposite of the protective family and marked by high levels of concept-orientation and low levels of socio-orientation (low conformity, high conversation). In these families, “The emphasis in this communication structure seems to be on mutuality of respect and interests: the combination of an absence of social constraint plus a positive impetus to self-expression should foster both communication and competence.”<sup>20</sup> Some parents/guardians worry that this type of openness of thought actually creates problems in their children, but McLeod and Chaffee noted that these families have children who say they are more likely to want to grow up and be like their parents/guardians than the other three types.

## Laissez-faire

The final family communication pattern, laissez-faire, is marked by both low concept- and socio-orientations (low conversation, low conformity). In these families, there tends to be a lack of parent-child interaction or co-orientation. Instead, these children are more likely to be influenced by external factors like the media, peers, and other forces outside of the family unit. McLeod and Chaffee said that these children are more like a control group in an experiment because of the hands-off nature of their communicative relationships with their patterns. As such, it’s somewhat difficult to discuss the effectiveness of this study of family communication.

## Research Spotlight



In a 2018 study by Kelly G. Odenweller & Tina M. Harris, the researchers set out to examine the relationship between family communication patterns and adult children's racial prejudice and tolerance. The researchers used a mostly college-age sample of 190 adults.

Parental use of socio-oriented family communication patterns was positively related to an adult child's reported levels of prejudiced and bias towards their own group, and negatively related to being racially tolerant.

As for concept-orientation, there were no relationships found at all.

Ultimately, a parent's conformity oriented family communication style can affect their children's racial biases.

Odenweller, K. G., & Harris, T. M. (2018). Intergroup socialization: The influence of parents' family communication patterns on adult children's racial prejudice and tolerance. *Communication Quarterly*, 66(5), 501–521. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2018.1452766>

## Family Systems Theory

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, philosophers started questioning how humans organize things and our understanding of organizing. Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general systems theory conceptualized what has become known as general systems theory.<sup>22</sup> Bertalanffy defined a **system** as "sets of elements standing in interrelation."<sup>23</sup> A classic mechanical system is a non-digital watch. Figure 3 shows the basic layout of a watch's innards.

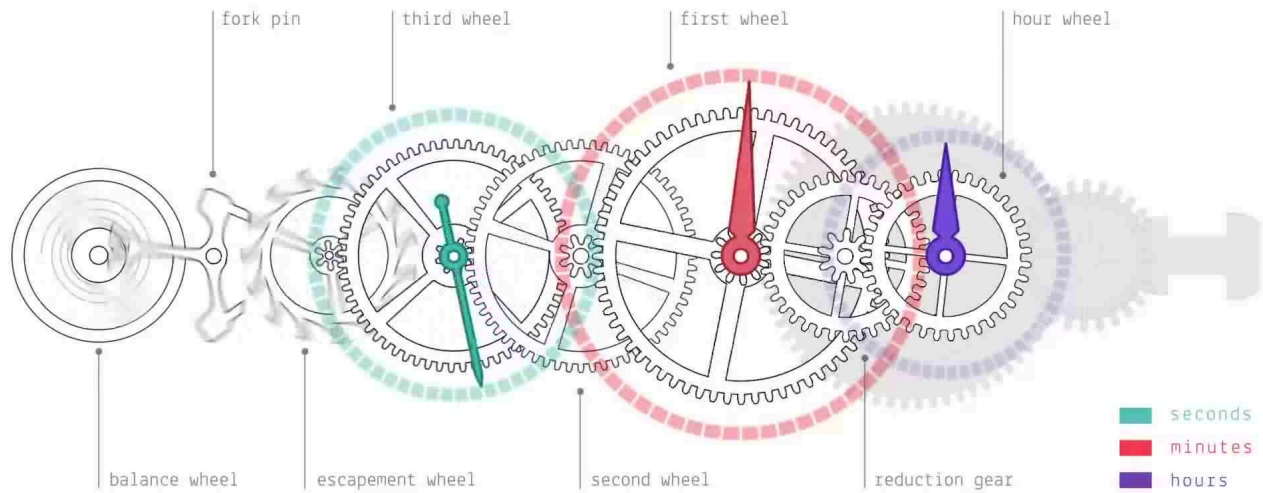


Figure 3. Watch System. [“Watch Movement” by Giacomo Ciurlo, DensityDesign Research Lab is licensed CC-BY-SA](#)

In this illustration, we see how the balance wheel causes the fork pin to move, which turns the escapement wheel. The escapement wheel turns the third wheel (seconds), which turns the second wheel, which turns the first wheel (minutes), which turns the reduction gear, which turns the hour wheel. All of these different parts must work together to tell time. If a problem arises at any part of this process, then it will affect the entire system and our ability to tell time accurately.

So, how does this ultimately help us understand family communication? A psychiatrist named Murray Bowen developed family systems theory in the 1950s while working at the National Institute of Mental Health, which stemmed from the work of general systems theory discussed by Bertalanffy.<sup>24</sup> Like Bertalanffy, Bowen’s theory started by examining how everything exists within nature and was governed by natural processes. Two of these processes, individuality and togetherness, became central to these ideas.<sup>25</sup> **Individuality** is a “universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward separateness, uniqueness, and distinctiveness.”<sup>26</sup> **Togetherness**, on the other hand, is “the complementary, universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward relationship, attachment, and connectedness.”<sup>27</sup> This essential dialectical tension creates an organism’s differentiation, or its drive to be both individualistic while maintaining intimate connections with others in the larger environment. This more ecological view of how humans exist becomes a central tenant of Bowen’s family systems theory. Bowen argues that human behavior was not greatly determined by social-construction or intra-psychically generated. Instead, Bowen believes that a great deal of human behavior is habitual and rooted in billions of years of evolutionary history.

In his earliest work, Bowen examined schizophrenic patients, so he was interested in the development and treatment of schizophrenia. Instead of focusing just on the schizophrenic patient, Bowen started analyzing the

broader range of relationships within the individual family units. Ultimately, Bowen argued that schizophrenia might be an individual diagnosis, but is in reality, “a symptom manifestation of an active process that involves the entire family.”<sup>28</sup> Dr. Bowen goes on to rationalize, “When schizophrenia is seen as a family problem, it is not a disease in terms of our usual way of thinking about disease... When the family is viewed as a unit, certain clinical patterns come into focus that are not easily seen from the more familiar individual frame of reference.”<sup>29</sup> In essence, when we stop to think about a family as a system, it’s much easier to understand the manifestations of behaviors of family members.

## Characteristics of Family Systems

Over the years, numerous researchers have furthered the basic ideas of Murray Bowen to further our understanding of family systems. Part of this process has been identifying different characteristics of family systems. According to Kathleen Galvin, Fran Dickson, and Sherilyn Marrow,<sup>30</sup> there are seven essential characteristics of family systems: interdependence, wholeness, patterns/regularities, interactive complexity, openness, complex relationships, and equifinality.

### Interdependence

The term interdependence means that changes in one part of the system will have ramifications for other parts of the system. For example, if one of the gears in your watch gets bent, the gear will affect the rest of the watch’s ability to tell time. In this idea, the behaviors of one family member will impact the behaviors of other family members. To combine this idea with family communication patterns described earlier, parents/guardians that are high in socio-orientation and low in concept-orientation will impact that children’s willingness and openness to communicate about issues of disagreement.

On the larger issue of pathology, numerous diseases and addictions can impact how people behave and interact. If you have a family who has a child diagnosed with cancer, the focus of the entire family may shift to the care of that one child. If the parents/guardians rally the family in support, this diagnosis could bring everyone together. On the other hand, it’s also possible that the complete focus of the parents/guardians turns to the ill child and the other children could feel unattended to or unloved, which could lead to feelings of isolation, jealousy, and resentment.

### Wholeness

The idea of wholeness or holism is to be able to see behaviors and outcomes within the context of the system. To understand how a watch tells time, you cannot just look at the fork pin’s activity and understand the concept of time. In the same way, examining a single fight between two siblings cannot completely let you know everything you need to know about how that family interacts or how that fight came to happen. How

siblings interact with one another can be manifestations of how they have observed their parents/guardians handle conflict or even extended family members like aunts/uncles, grandparents, and cousins.

Holism is often discussed in opposite to reductionism. Reductionists believe that the best way to understand someone's communicative behavior is to break it down into the simplest parts that make up the system. For example, if a teenager exhibits verbal aggression, a reductionist would explain the verbally aggressive behavior in terms of hormones (specifically testosterone and serotonin). Holistic systems thinkers don't negate the different parts of the system, but rather like to take a larger view of everything that led to the verbally aggressive behavior. For example, does the teenager mirror their family's verbally aggressive tendencies? Basically, what other parts of the system are at play when examining a single behavioral outcome.

## Patterns/Regularities

Families, like any natural organism, like balance and predictability. To help with this balance and predictability, systems (including family systems) create a complex series of both rules and norms. Rules are dictates that are spelled out. Many children grow up hearing, "children are to be seen and not heard." This rule dictates that in social situations, children are not supposed to make noise or actively communicate with others. Norms, on the other hand, are patterns of behavior that are arrived at through the system. For example, maybe your mother has a home office, and everyone knows that when she is in her office, she should not be disturbed.

Of course, one of the problems with patterns and regularities is that they become deeply entrenched and are not able to be changed or corrected quickly or easily. When a family is suddenly faced with a crisis event, these patterns and regularities may prevent the family from actively correcting the course. For example, imagine you live in a family where everyone is taught not to talk about the family's problems with anyone outside the family. If one of the family members starts having problems, the family may try to circle the wagons and ultimately not get the help it needs. This is an example of a situation that happened to one of our coauthors' families. In this case, one of our coauthor's cousins became an alcoholic during his teen years. We'll call him Jesse. Very few people in the immediate family even know about Jesse's problems. Jesse's mother was a widely known community leader, so there was a family rule that said, "don't make mom or our family look bad." When Jesse's parents found out about his alcoholism (though a DUI), they circled the wagons and tried to deal with the problem as a family. Unfortunately, dealing with a disease like alcoholism by closing ranks is not the best way to get someone treatment. One night Jesse's mother was called out to an accident at a local night club where a drunk driver had hit several people. When Jesse's mother showed up, it was only then that she learned that the drunk driver had been her son.

In this case, the rule about protecting the family's image had become so ingrained, that the family hadn't taken all of the steps necessary to get Jesse the help he needed. Although no one died in the accident, one young woman hit by Jesse was paralyzed for the rest of her life. Jesse ended up going to prison for several years.

## Interactive Complexity

The notion of interactive complexity stems back to the original work conducted by Murray Bowen on family systems theory. In his initial research looking at schizophrenics, a lot of families labeled the schizophrenic as “the problem” or “the patient,” which allowed them to put the blame for family problems and interactions on the schizophrenic. Instead, Bowen realized that schizophrenia was one person’s diagnosis in a family system where there were usually multiple issues going on. Trying to reduce everything down to the one label, essentially letting everyone else “off the hook” for any blame for family problems, was not an accurate portrayal of the family.

Instead, it’s important to think about interactions as complex and stemming from the system itself. For example, all married couples will have disagreements. Some married couples take these disagreements, and they become highly contentious fights. These fights are often repetitious and seen over and over again. Mary asks Anne to take out the trash. The next day Mary sees that the trash hasn’t been taken out yet. Mary turns to Anne at breakfast and says, “are you ever going to take out the trash?” Anne quickly replies, “Stop nagging me already. I’ll get it done when I get it done.” Before too long, this becomes a fight about Anne not listening to Mary from Mary’s point-of-view, while the conversation becomes about Mary’s constant nagging from Anne’s point-of-view. Before long, the argument devolves into an argument about who started the conflict in the first place. Galvin, Dickson, and Marrow argue that trying to determine who started the conflict is not appropriate from a systems perspective, instead, researchers should focus on “current patterns serves to uncover ongoing complex issues.”<sup>31</sup>

## Openness

The next major characteristic of systems is openness. The term openness refers to how permissive system boundaries are to their external environment. Some families have fairly open boundaries. In essence, these families allow for a constant inflow of information from the external environment and outflow of information to the external environment. Other families are considerably more rigid about system boundaries. For example, maybe a family is deeply religious and does not allow television in the home. Furthermore, the family only allows reading materials that come strictly from their religious sect and actively prevent any ideas that may threaten their religious ideology. In this case, the family has a very rigid and closed boundary. When families close themselves off from the external environment, they essentially isolate themselves. Children who are reared in highly isolated family systems often have problems interacting with other children when they come into contact with them in the external environment (like school). Some families will choose to homeschool their children as another tool to close the family system to foreign ideas and influences.

## Complex Relationships

It’s important to remember that all family systems also have multiple subsystems. One of the areas that Murray

Bowen became very interested in how family subsystems develop and function during times of crisis. In Bowen's view, a couple may be the basic unit within an emotional relationship. Still, any tension between the couple will usually result in one or both parties turning to others. If there are not others within the family itself, partners will bring in external people into the instability. For example, James and Ralph just got married. After a recent argument, Ralph ended up talking to his best friend, Shelly, about the argument (11.4). Bowen argues a two-person system under stress will draw in a third party to provide balance, which ultimately creates a two-helping-one or a two-against-one dynamic. It's also possible that James decides to talk to his mother, Polly, which creates a different triangle.

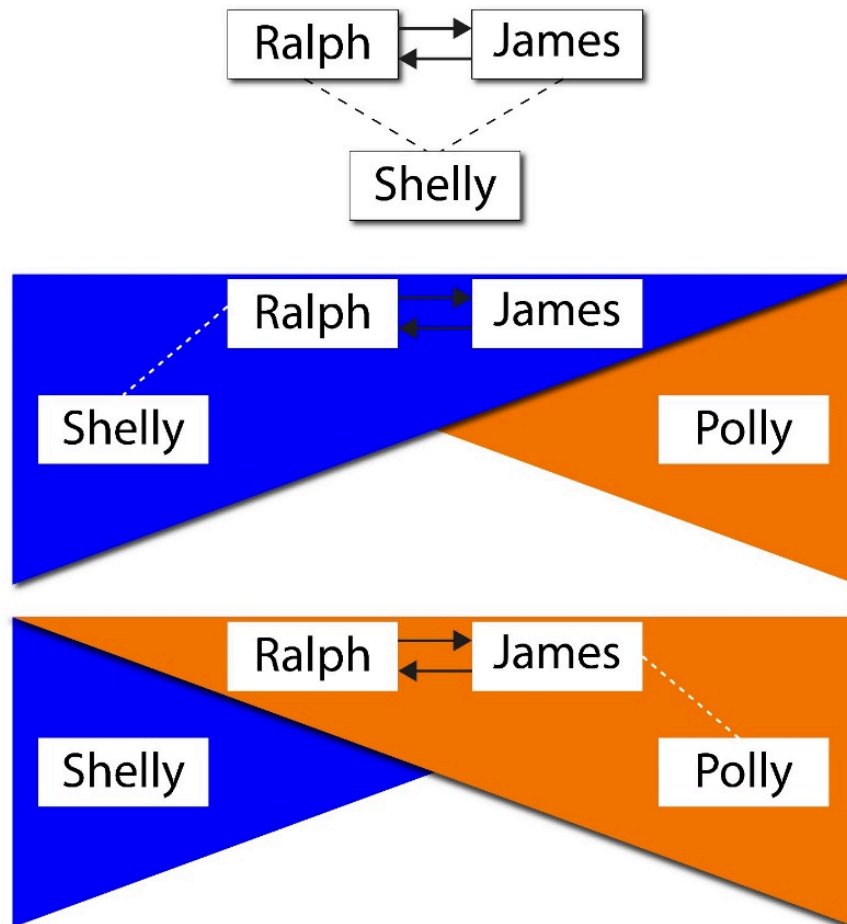


Figure 4. Nature of Three

Families are filled with relationship triangles. We could describe Ralph and James as parents and Shelly and Polly as their daughters just as easily. These triangles are always being created and defined within a family unit when there is instability between two people. During times of crisis, these triangles take on a solution to the instability in the two-person relationship. Unfortunately, this “solution” is either two-helping-one or a two-against-one.<sup>32</sup> Basically, in a triangle, there are now two people on one side and one on the other, so it gives a

sense of balance. The more family members we start to examine, the more complicated these triangle structures can become.

## Equifinality

The final characteristic of family systems is equifinality. Equifinality is defined as the ability to get to the same end result using multiple starting points and paths. Going back to the basic definition of “family” discussed earlier in this chapter, there are many different ways for people to form relationships that are called families. Within family systems theory, the goal is to see how different family systems achieve the same outcomes (whether positive or negative).

### Key Takeaways

- Although there are numerous definitions for the term “family,” this book uses the following definition: two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; living together or apart by choice or circumstance; having interaction within family roles; creating and maintaining a common culture; being characterized by economic cooperation; deciding to have or not to have children, either own or adopted; having boundaries; and claiming mutual affection.
- Family communication patterns include socio-orientation and concept-orientation.
- Murray Bowen’s family systems theory is an extension of Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s general systems theory. Bowen argued that human behavior is not determined by social-construction or intra-psychically generated, but is habitual and rooted in billions of years of evolutionary history.

## Marriage Relationships

Earlier in this text, we discussed dating and romantic relationships. For this chapter, we’re going to focus on marriages as a factor of family communication.

## Marital Types

One of the most important names in the area of family communication and marital research, in general, is a scholar named Mary Anne Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick was one of the first researchers in the field of communication to devote her career to the study of family communication. Most of her earliest research was all in the area of marriage.<sup>57</sup>

### The Relational Definitions

After creating the relational dimensions, Fitzpatrick then further broke this down into a marriage typology that included three specific remarriage types: traditional, independents, and separates.<sup>66</sup> Figure 11 illustrates how the three relational definitions were ultimately arrived at.

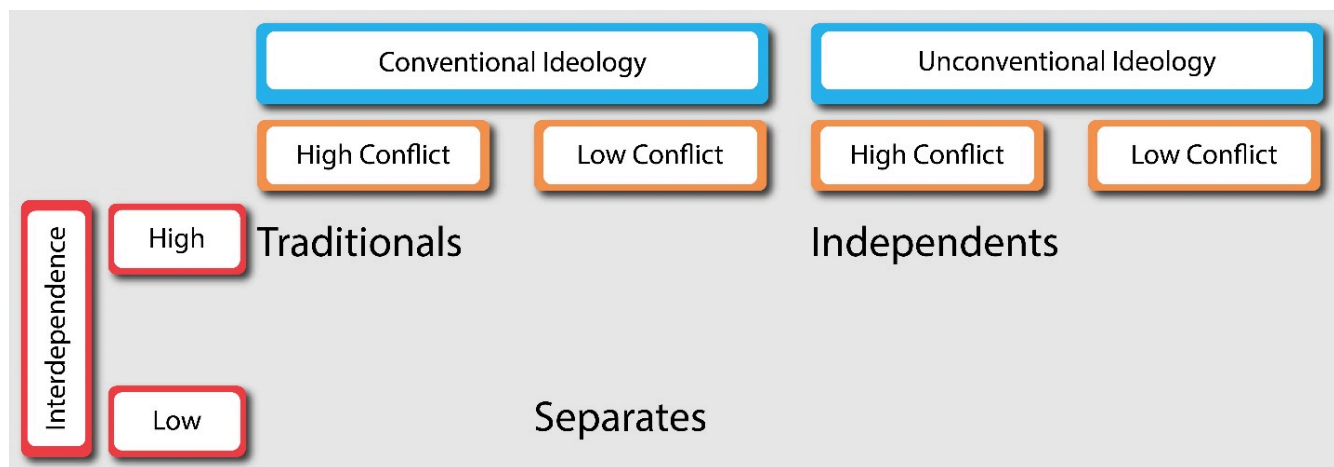


Figure 11. Relational Definitions

### Traditionals

The first relational definition that Fitzpatrick arrived at was called traditionals. **Traditionals** are highly interdependent, have a conventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement. First, traditional lives are highly intertwined in both the use of space and time, so they are not likely to feel the need for autonomous space at home or an overabundance of “me time.” Instead, these couples like to be with each other and have a high degree of both sharing and companionship. These couples are more likely to have clear routines that they are happy with. These couples are traditionals also because they do have a conventional ideology. As such, they believe that a woman should take her husband’s name, keep family plans when made, children should be brought up knowing their cultural heritage, and infidelity is never excusable. Lastly, traditionals report openly engaging in conflict, but they do not consider themselves overly assertive in their conflict with each other. Of the three types, people in traditional marriages report the greatest levels of satisfaction.

## Independents

The second relational definition that Fitzpatrick described were called independents. **Independents** have a high level of interdependence, have an unconventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement. The real difference is their unconventional values in what a marriage is and how it functions. Independents, like their traditional counterparts, have high levels of interdependency within their marriages, so there is a high degree of both sharing and companionship reported by these individuals. However, independents tend to need more “me time” and autonomous space. Independents are also less likely to stick with a clear family schedule daily. To these individuals, marriage is something that compliments their way of life and not something that constrains it. Lastly, independents are also likely to openly engage in conflict and report moderate levels of assertiveness and do not avoid conflicts.

## Separates

The final relational definition that Fitzpatrick described were called separates. **Separates** have low interdependence, have a conventional ideology, and low levels of conflict engagement. “Separates seem to hold two opposing ideological views on relationships at the same time. Although a separate is as conventional in marital and family issues as a traditional, they simultaneously support the values upheld by independents and stress individual freedom over relational maintenance.”<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, these couples tend to focus more on maintaining their individual identity more than relational maintenance. Furthermore, these individuals are also likely to report avoiding conflict within the marriage. These individuals generally report the lowest levels of marriage satisfaction of the three.

## Same-Sex Marriages

Up to this point, the majority of the information discussed in this section has been based on research explicitly conducted looking at heterosexual marriages. In one study, Fitzpatrick and her colleagues specifically set out to examine the three relational definitions and their pervasiveness among gay and lesbians.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, the researchers found “gay males, there are approximately the same proportion of traditionals, yet significantly fewer independents and more separates than in the random, heterosexual sample. For lesbians, there were significantly more traditionals, fewer independents, and fewer separates than in the random, heterosexual sample.”<sup>69</sup> However, it’s important to note that this specific study was conducted just over 20 years before same-sex marriage became legal in the United States.

The reality is that little research exists thus far on long-term same-sex marriages. The legalization of same-sex marriages in July 2015 started a new period in the examination of same-sex relationships for family and family communication scholars alike.<sup>70</sup> As a whole, GLBT families, and marriages more specifically, is an under-researched topic. In a 2016 analysis of a decade of research on family and marriage in the most prominent

journals on the subject, researchers found that only .02% of articles published during that time period directly related to LGBTQ families.<sup>71</sup> For scholars of interpersonal communication, the lack of literature is also problematic. In an analysis of the *Journal of Family Communication*, of the 300+ articles published in that journal since its inception in 2001, only nine articles have examined issues related to LGBTQ families. This is an area that future scholars, maybe even you, will decide to study.

### Key Takeaways

- Traditional are couples who are highly interdependent, have a conventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement. Independents are couples who have a high level of interdependence, have an unconventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement. Separates are couples who have low interdependence, have a conventional ideology, and low levels of conflict engagement.
- Little research has examined how LGBTQIA couples interact in same-sex marriages. Research has shown that in a decade of research about family and marriage, only .02% articles had to do with LGBTQIA families.

## Sibling Types

After examining the literature related to siblings, Shirley McGuire, Susan M. McHale, and Kimberly Updegraff realized that two main concepts were commonly discussed in the literature: hostility and warmth.<sup>43</sup> **Sibling hostility** was characterized by such sibling behaviors as causing trouble, getting into fights, teasing/name-calling, taking things without permission, etc...<sup>44</sup> **Sibling warmth**, on the other hand, was characterized by sibling behaviors such as sharing secrets, helping each other, teaching each other, showing physical affection, sharing possessions, etc...<sup>45</sup> Research has shown us that warmth and hostility have an impact on sibling relationships. For example, individuals who have higher levels of sibling warmth are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior.<sup>46</sup> Individuals who have sibling relationships that are high in hostility are more likely to report higher levels of aggression, anxiety, depression, and loneliness.<sup>47</sup> A recent meta-analysis of sibling relationships found that communicating frequently and feeling close to a sibling is associated with higher well-being and having healthy relationships generally. However, more sibling conflict is related to poor well-being and more negative relationships.<sup>33</sup>

## Sibling Relationship Types

McGuire, McHale, and Updegraff knew that these two dimensions were distinct from one another, so they set out to create a typology of sibling relationships based on hostility (high vs. low) and warmth (high vs. low). You can see this typology in Figure 10.

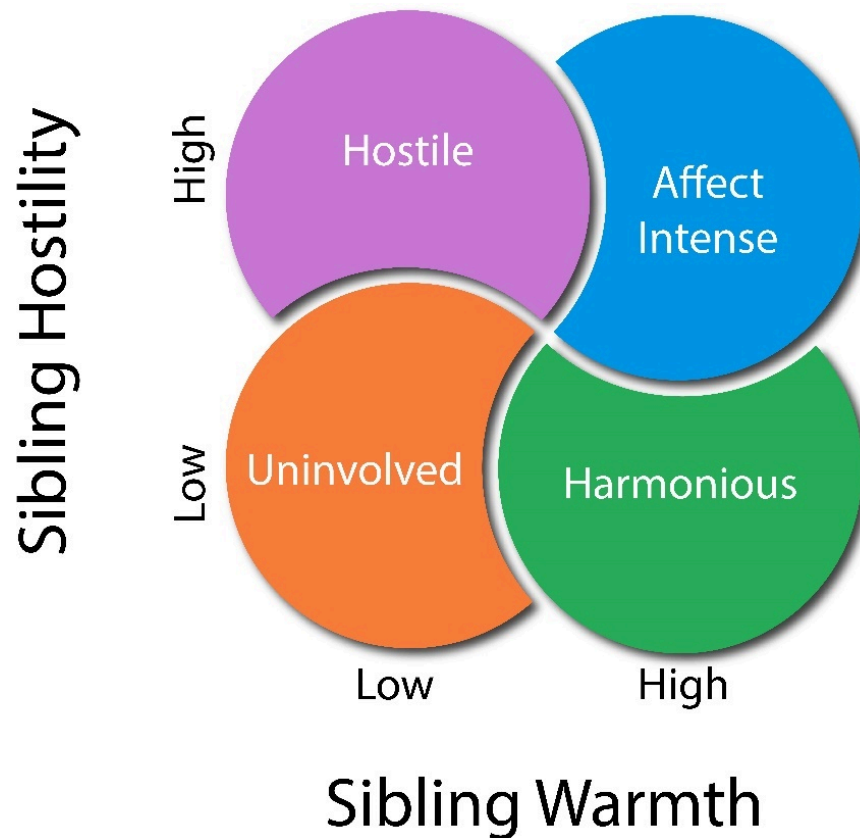


Figure 10. Sibling Relationships

### Harmonious

The first type of sibling relationship is the harmonious relationship. Harmonious sibling relationships are characterized by low levels of hostility and high levels of warmth. In these relationships, the siblings get along very well and have very low levels of problematic conflict. Often siblings in this category get along so well that they are very close friends in addition to being siblings. When it comes to long-term outcomes, harmonious siblings were found to have lower feelings of loneliness and higher self-esteem.<sup>48</sup> Research has also found gender effects. When sibling pairs are both female, they are more likely to report harmonious relationships than the other three sibling relationship types. At the same time, the combination of gender and birth-order also makes a difference. Males who are the firstborn are less likely to report harmonious sibling relationships.<sup>49</sup>

## Hostile

The opposite sibling type of the harmonious sibling is the hostile sibling relationship, which is characterized by high levels of hostility and low levels of warmth. These relationships are marked by high levels of conflict between the siblings, which can often be highly physically and verbally aggressive. Furthermore, individuals in hostile sibling relationships are more likely to internalize internalizing of problems along with lower academic success, social competence, and feelings of self-worth.<sup>50</sup> These siblings often perceive their siblings as rivals within the family unit, so there is an inherent competition for scarce resources. Often these resources are related to parental attention, respect, and love.

## Affect-Intense

The third sibling type is the affect-intense relationship. Affect-intense sibling relationships are marked by both high levels of hostility and warmth. These sibling relationships are as nurturing as harmonious relationships and as dominating as hostile relationships. These relationships are also perceived as more satisfying than hostile sibling relationships.<sup>51</sup> In one study examining affect-intense sibling relationships, researchers found that 38% of siblings from divorced families reported their sibling relationships as affect-intense as compared to only 22% of siblings from intact families.

## Uninvolved

The last type of sibling relationship is called the uninvolved, which is characterized by low levels of both hostility and warmth. Uninvolved sibling relationships typically don't have any of the problems associated with affect-intense or hostile sibling relationships. Still, they also do not report any of the benefits that have been found with harmonious sibling relationships.<sup>52</sup> Uninvolved sibling relationships also appear to develop later in life. "Perhaps the separation processes and increased focus on peers that begin during adolescence stimulate the development of an uninvolved sibling relationship."<sup>53</sup>

## Sibling Relationship Maintenance

One area where communication scholars have been instrumental in the field of sibling relationships has been in relationship maintenance, or the communicative behaviors that one engages in to preserve a relationship with another person. In one of the earliest studies to examine sibling relationships in the field, Scott Myers and a group of students explored the relationship between relationship communication and sibling communication satisfaction, liking, and loving.<sup>54</sup> Equality, receptivity, immediacy, similarity, and composure were all positively related to communication satisfaction. Composure, equality, similarity, and receptivity were all positively related to sibling liking. Equality, similarity, and receptivity were positively related to loving one's sibling. The

researchers also noted that individuals who perceived their relationships as more formal reported lower levels of loving their siblings. This first study helped pave the way for future research in examining how relationship communication impacts sibling relationships.

In a follow-up study, Scott Myers and Keith Weber set out to construct a measure for analyzing how individuals use communication to maintain their sibling relationships.<sup>55</sup> In their research, Myers and Weber found six distinct ways that siblings maintain their relationships through communication: confirmation, humor, social support, family visits, escape, and verbal aggression

## Confirmation

The first way that siblings engage in relational maintenances is through confirmation. Confirmation messages help a sibling communicate how much they value the sibling. Sometimes it's as simple as telling a sibling, "I'm pretty lucky to have a brother/sister like you," can be a simple way to demonstrate how much someone means to you. These types of messages help validate the other sibling and the relationship.

## Humor

A second relational maintenance tool that siblings can use is humor. Being able to laugh with one's sibling is a great way to enjoy each other's company. Often siblings find things completely hilarious that outsiders may not understand because of the unique nature of sibling relationships. Siblings also can lovingly make fun of each other. Now, we're not talking about making fun of someone in a demeaning or mean-spirited manner. For example, one of our coauthors has an older brother who loves to give him a hard time. Recently, our coauthor misspelled something on Facebook, and his brother was right there to point it out and give him a hard time. In some relationships, this could be viewed as criticism, but because of the nature of their relationship, our coauthor knew the incident should be taken in jest.

## Social Support

The third way siblings engage in relational maintenances is through social support. Social support is an individual's perception and the actuality that an individual is loved and cared for and has people they can turn to when assistance or help is needed. Between siblings, this could involve conversations about one's romantic life or even about parental concerns. Another way that siblings often provide social support is by giving and seeking advice from their sibling(s).

## Family Events

The fourth way that families engage in social support is through family events. Now, not all families are big

on family events, but some families participate in close-knit gatherings regularly. Some siblings will avoid these events to avoid seeing their other siblings, but many siblings see these opportunities as a way to keep their sibling relationships going. One of our coauthor's family has problems getting together each year during the holidays because of how busy their schedules are in December. Instead, our coauthor and family go on family trips. Over the years, they've gone to Australia, Alaska, Hawaii, The Bahamas, San Francisco, New York City, New Zealand, and many other places. Currently, they're planning trips to Belize and back to Hawaii. The family looks forward to these vacations together. In addition to these trips, our coauthor's father also arranges periodic family reunions for his side of the family. Once again, our coauthor and sibling often end up rooming together because both are single. Ultimately, both look forward to these reunions because it gives them a chance to catch up.

## Escape

At the same time, it's often great to attend family events, but we usually only like to attend when we know our sibling will be there. In these cases, we often use our siblings as a form of escape. In fact, some siblings will only attend family get-togethers when they know their sibling(s) will be there. We often have a range of reasons for why we need to escape when we're interacting with our family, but we are sure glad our sibling(s) are there when we need that escape.

## Verbal Aggression

The final relational maintenance strategy that siblings have been found to use is verbal aggression. Now, verbal aggression is generally not viewed as a positive tool for communication. However, some sibling pairs have realized over time that verbally aggressive behavior allows them to get their way or vent their frustrations. However, in the original study by Weber and Myers, the researchers did find that all of the other relational maintenance strategies were positively related to sibling liking, commitment, and trust, but verbal aggression was not.<sup>56</sup>

### Key Takeaways

- Shirley McGuire, Susan M. McHale, and Kimberly Updegraff's found four sibling relationship types include harmonious, hostile, affect-intense, and uninvolved.

- Siblings generally maintain their relationships using several relational maintenance strategies: confirmation, humor, social support, family visits, escape, and verbal aggression.

## Key Terms

### **concept-orientation**

Family communication pattern where freedom of expression is encouraged, and communication is frequent and family life is pleasurable.

### **family**

Two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; living together or apart by choice or circumstance; having interaction within family roles; creating and maintaining a common culture; being characterized by economic cooperation; deciding to have or not to have children, either own or adopted; having boundaries; and claiming mutual affection.

### **ideology of traditionalism**

Marriages that are marked by a more historically traditional, conservative perspective of marriage.

### **independents**

Marital definition where couples have a high level of interdependence, have an unconventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement.

### **individuality**

Aspect of Murray Bowen's family system theory that emphasizes that there is a universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward separateness, uniqueness, and distinctiveness.

### **separates**

Marital definition where couples have low interdependence, have conventional ideology, and low levels of conflict engagement.

### **sibling hostility**

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors as causing trouble, getting into fights, teasing/name-calling, taking things without permission, etc...

**sibling warmth**

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors such as sharing secrets, helping each other, teaching each other, showing physical affection, sharing possessions, etc...

**socio-orientation**

Family communication pattern where similarity is valued over individuality and self-expression, and harmony is preferred over expression of opinion.

**system**

Sets of elements standing in interrelation.

**togetherness**

Aspect of Murray Bowen's family system theory that emphasizes the complementary, universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward relationship, attachment, and connectedness.

**traditionals**

Marital definition where couples are highly interdependent, have conventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement

## Chapter Wrap-Up

As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, families are a central part of our lives. Thankfully, several communication scholars have devoted their careers to understanding families. In this chapter, we started by exploring the nature of family relationships with a specific focus on family communication patterns and family systems. Next, we explored the family life cycle. We then discussed the nature of sibling relationships. Lastly, we ended the chapter by discussing marriage.

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# INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN MEDIATED CONTEXTS

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## Learning Objectives

- Explain the history of computer-mediated communication.
- Understand the eight (8) concepts describing digital channels.
- Recognize the three specific types of online identities that people can formulate.
- Summarize the main aspects of three (3) CMC theories.

In today's world, we all spend a lot of time on various devices designed to make our lives easier. From smartphones to social media, we are all in constant contact with family, friends, coworkers, etc. Since the earliest days of communication technologies, we have always used these technologies to interact with one another. This chapter is going to examine technology in our interpersonal relationships.

## Technology and Communication

Since the Internet's creation in 1969, public access to the Internet and the creation of the World Wide Web (www) in 1991, and the proliferation of internet service providers through the late 1990s, the technology that shapes your life today and tomorrow is still relatively new. Here are some relatively recent landmarks in social media sites, technology, and apps: LinkedIn (2003), iTunes (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), iPhone (2007), Drop Box (2008), Google Docs (2009), Kickstarter (2010), Google+ (2011), Google Glass (2012), Oculus Rift (2013), iWatch (2014), TikTok (2016), BeReal (2020), Chat GPT (2022), Threads on Instagram (2023). As you can imagine, just limiting this list is hard. Some of these products you're probably very familiar with while others may be new to you altogether.

## Development of Computer-Mediated Communication

Before we get started, it's essential to understand the evolution of what we call computer-mediated communication or CMC. Though some scholars have adopted the broader term "communication technology" in recent years, it may not be necessary because a computer of some kind is always at the center of these communicative interactions.

So what is a computer? In its earliest use, "computers" were people who performed massive amounts of calculations by hand or using a tool like an abacus or slide rule (Figure 1). The idea of "punch cards" would be the basis of many generations of computers until the 1960s. Of course, the punch cards went from being wood cards to cardboard or cardstock throughout its history. Some of the earliest statistical research in the field of communication was conducted using punch cards. The 1970s saw the start of the explosion of the personal computer and the creation of what we now know as the internet. From the 1980s until now, Microsoft and Apple (Macintosh) have cornered the market on personal computers.

## Mediation Facilitates Communication

The early Internet was not exactly designed for your regular user, so it took quite a bit of skill and "know how" to use it and find things. Of course, while the Internet was developing, so was its capability for allowing people to communicate and interact with one another. Email was created in 1971 by Ray Tomlinson. Internet forums or **message/bulletin boards**, which were online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. From the earliest days of the Internet, people were using the Internet as a tool to communicate and interact with people who had similar interests.

One early realization about email and message boards is that people relied solely on text to interpret a message with no form of nonverbal communication attached.

Thus, the **emoticon** (emotion icon) was born (Figure 1). An emoticon was a series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended feelings and/or tone. Over the years, many different emoticons were created some useful like the smiley and sad faces. So much of how we understand each other is based on our nonverbal behaviors, so these emoticons were an attempt to bring a lost part of the human communicative experience to a text-based communicative experience.

## Information Communication Technology

As technology has developed, our understanding of it has changed. Information Communication Technology (ICTs) describe digital communication options. ICTs consist of technology features and modalities. Modalities or **modes** are a synonym for communication channels, like text messaging, phone calls, video calls, and email

are all unique channels. **Features** are options within the channel/mode; features may not be available or used by everyone. The ability to turn off or on “read” receipts in a text message is a feature of the texting channel. The ability to flag an email as important is another feature.

Former KU professor, Nancy Baym<sup>2</sup>, created eight (8) concepts to explain the variability within channels and modes.<sup>1</sup> These all exist on a continuum, not a strict binary. Table 1 describes these concepts with examples. Carefully review the table because these eight concepts can be applied to any mode of communication.

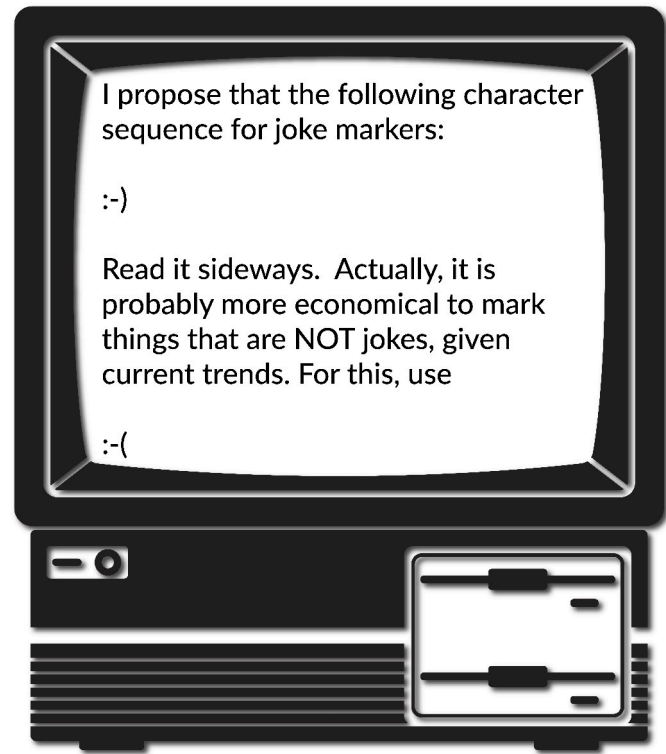


Figure 1 Emoticon Email

Synchronous communication happens in real time. Face-to-face conversations are **synchronous**, because the communication occurs at the same time. Phone calls and video calls are synchronous channels.

## 1. Synchrony

The opposite of synchronous communication is **asynchronous**, or a mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication.

When Person A sends a message, Person B did not need to be on the computer at the same time to receive the message. There could be a delay of hours or even days before that message received and Person B responded.

Social cues are nonverbals that can occur thorough a channel. Channels high in social cues allow for multiple nonverbals.

## 2. Social Cues

Lean Social Cues:

In channels with low social cues, people may do things to supplement that lack. Using emoticons, or emojis, are ways people attempt to create more social cues within a channel.

High Social Cues:

Video calls allow for each person to visually see the other, hear the emotion and tone of voice, see nonverbal reactions like facial expressions, etc.

The concept of reach refers to the number of people who receive a message. Think of reach as the potential number of people your message can reach.

## 3. Reach

Low Reach

A text message to your best friend has low reach. Phone calls typically have low reach, if you are calling one particular person.

High Reach

An email to your entire class has moderate to high reach. A post on social media can have incredibly broad reach, going “viral” and reaching an immeasurable audience.

## 4. Replicability

Replicability describes how permanent a message can be. If a channel can easily make copies of the same thing, it has more replicability.

A face-to-face interaction is not replicable, because that conversation in that moment in time can never happen again.

The ability to search a channel, often for past communication, is searchability.

## 5. Searchability

Phone calls can show records of when and who called, but not the content of the message. Text messages and emails have higher searchability, as the message content, sender, receiver, and time stamps are recorded. As many of you have likely heard, the internet lasts forever. This is in reference to the replicability of the internet.

## 6. Mobility

How much a channel is connected to a particular place is its range of mobility.

In the past, phone calls were only available on landline phones, connected to one place. With the development and popularization of smartphones, most channels are now highly mobile.

Interactivity is the amount of social interaction available in a channel.

## 7. Interactivity

In the context of interpersonal communication, most of the channels will have high interactivity.

## 8. Quantifiability

This concept refers to the ability to quantify and numerically categorize or count aspects of a channel.

Social media platforms are highly quantifiable, users can see the number of likes, shares, connections, etc.

Table 1. Eight Concepts of Digital Channels

# The CMC Process

As interpersonal communication scholars, our interest in CMC is less about the technologies that people are using and more about how people are using technology to interact with one another. So instead of focusing on how one goes about coding new software, interpersonal communication scholars focus on how new technologies and software help facilitate interpersonal communication. For example, Pat and Sam are playing the latest Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (e.g., Word of Warcraft, Fortnite, etc.). As you can see in Figure 5, each player is playing the same video game together but from different locations. Through a technology called VoIP, Sam and Pat can play video games at the same time while talking to each other through the use of headsets.

## Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

In Figure 2, Sam and Pat are in some kind of underworld, fiery landscape. Pat is playing a witch character, and Sam is playing a vampire character. The two can coordinate their movements to accomplish in-game tasks because they can freely talk

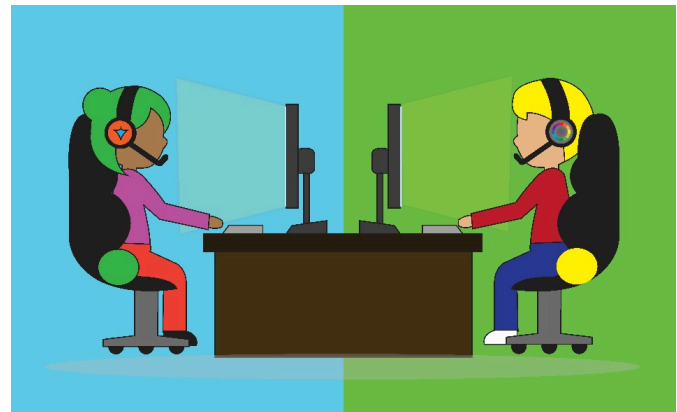


Figure 2 Video Game Play

to one another while playing the game in real-time. As previously discussed, this type of CMC is **synchronous** communication, or communication that happens in real-time. Conversely, **asynchronous** communication is communication is the exchange of messages with a time lag. In other words, people can communicate on their own schedules as time permits instead of in real-time. For example, Figure 3 shows a conversation between two college students. In this case, two college students are using SMS, commonly called texting) to interact with each other. The conversation starts at 2:25 PM. The first person initiates the conversation, but doesn't get a

response until 3:05 PM. The third turn in the interaction then doesn't happen until 5:40 PM. In this exchange, the two people interacting can send responses at their convenience, which is one of the main reasons people often rely on asynchronous communication. Other common forms of asynchronous communication include emails, online discussion forums, company message boards, etc.

## Nonverbal Cues

One important difference between face-to-face interaction and CMC is nonverbal communication. Historically, most of the mediums people used to interact with one another were asynchronous and text-based. As such, it was more difficult to ascertain the meaning behind a string of words fully. Culnan and Markus believed that the functions nonverbal behaviors meet in interpersonal interactions simply go unmet in CMC.<sup>7</sup> As such, they argued interpersonal communication must always be inherently impersonal when it's conducted using computer-mediated technologies. This perspective, called the **cues filtered out perspective**, has three underlying assumptions:

1. Communication mediated by technology filters out communicative cues found in FtF interaction,
2. Different media filter out or transmit different cues, and
3. Substituting technology-mediated for FtF communication will result in predictable changes in intrapersonal and interpersonal variables.<sup>8</sup>

Let's breakdown these assumptions. First, CMC interactions "filter out" communicative cues found in FtF interactions. For example, if you're on the telephone with someone, you can't see their eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, etc.... If you're reading an email, you have no nonverbal information to help you interpret the message because there is none. That's what is meant by nonverbal cues that have been filtered out. For now, we're going to stop our discussion about nonverbal communication because we will revisit this information later in this chapter when we look at a range of theories related to CMC.



Figure 3 Asynchronous Communication via SMS (Text Messaging)

Even if we don't have the nonverbals to help us interpret a message, we interpret the message using our perceptions of how the sender intended us to understand this message, which can often be wrong. How many times have you seen an incorrectly read text or email start a conflict? Of course, one of the first attempts to recover some sense of nonverbal meaning was the emoticon that we discussed earlier in this chapter.

## CMC Rules and Norms

As with any type of communication, some rules and norms govern how people communicate with one another. For example, Twitter, now called 'X,' has an extensive Terms of Service policy that covers a wide range of communication rules. For our purposes here, let's examine their rules related to hate speech:

**Hateful conduct:** You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others on the basis of these categories.

**Hateful imagery and display names:** You may not use hateful images or symbols in your profile image or profile header. You also may not use your username, display name, or profile bio to engage in abusive behavior, such as targeted harassment or expressing hate towards a person, group, or protected category.<sup>2</sup>

This statement is an obvious example of a rule that exists on the X platform. Of course, some have argued that this rule is pretty flexible at times, given the type of hateful political speech that is often posted by different political figures.

In addition to clearly spelled out rules that govern how people communicate via different technologies, there are also norms for how people communicate. A norm, in this context, is an accepted standard for how one communicates and interacts with others in the CMC environment. For example, one norm that can really frustrate people in text-based CMC environments is yelling, or TYPING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. There's actually not a consensus on when the avoidance of all capital letters as a tool for yelling first happened. We do know that newspapers in the 1880s often used all capital letters to emphasize headlines (basically have them jump off the page). At some point in the early 1980s, using all caps as a form of yelling became quite the norm, which was noted in a message post from Dave Decot in 1984 (Figure 4).<sup>10</sup>

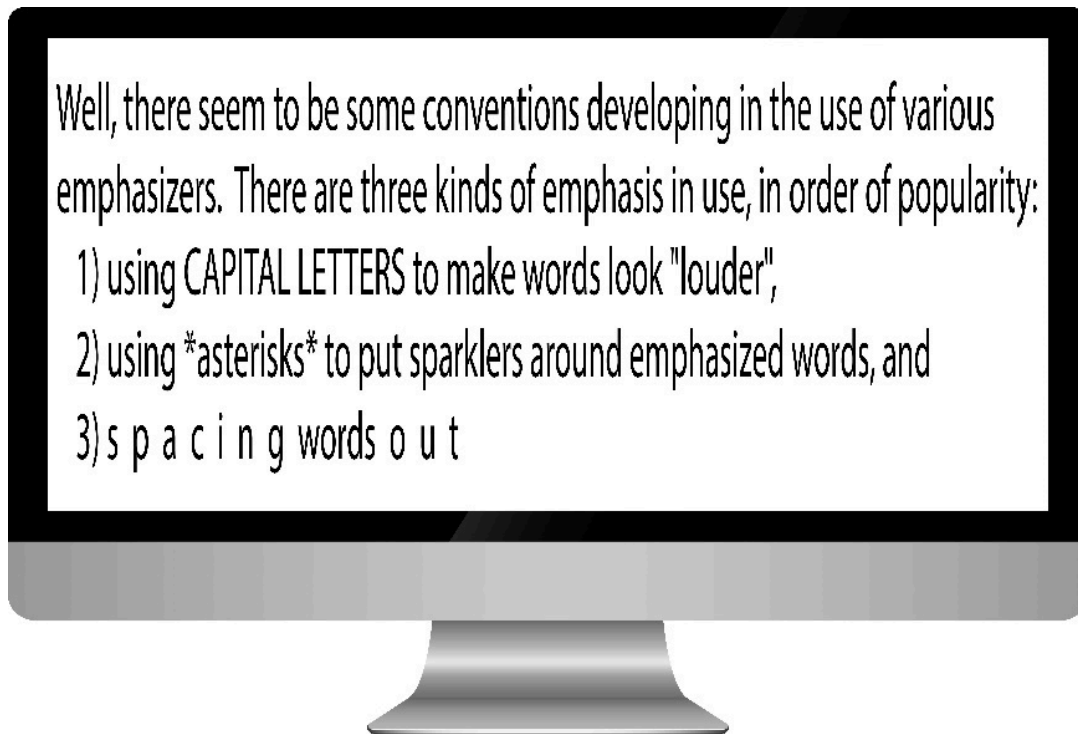


Figure 4 The Creation of YELLING

In this example, you see three different attempts to create a system for emphasizing words. The first is the use of all capital letters for making words seem “louder,” which eventually became known as yelling.

## Co-Present Interactions & Mediated Communication

Before going too much further into the world of CMC, we need to explain that not everything is great and perfect with the world of CMC interactions. For this discussion, we need to focus on the idea of **co-present interactions**, or when people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another. Historically, most of interpersonal communication involved co-present interactions. With the advent of a range of communication technologies, people don’t necessarily have to be co-present to interact. On the flip side, there are many people who are co-present who use their mediated devices as a way of avoiding FtF interactions with those around them. One of our professor friends recently remarked, “when I started my career, I always had to tell students to quiet down at the beginning of class. Now, they’re already quiet because they’re all looking at their cellphones ignoring those around them.”

Now we often have to encourage collocated social interactions, or how do we get people sitting next to each other to talk to one another. Olsson and colleagues argues that there are two basic problems facing people today, “(1) the use of current technology disrupting ongoing social situations, and (2) lack of social interaction in collocated situations where it would be desirable.”<sup>25</sup> When people don’t interact with one another, they

tend to become more socially isolated and lonely, which can lead to a true feeling of disengagement with those around them.

How many times have you seen people eating out together yet spending their whole time on their smartphones checking email or texting? Many people believe that this type of multitasking actually enhances productivity, but research tends to disagree with this notion. One study actually demonstrated that when people are confronted with constant distractions like phones ringing or email alerts chiming on a smartphone, people lose an average of 10 IQ points due to these distractions.<sup>26</sup> This drop in IQ is equivalent to missing an entire night of sleep. Furthermore, those generations that have grown up with technology are more likely to engage in multitasking behavior.<sup>27</sup> In a 2014 study conducted by Jonathan Bowman and Roger Pace, the researchers tested the impact that cell phone usage vs. FtF conversations had while performing a complex cognitive task.<sup>28</sup> Not surprisingly, individuals who interacted via cell phones were less adept at performing the task than those engaged in FtF interactions. Furthermore, individuals involved in the FtF interactions were more satisfied with their interactions than their peers using a cellphone. As the authors of the article note, “People think they are effectively communicating their message while dual-tasking even though they are not.”<sup>29</sup>

So how can technology benefit social interactions? In the Olsson et al. study, the researchers examined several different studies that were designed to help foster collocated social interactions.<sup>30</sup> Table 2 illustrates the basic findings from their study.

Role of technology	Social design objectives	Design approaches
<b>Enable (previous work beyond which the reviewed literature explores)</b>		
<b>Facilitate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating ongoing social situations</li> <li>• Enriching means of social interaction</li> <li>• Supporting sense of community</li> <li>• Breaking ice in new encounters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared digital workspace</li> <li>• Open space for shared activity</li> <li>• Topic suggestions</li> <li>• Disclosing information about others</li> </ul>
<b>Invite</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing awareness</li> <li>• Revealing common ground</li> <li>• Avoiding cocooning in social silos</li> <li>• Engaging people in collective activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open space for shared activity</li> <li>• Matchmaking</li> <li>• Self-expression</li> <li>• Topic suggestions</li> <li>• Open space for shared activity</li> </ul>
<b>Encourage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging, incentivizing or triggering people to interact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introducing constraints</li> </ul>
<p>Olsson, T. et al. (2020). Technologies for Enhancing Collocated Social Interaction: Review of Design Solutions and Approaches. <i>Computer Supported Cooperative Work</i>, 29, 29–83. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-019-09345-0">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-019-09345-0</a>. CC-BY</p>		

Table 2 Mapping the social design objectives and design approaches interpreted from the papers to abstract enhancement categories (Roles of Technology)

In Table 2 you are introduced to four different ways that technology can help facilitate collocated social interaction. You are also presented with the design objectives for each of these different ways to encourage collocated social interaction along with specific design approaches that creators can use to help foster collocated social interaction.

### Key Takeaways

- Synchronous communication, or communication that happens in real-time; whereas, asynchronous communication is communication is the exchange of messages with a time lag.
- Nonverbal behaviors are not inherent in many forms of computer-mediated communication.

With text-based messages (email, texts, IRC, etc.), there are no nonverbal cues to attend to at all. In other mediated forms (e.g., Skype, Facetime, etc.), we can see the other person, but it's still not the same as an interaction in a FtF context.

## Creating and Recreating the Self Online

Earlier in the book, we discussed the world of intrapersonal communication. At the beginning of this chapter, we had you describe yourself by answering the question, “Who am I?” 20 different times. Look back at that list. Now, think about yourself in the CMC context. Are you the same person in a FtF interaction as you are in a CMC interaction? Maybe, but maybe not. For example, maybe you’re a very shy person in FtF interactions, and you have problems talking with complete strangers online. However, maybe you’re a very quiet person in FtF interactions, but when you’re playing *World of Warcraft*, you suddenly become very loud and boisterous. One of the beautiful things about CMC for many people is that they can be almost anyone or anything they want to be online. In this section, we’re going to examine some specific factors related to one’s online self. Many social psychologists over the years have attempted to define and conceptualize what is meant by the term “identity.”



Figure 5 Types of Online Identities

### Types of Online Identities

Unlike traditional FtF interactions, online interactions can go even further blurring the identities as people act

in ways impossible in FtF interaction. Wood and Smith discussed three different ways that people express their identities online: anonymity, pseudonymity, and ‘real-life’ (Figure 5).<sup>47</sup>

## Anonymous Identity

First, people in a CMC context can behavior in a way that is completely **anonymous**. In this case, people in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is simply not known. Now, it may be possible for some people to figure out who an anonymous person is (e.g., the NSA, the CIA, etc.), but if someone wants to maintain her or his anonymity, it’s possible to do so. Think about how many fake Facebook, X, Tinder, Grindr accounts exist. Some exist to try to persuade you to go to a website (often for illicit purposes like hacking your computer), while others may be attempting “catfishing” for the fun of it.

**Catfishing** is a deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting victims into an emotional/romantic relationship. Many of us have seen the MTV show *Catfish*. The premise of the show repeats, over the course of months, the two exchange more 1,000s of messages, two people fall for one another, but one is not who they seem. *Catfish* usually begins when one partner starts noticing inconsistencies in various stories that are being told. *Catfish*-style stories easily reveal the problems that can arise from anonymity on the Internet. Often behavior that would be deemed completely inappropriate in a FtF encounter suddenly becomes appropriate because it’s deemed as “less real” by some.

One of the major problems with anonymity online has been cyberbullying. Teenagers today can post horrible things about one another online without any worry that the messages will be linked back to them directly. Unlike bullying that happened at school, teens facing cyberbullying cannot even find peace at home because the Internet follows them everywhere. It’s also important to understand that cyberbullying isn’t just a phenomenon that happens with children. In a 2009 survey of Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union members, they found that 34% of respondents faced FtF bullying, and 10.7% faced cyberbullying. All of the individuals who were targets of cyberbullying were also ones bullied FtF.<sup>49</sup>

## Pseudonymous Identity

Second, the second category of interaction is **pseudonymity CMC identity**. Wood and Smith used the term pseudonymous because of the prefix “pseudonym,” “Pseudonym comes from the Latin words for ‘false’ and ‘name,’ and it provides an audience with the ability to attribute statements and actions to a common source [emphasis in original].”<sup>50</sup> Whereas an anonym allows someone to be completely anonymous, a pseudonym “allows one to contribute to the fashioning of one’s own image.”<sup>51</sup>

There are many famous people who use pseudonyms in their social media: @MrBeast (American YouTuber, internet personality, and businessperson, Jimmy Donaldson), @pewdiepie (online personality and producer Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg), @baddiewinkle (Octogenarian fashionista and online personality Helen Van

Winkle), @doctor.mike (Internet celebrity family practitioner Dr. Mike Varshavski), etc.... Some of these people used parts of their real names, and others used complete pseudonyms. All of them have enormous Internet followings and have used their pseudonyms to build profitable brands. So, why do people use a pseudonym?

The veneer of the Internet allows us to determine how much of an identity we wish to front in online presentations. These images can range from a vague silhouette to a detailed snapshot. Whatever the degree of identity presented, however, it appears that control and empowerment are benefits for users of these communication technologies.<sup>52</sup>

Now, some people adopt a pseudonym because their online actions may be “out of brand” for their day-job or because they don’t want to be fully exposed online.

## 'Real Life' or Offline Identity

Lastly, some people have their ‘real-life’ identities displayed online, that is their online identity is very close to the identity they share offline. First, a caveat, it would be inappropriate to say that online identities are not ‘real-life’ certainly a Facebook profile, dating account, or your Snapchat story are all part of your actual, very real, life. You can find JasonSWrench on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.... Our coauthor made the decision to have his social networking site behavior very public from the beginning. Part of that reason was that when he first joined Facebook in 2007, he was required to use his professional school email address that ended with.edu. In the early days, only people with.edu email addresses could join Facebook. Jason also realizes that this behavior is a part of his professional persona, so he doesn’t put anything on one of these sites he wouldn’t want other professionals (or even you) to see and read. When it comes to people in the public eye, most of them use some variation of their real names to enhance their brands. That’s not to say that many of these same people may have multiple online accounts, and some of these accounts could be completely anonymous or even pseudonymous.

## Online Impression Formation

In the 21st Century, so much of what we do involves interacting with people online. How we present ourselves to others through our online persona is very important (**impression formation**). How we communicate via social media and how professional our online persona is can be a real determining factor in getting a job.

In today’s world, anything you put online can be found by someone else. According to the 2018 CareerBuilder.com social recruiting survey, in a survey of more than 1,000 hiring managers, 70% admit to screening potential employees using social media, and 66% use search engines to look up potential employees.<sup>19</sup> In fact, having an online persona can actually be very beneficial. Forty-seven percent of hiring managers admit to not calling a potential employee when the employee does not have an online presence. You may

be wondering what potential employers are looking for when they checkout people online. The main things employers look for is information to support someone's qualifications (58%); whether or not an individual has a professional online persona (50%); to see what others say about the potential candidate (34%); and information that could lead a hiring manager to decide not to hire someone (22%).<sup>20</sup> According to CareerBuilder.com, here are the common reasons someone doesn't get a job because of her/his/their online presence:

- Job candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information: 40 percent
- Job candidate posted information about them drinking or using drugs: 36 percent
- Job candidate had discriminatory comments related to race, gender, religion, etc.: 31 percent
- Job candidate was linked to criminal behavior: 30 percent
- Job candidate lied about qualifications: 27 percent
- Job candidate had poor communication skills: 27 percent
- Job candidate bad-mouthed their previous company or fellow employee: 25 percent
- Job candidate's screen name was unprofessional: 22 percent
- Job candidate shared confidential information from previous employers: 20 percent
- Job candidate lied about an absence: 16 percent
- Job candidate posted too frequently: 12 percent<sup>21</sup>

As you can see, what you put online says a lot about you as a person to many organizations, so they are checking the Internet to see what exists about you as a person. The flip of this is that what you have online can also help get you hired. In that same study from CareerBuilder.com, they found that 57% of hiring managers have found information about a candidate online that has solidified their decision to hire that person. Here is a list of what hiring managers found that made them want to hire someone:

- Job candidate's background information supported their professional qualifications for the job: 37 percent
- Job candidate was creative: 34 percent
- Job candidate's site conveyed a professional image: 33 percent
- Job candidate was well-rounded, showed a wide range of interests: 31 percent
- Got a good feel for the job candidate's personality, could see a good fit within the company culture: 31 percent
- Job candidate had great communications skills: 28 percent
- Job candidate received awards and accolades: 26 percent
- Other people posted great references about the job candidate: 23 percent
- Job candidate had interacted with company's social media accounts: 22 percent
- Job candidate posted compelling video or other content: 21 percent

- Job candidate had a large number of followers or subscribers: 18 percent<sup>22</sup>

As you can see, having an online presence is important in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Some people make the mistake of having no social media presence, which can backfire on you. In today's social media society, having no online presence can look very strange to hiring managers. You should consider your social media presence as an extension of your resume. At the very least, you should have a LinkedIn profile because it is the social networking site most commonly used by corporate recruiters.<sup>23</sup>

### Key Takeaways

- Andrew F. Wood and Matthew J. Smith discussed three specific types of online identities that people can formulate: anonymity (the person behind a message is completely unknown), pseudonymity (someone uses a pseudonym, but people know who the real person behind the message is), and real-life (when our online and FtF identities are the same).
- Our online identities and offline identities portray different facets of our selves, and people can form meaningful impressions based on what they find online.

## Theories of Computer-Mediated Communication

Most of the early work in computer-mediated communication from a theoretical perspective was conducted using old mediated theories created to discuss the differences between print, radio, and television and applying them to the Internet. As such, we don't see the proliferation of theories. To help us understand the theories of computer-mediated communication, we are going to explore five theories and their implications for CMC.

### Social Presence Theory

One major theory that has been used to help explain CMC is social presence theory, originally created by Short, Williams, and Christie.<sup>56</sup> Presence is a psychological state of mind and how we relate to technology. When we are truly present, we forget that we are actually using technology. **Social presence** then is “the degree to which we as individuals perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a

relationship.”<sup>57</sup> Our perceptions of presence are largely based on the degree to which we have the ability to interpret nonverbal cues from the people we are interacting with.

When it comes to CMC, various technologies elicit varying degrees of presence. For example, reading information on a website probably is not going to make you forget that you are reading text on a screen. On the other hand, if you’re engaging in a conversation with your best friend via text messages, you may forget about the technology and just view the interaction as a common one you have with your friend. In essence, people can vary in how they perceive presence. Virtual worlds like SecondLife, VRChat, and World of Warcraft can all elicit presence. Each of these involves a virtual world where people can create avatar and interact in a 3D simulated environment. As virtual reality technology takes hold, and online gaming persists, it’s easy to find online virtual communities that offer a great deal of social presence.

Different virtual worlds have different purposes, but people can find both of them highly present. When students who are not familiar with these virtual worlds enter them, they often have a hard time understanding how people can spend hours upon hours interacting with others within these virtual worlds. To the students, they view this as a “strange” experience and experience no social presence at all. Conversely, to the people who “live” in these virtual worlds regularly, they experience high levels of social presence. We do know that those individuals who report higher levels of social presence tend to have more rewarding online interpersonal interactions and are more likely to perceive themselves as competent communicators within these mediated environments.<sup>58</sup> Thus, social presence challenges the cues filtered out notion that CMC does not allow us to experience interpersonal relationships. Instead, social presence theory demonstrates how and why people might feel strong connections to communication partners in mediated contexts.

## Media Richness Theory

A second major theory that has been applied to CMC is media richness theory. Media richness theory was first proposed by Daft and Lengel.<sup>59</sup> **Richness** is defined as “the potential information carrying capacity of data.”<sup>60</sup> Lengel proposed that media varied in richness depending on how much information is provided through the communication.<sup>61</sup> For example, in print media, all you have is text. As such, you have no nonverbal behaviors of the author to help you interpret the words you are reading. With FtF communication, on the other hand, we have the full realm of nonverbal behaviors that we can attend to in an effort to understand the sender’s message. As such, Lengel argued that media escalates in richness in the following order: computer output, formal memos, personal memos, telephone, and FtF. You’ll notice that this perspective on media was originally designed to help individuals understand the media choices used in organizations.

So, where does this leave us with CMC? Well, from the basic ideas of media richness theory, we can ascertain that the richer the media, the less ambiguous a message is for a receiver. The theory argues the more rich an individual perceives a medium, the more likely they are to have successful social interactions online. From an organizational perspective, the richer the medium, the better individuals will be able to accomplish specific tasks when they are at a distance from one another. When it comes to the workplace, the more ambiguous a

task is, the more people prefer highly rich media for their interactions.<sup>62</sup> Media richness is perhaps the most researched CMC theory, but the results are mixed. Mostly the theory is supported, the more ambiguous the task, the more likely someone is to use a rich media, the more clear cut the more likely they'll use lean media. Sometimes people use lean media to convey a lot of information (e.g., a long email, or this textbook), other times people use really rich media to convey very limited information (e.g., a colleague stops by to ask if you're going to an event, your parent calls to tell you they paid your tuition.) Either way, the concepts of rich and lean media are important and helpful to understanding how people use media.

## Social Information Processing Theory

The first two theories we examined were theories originally designed to examine media before CMC was available to nearly everyone. The first truly unique theory designed to look at CMC from a communication perspective came from Joseph Walther back in 1992 in his social information processing theory.<sup>63</sup> As a communication scholar, Walther realized that interpersonal interactions change over time. Some of the other theories really didn't take into account how interpersonal relationships evolve as the interpersonal interactants spend more time getting to know one another. The two previous theories applied to CMC do not take into account how our impressions of those we interact with can change over time. For example, both media richness and social presence theory focus on the nonverbal aspects and assume that because of the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC, people will inherently find CMC as either less rich or less present when compared to FtF interactions. Walther argued that the filtering out of nonverbal cues doesn't hurt an individual's ability to form an impression of someone over time in a CMC context. Ultimately, Walther argues that over time relationships formed in a CMC context can develop like those that are FtF. He does admit that these relationships will take more time to develop, but that they can reach the same end states as those relationships formed FtF.

## From Social to Hyperpersonal

Walther later expanded his ideas of social information processing to include a new concept he dubbed hyperpersonal interactions.<sup>64</sup> **Hyperpersonal** interactions are those that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions. For example, many people who belong to online self-help groups discuss feelings and ideas that they would never dream of discussing with people in an FtF interaction unless that person was their therapist. Furthermore, during CMC interactions an individual can refine her or his message in a manner that is impossible to do during an FtF interaction, which will help 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 you'd just written because it was in your best interest not to put it out to the world. In CMC interactions, we have this ability to fine-tune our messages before transmitting; whereas, in FtF messages, once something has been communicated, there is no ability to refine the message.

In addition to extended interaction time, the premise of social information processing theory, there are four

components of the hyperpersonal theory that explain why people have interactions exceeding the personal-nature of in-person communication. First, the sender has the ability to carefully craft and edit their messages before sending them. This selective self-presentation allows the sender to highlight positive aspects of themselves and omit less desirable traits, creating an idealized version of themselves that may not be as easily maintained in face-to-face interactions. Second, the receiver often fills in the gaps of missing information with their own interpretations, which can lead to over-attribution of similarity. Because the receiver has limited nonverbal cues to rely on, they may assume the sender shares more in common with them than they actually do, further enhancing the hyperpersonal connection. Third, the channel used in computer-mediated communication (CMC) allows for asynchronous interaction, giving both the sender and receiver time to process and respond thoughtfully. This increased control over the timing and content of messages can lead to more intimate and revealing exchanges than might occur in real-time, face-to-face conversations. Finally, feedback effects play a crucial role in reinforcing hyperpersonal interactions. Positive feedback loops occur when the receiver's idealized perceptions of the sender are confirmed, leading the sender to continue presenting themselves in ways that align with these perceptions. This reciprocal cycle can deepen the connection, making the interaction feel more personal and intense than it might in a traditional in-person context. Social information processing theory and the hyperpersonal approach remain some of the best and well-researched explanations we have for why people form high quality relationships in CMC contexts.

### Key Takeaways

- Social presence theory helps us understand whether or not individuals using CMC technologies perceive the people they are interacting with as “real.” Our perceptions of presence are largely based on the degree to which we can interpret nonverbal cues from the people we are interacting with.
- Media richness theory helps us understand CMC behavior by examining the capacity that people have for data. As media becomes richer and has more nonverbal content, the easier it is for a receiver to interpret the message accurately. As such, the more rich an individual perceives a medium the more likely they are to have successful social interactions online.
- Social information processing (SIP) theory helps researchers understand the development of interpersonal relationships in CMC contexts. SIP argues that overtime relationships formed in a CMC context can develop like those that are FtF.

## Key Terms

### **anonymous CMC identities**

People in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is simply not known.

### **asynchronous communication**

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication.

### **catfishing**

Deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting victims into an emotional/romantic relationship.

### **co-present interactions**

When people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another.

### **emoticon**

A series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended feelings and/or tone.

### **hyperpersonal**

CMC interactions that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions.

### **impression formation**

How we present ourselves to others through our online persona.

### **message/bulletin boards**

Online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages.

### **pseudonymity CMC identity**

Identity that someone takes on that is beyond themselves in the creation of CMC messages.

### **real-life CMC identity**

When our CMC identity and our FtF identities are congruent.

### **richness**

The potential information carrying capacity of data.

**short message service (SMS)**

Communication technology allowing for the exchange of short alphanumeric messages between digital and mobile devices found in phones, the Web, or in mobile communication systems (commonly referred to as “text messaging”).

**social presence**

The degree to which we, as individuals, perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a relationship.

**synchronous communication**

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are concurrently engaged in communication.

## Chapter Wrap-Up

This chapter explored many of the ways that modern communication technologies help us interact with each other. Whether we’re talking over a headset to someone through our gaming console or texting our roommate, we use these technologies to communicate with people all the time. The first part of this chapter explored the history of computer-mediated communication, which was followed by a discussion of the process of computer-mediated communication. We then discussed identity formation in virtual environments. We ended the chapter look at four of the most commonly discussed theories related to computer-mediated communication. Hopefully, you realize that this chapter barely scratches the surface when it comes to how people are using technology to create and enhance their interpersonal relationships.

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# RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

Outside of sleeping, you'll probably end up spending more time working than anything else you do for the rest of your life. Figure 1 shows you what the average full-time working person's day is like. Because we spend so much time at work, it should come as no surprise that we form relationships with people in the workplace. This chapter details those relationships, moving from supervisor, to coworker, to friends and romantic relationships. The chapter closes with considerations of challenging or problematic workplace relationships.

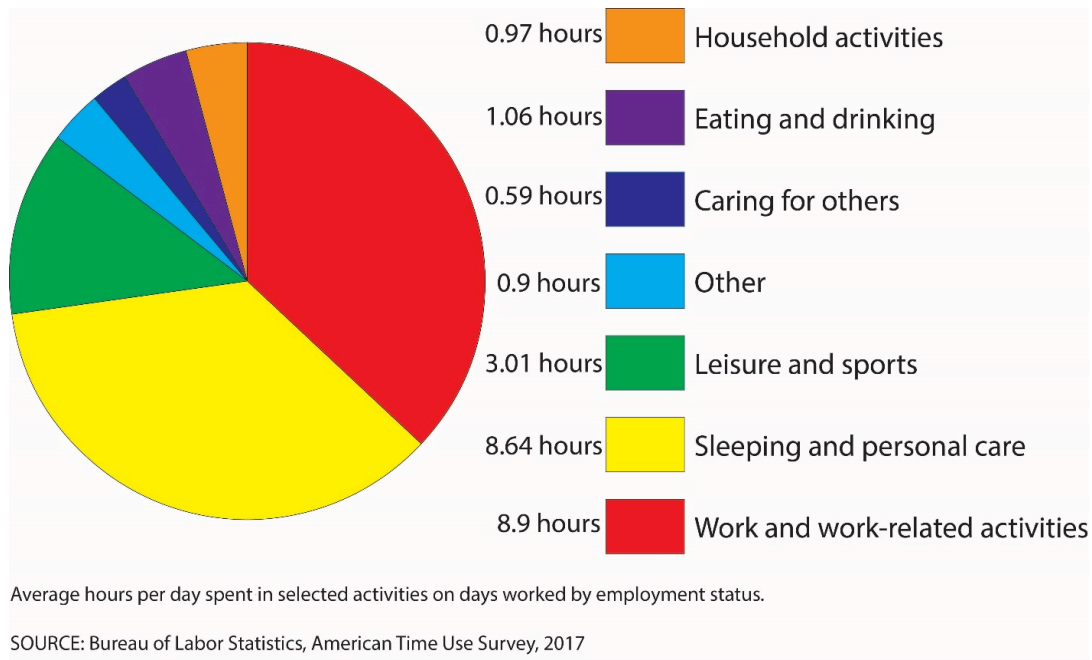


Figure 1 Daily Life Breakdown

We spend more time with the people we work with than the people we live with during the five-day workweek. So, it shouldn't be too surprising that our workplace relationships tend to be very important to our overall quality of life. In previous chapters, we've looked at the importance of a range of different types of relationships. In this chapter, we're going to explore some areas directly related to workplace interpersonal relationships, including professionalism, leader-follower relationships, workplace friendships, romantic relationships in the workplace, and problematic workplace relationships. Finally, we'll end this chapter by discussing essential communication skills for work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Learning Objectives

1. Describe the concept of leader-member exchange theory and the three stages these relationships go through.
2. Describe the four reasons why romantic workplace relationships develop.
3. Summarize the findings related to how coworkers view romantic workplace relationships.
4. List and explain the characteristics of coworker relationships.
5. Differentiate among three types of coworker relationships.
6. Describe the three ways coworkers go about disengaging from workplace relationships.
7. Explain the role of (in)appropriate language in the workplace and how it helps or harms relationships.

## Leader-Follower Relationships

### The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Perspective on Leadership

Graen proposed a different type of theory for understanding relationships between leaders and followers, or ‘members.’<sup>16</sup> In Graen’s **leader-member exchange** (LMX) theory, leaders have limited resources and can only take on high-quality relationships with a small number of followers. For this reason, some relationships are characterized as high-quality LMX relationships, but most relationships are characterized as low-quality LMX relationships. **High-quality LMX relationships** are those “characterized by greater input in decisions, mutual support, informal influence, trust, and greater negotiating latitude.”

In contrast, **low-quality LMX relationships** “are characterized by less support, more formal supervision, little or no involvement in decisions, and less trust and attention from the leader.”<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, many positive outcomes happen for a follower who enters into a high LMX relationship with a leader. Before looking at some positive outcomes from high LMX relationships, we’re first going to examine the stages involved in the creation of these relationships.

## Stages of LMX Relationships

So, you may be wondering how LMX relationships are developed. Graen and Uhl-Bien<sup>18</sup> created a three-stage model for the development of LMX relationships. Figure 3 represents the three different stages: stranger, acquaintance, and partner.

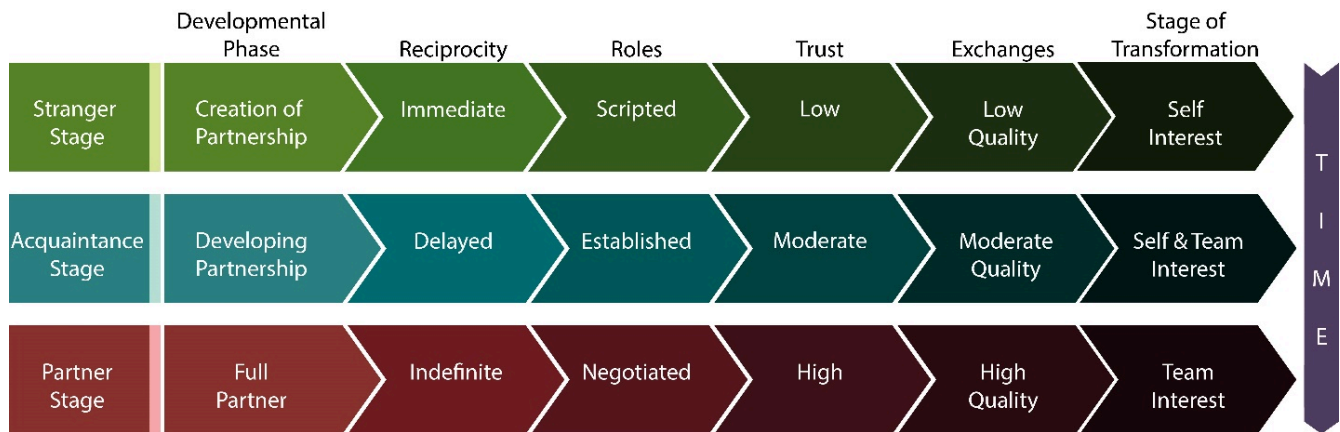


Figure 3 Stages of LMX Relationships

### Stranger Stage

The first stage of LMX relationships is the stranger stage, and this is the beginning of the creation of an LMX relationship. Most LMX relationships never venture beyond the stranger stage because of the resources needed on both the side of the follower and the leader to progress further.

As you can see from Figure 3, the stranger stage is one where their self-interests primarily guide the follower and the leader. These exchanges generally involve what Graen and Uhl-Bien call a “cash and carry” relationship. Cash and carry refers to the idea that some stores don’t utilize credit, so all purchases are made in cash, and customers carry their purchased goods right then. In the stranger stage, interactions between a follower and leader follow this same process. The leader helps the follower and gets something immediately in return. Low levels of trust mark these relationships, and interactions tend to be carried out through scripted forms of communication within the normal hierarchical structure of the organization.

### Acquaintance Stage

The second stage of high-quality LMX relationships is the acquaintance stage or exchanges between a leader and follower become more normalized and aren’t necessarily based on a cash and carry system. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien, “Leaders and followers may begin to share greater information and resources, on both a personal and work level. These exchanges are still limited, however, and constitute a ‘testing’ stage—with the equitable return of favors within a limited time perspective.”<sup>19</sup> At this point, neither the leader nor the follower expects to get anything immediately in return within the exchange relationship. Instead, they start seeing this

relationship as something that has the potential for long-term benefits for both sides. There also is a switch from purely personal self-interests to a combination of both self-interests and the interests of one's team or organization.

## Partner Stage

The final stage in the development of LMX relationships is the partner stage or the stage where a follower stops being perceived as a follower and starts being perceived as an equal or colleague. A level of maturity marks these relationships. Even though the two people within the exchange relationship may still have titles of leader and follower, there is a sense of equality between the individuals within the relationship.

## Outcomes of High LMX Relationships

Ultimately, high LMX relationships take time to develop, and most people will not enter into a high LMX relationship within their lifetime. These are special relationships but can have a wildly powerful impact on someone's career and life. The following are some of the known outcomes of high LMX relationships when compared to those in low LMX relationships:

1. Increased productivity (both quality and quantity).
2. Increased job satisfaction.
3. Less likely to quit.
4. Increased supervisor satisfaction.
5. Increased organizational commitment.
6. Increased satisfaction with the communication practices of the team and organization.
7. Increased clarity about one's role in the organization.
8. Increased likelihood to go beyond their job duties to help other employees.
9. Higher levels of success in their careers.
10. Increased likelihood of providing honest feedback.
11. Increased motivation at work.
12. Higher levels of influence within their organization.
13. Receive more desirable work assignments.
14. Higher levels of attention and support from organizational leaders.
15. Increased organizational participation. [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [23](#)

## Research Spotlight



In a 2019 article, Omilion-Hodges and colleagues wanted to find out what young adults want in a manager. The researchers orally interviewed 22 undergraduate students, then tested a set of measures. Students reported the general desires they have for managers. They were:

1. **Mentor:** Role model, leads by example, makes and leaves an impact, advocate, and life coach.
2. **Manager:** The nuts and bolts of a functional organization, lack of personal relationship, monitor and delegate tasks, maintain the establishment, structured and organized, stick to the plan, follow rules and regulations, strictly business, rules, hierarchy, protocol, and proficient.
3. **Teacher:** Dedicated, provide learning opportunities, supportive, dedicated to growth of the organization, information delegation, provides necessary resources, provides explicit directions and feedback, one-on-one instruction.
4. **Friend:** Well-developed relationship outside of work, empathetic; support in all areas of your life, similarity, identity development, values employees as whole people, relationally focused.
5. **Gatekeeper:** Removed from day-to-day operations, strategic, can help you advance or hold you back, rules and regulation abiding, restricts information at their discretion, communicates only to influence, controls the successes and or failures of followers. <sup>26</sup>

Omilion-Hodges, L. M., Shank, S. E., & Packard, C. M. (2019). What young adults want: A multistudy examination of vocational anticipatory socialization through the lens of students' desired managerial communication behaviors. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 33(4), 512–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318919851177>

## Coworker (Peer Relationships)

### Characteristics of Coworker Relationships

According to organizational workplace relationship expert Patricia Sias, peer coworker relationships exist

between individuals who exist at the same level within an organizational hierarchy and have no formal authority over each other.<sup>29</sup> According to Sias, we engage in these coworker relationships because they provide us with *mentoring, information, power, and support*. Let's look at all four of these.

## Mentoring

First, our coworker relationships are a great source for mentoring within any organizational environment. It's always good to have that person who is a peer that you can run to when you have a question or need advice. Because this person has no direct authority over you, you can informally interact with this person without fear of reproach if these relationships are healthy. We'll discuss what happens when you have nonhealthy relationships in the next section.

## Sources of Information

Second, we use our peer coworker relationships as sources for information. One of our coauthors worked in a medical school for a while. Our coauthor quickly realized that there were some people he could talk to around the hospital who would gladly let our coauthor know everything that was going on around the place. One important caveat to all of this involves the quality of the information we are receiving. By information quality, Sias refers to the degree to which an individual perceives the information they are receiving as accurate, timely, and useful. Ever had that one friend who always has great news, that everyone else heard the previous week? Yeah, not all information sources provide you with quality information. As such, we need to establish a network of high-quality information sources if we are going to be successful within an organizational environment.

## Issues of Power

Third, we engage in coworker relationships as an issue of power. Although two coworkers may exist in the same run within an organizational hierarchy, it's important also to realize that there are informal sources of power as well. In the next chapter, we are going to explore the importance of power within interpersonal relationships in general. For now, we'll say that power can be useful and helps us influence what goes on within our immediate environments. However, power can also be used to control and intimidate people, which is a huge problem in many organizations.

## Social Support

The fourth reason we engage in peer coworker relationships is social support. For our purposes, let's define **social support** as the perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from those people within their life. Let's face it; there's a reason corporate America has been referred to as the concrete

jungle, circuses, or theatres of the absurd. Even the best organization in the world can be trying at times. The best boss in the world will eventually get under your skin about something. We're humans; we're flawed. As such, no organization is perfect, so it's always important to have those peer coworkers we can go to who are there for us. One of our coauthors has a coworker our coauthor calls whenever our coauthor needs to be "talked off the ledge." Our coauthor likes higher education and loves being a professor, but occasionally something happens, and our coauthor needs the coworker to vent to about something that has occurred. For the most part, our coauthor doesn't want the coworker to solve a problem; our coauthor just wants someone to listen as our coauthor vents. We all need to de-stress in the workplace, and having peer coworker relationships is one way we do this.

## Other Characteristics

In addition to the four characteristics discussed by Sias, Methot<sup>30</sup> argued that three other features are also important: *trust*, *relational maintenance*, and *ability to focus*.

### Trust

Methot defines trust as "the willingness to be vulnerable to another party with the expectation that the other party will behave with the best interest of the focal individual."<sup>31</sup> In essence, in the workplace, we eventually learn how to make ourselves vulnerable to our coworkers believing that our coworkers will do what's in our best interests. Now, trust is an interesting and problematic concept because it's both a function of workplace relationships but also an outcome. For coworker relationships to work or operate as they should, we need to be able to trust our coworkers. The more we get to know our coworkers and know they have our best interests at heart, then the more we will ultimately trust our coworkers. Trust develops over time and is not something that is not just a bipolar concept of trust or doesn't trust. Instead, there are various degrees of trust in the workplace. At first, you may trust your coworkers just enough to tell them surface level things about yourself (e.g., where you went to college, major, hometown, etc.), but over time, as we've discussed before in this book, we start to self-disclose as deeper levels as our trust increases. Now, most coworker relationships will never be intimate relationships or even actual friendships, but we can learn to trust our coworkers within the confines of our jobs.

### Relational Maintenance

Dindia and Canary wrote that definitions of the term "relational maintenance" could be broken down into four basic types:

1. To keep a relationship in existence;
2. To keep a relationship in a specified state or condition;

3. To keep a relationship in a satisfactory condition; and
4. To keep a relationship in repair.<sup>32</sup>

Mithas argues that **relational maintenance** is a difficult task in any context. Still, coworker relationships can have a range of negative outcomes if organizational members have difficulty maintaining their relationships with each other. For this reason, Mithas defines maintenance difficulty as “the degree of difficulty individuals experience in interpersonal relationships due to misunderstandings, incompatibility of goals, and the time and effort necessary to cope with disagreements.”<sup>33</sup>

Imagine you have two coworkers who tend to behave in an inappropriate fashion nonverbally. Maybe one sits there and rolls their eyes at everything a coworker says, or perhaps uses exaggerated facial expressions to mock a coworker when they’re talking. Having these types of coworkers will cause us (as a third party witnessing these problems) to spend more time trying to maintain relationships with both of them. On the flip side, the relationship between our two coworkers will take even more maintenance to get them to a point where they can just be **collegial** in the same room with each other. The more time we have to spend trying to decrease tension or resolve interpersonal conflicts in the workplace, the less time we will ultimately have on our actual jobs. Eventually, this can leave you feeling exhausted feeling and emotionally drained as though you just don’t have anything else to give. Some coworker relationships can become so toxic that minimizing contact and interaction can be the best solution to avoid draining your psychological and emotional resources.

## Ability to Focus

Have you ever found your mind wandering while you are trying to work? One of the most important things when it comes to getting our work done is having the ability to focus. Within an organizational context, Methot defines “ability to focus” as “the ability to pay attention to value-producing activities without being concerned with extraneous issues such as off-task thoughts or distractions.”<sup>34</sup> When individuals have healthy relationships with their coworkers, they are more easily able to focus their attention on the work at hand. On the other hand, if your coworkers always play politics, stabbing each other in the back, gossiping, and engaging in numerous other counterproductive workplace (or **deviant workplace**) behaviors, then it’s going to be a lot harder for you to focus on your job.

## Types of Coworker Relationships

Now that we’ve looked at some of the characteristics of coworker relationships, let’s talk about the three different types of coworkers research has categorized. Kram and Isabella<sup>35</sup> found that there are essentially three different types of coworker relationships in the workplace: *information peer*, *collegial peer*, and *special peer*. Figure 5 illustrates the basic things we get from each of these different types of peer relationships.



Figure 5 Types of Coworker Relationships

## Information Peers

**Information peers** are so-called because we rely on these individuals for information about job tasks and the organization itself. As you can see from Figure 13.5, there are four basic types of activities we engage information peers for information sharing, workplace socialization/onboarding, networking, and knowledge management/maintenance.

First, we share information with our information peers. Of course, this information is task-focused, so the information is designed to help us complete our job better.

Second, information peers are vital during workplace socialization or onboarding. **Workplace socialization** can be defined as the process by which new organizational members learn the rules (e.g., explicit policies, explicit procedures, etc.), norms (e.g., when you go on break, how to act at work, who to eat with, who

not to eat with, etc.), and culture (e.g., innovation, risk-taking, team orientation, competitiveness, etc.) of an organization. Organizations often have a very formal process for workplace socialization that is called onboarding. Onboarding is when an organization helps new members get acquainted with the organization, its members, its customers, and its products/services.

Third, information peers help us network within our organization or a larger field. Half of being successful in any organization involves getting to know the key players within the organization. Our information peers will already have existing relationships with these key players, so they can help make introductions. Furthermore, some of our peers may connect with others in the field (outside the organization), so they could help you meet other professionals as well.

Lastly, information peers help us manage and maintain knowledge. During the early parts of workplace socialization, our information peers will help us weed through all of the noise and focus on the knowledge that is important for us to do our jobs. As we become more involved in an organization, we can still use these information peers to help us acquire new knowledge or update existing knowledge. When we talk about knowledge, we generally talk about two different types: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is information that is kept in some retrievable format. For example, you'll need to find previously written reports or a list of customers' names and addresses. These are examples of the types of information that physically (or electronically) may exist within the organization. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is the knowledge that's difficult to capture permanently (e.g., write down, visualize, or permanently transfer from one person to another) because it's garnered from personal experience and contexts. Informational peers who have been in an organization for a long time will have a lot of tacit knowledge. They may have an unwritten history of why policies and procedures are the way they are now, or they may know how to "read" certain clients because they've spent decades building relationships. For obvious reasons, it's much easier to pass on explicit knowledge than implicit knowledge.

## Collegial Peers

The second type of relationships we'll have in the workplace are **collegial peers** or relationships that have moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure and is different from information peers because of the more openness that is shared between two individuals. Collegial peers may not be your best friends, but they are people that you enjoy working with. Some of the hallmarks of collegial peers include career strategizing, job-related feedback, recognizing competence/performance, friendship.

pb\_glossary id="212"]Career strategizing[/pb\_glossary] is the process of creating a plan of action for one's career path and trajectory. We also often turn to those who are around us the most often to see how we are doing within an organization, receiving job-related feedback. Our collegial peers can provide us this necessary feedback to ensure we are doing our jobs to the utmost of our abilities and the expectations of the organization. Collegial peers are usually the first to recognize our competence in the workplace and recognize us for excellent performance. Generally speaking, our peers have more interactions with us on the day-to-day job than does

middle or upper management, so they are often in the best position to recognize our competence in the workplace. Our competence in the workplace can involve having valued attitudes (e.g., liking hard work, having a positive attitude, working in a team, etc.), cognitive abilities (e.g., information about a field, technical knowledge, industry-specific knowledge, etc.), and skills (e.g., writing, speaking, computer, etc.) necessary to complete critical work-related tasks. Not only do our peers recognize our attitudes, cognitive abilities, and skills, they are also there to pat us on the backs and tell us we've done a great job when a task is complete.

Lastly, collegial peers provide us a type of friendship in the workplace. They offer us a sense of camaraderie in the workplace. They also offer us someone we can both like and trust in the workplace. Collegial peers are not a “best friend,” but they offer you friendships within the workplace that make work more bearable and enjoyable. At the collegial level, you may not associate with these friends outside of work beyond workplace functions (e.g., sitting next to each other at meetings, having lunch together, finding projects to work on together, etc.). It's also possible that a group of collegial peers will go to events outside the workplace as a group (e.g., going to happy hour, throwing a holiday party, attending a baseball game, etc.).

## Special Peers

The final group of peers we work with are called special peers. Special peer relationships “involves revealing central ambivalences and personal dilemmas in work and family realms. Pretense and formal roles are replaced by greater self-disclosure and self-expression.”<sup>36</sup> **Special peer** relationships are marked by confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship.

First, special peers provide us with confirmation. When we are having one of our darkest days at work and are not sure we're doing our jobs well, our special peers are there to let us know that we're doing a good job. They approve of who we are and what we do. These are also the first people we go to when we do something well at work.

Second, special peers provide us with emotional support in the workplace. Emotional support from special peers comes from their willingness to listen and offer helpful advice and encouragement. Kelly Zellars and Pamela Perrewé have noted there are four types of emotional social support we get from peers: positive, negative, non-job-related, and empathic communication.<sup>37</sup> Positive emotional support is when you and a special peer talk about the positive sides to work. For example, you and a special peer could talk about the joys of working on a specific project. Negative emotional support, on the other hand, is when you and a special peer talk about the downsides to work. For example, maybe both of you talk about the problems working with a specific manager or coworker. The third form of emotional social support is non-job-related or talking about things that are happening in your personal lives outside of the workplace itself. These could be conversations about friends, family members, hobbies, etc. A good deal of the emotional social support we get from special peers has nothing to do with the workplace at all. The final type of emotional social support is empathic communication or conversations about one's emotions or emotional state in the workplace. If you're having a bad day, you can go to your special peer, and they will reassure you about the feelings you are experiencing.

Another example is talking to your special peer after having a bad interaction with a customer that ended with the customer yelling at you for no reason. After the interaction, you seek out your special peer, and they will confirm your feelings and thoughts about the interaction.

Third, special peers will provide both reliable and candid feedback about you and your work performance. One of the nice things about building an intimate special peer relationship is that both of you will be honest with one another. There are times we need confirmation, but then there are times we need someone to be bluntly honest with us. We are more likely to feel criticized and hurt when blunt honesty comes from someone when we do not have a special peer relationship. Special peer relationships provide a safe space where we can openly listen to feedback even if we're not thrilled to receive that feedback.

Lastly, special peers also offer us a sense of deeper friendship in the workplace. You can almost think of special peers as your best friend(s) within the workplace. Most people will only have one or maybe two people they consider a special peer in the workplace. You may be friendly with a lot of your peers (i.g., collegial peers), but having that special peer relationship is deeper and more meaningful.

## Friendship Development in the Workplace

Sias and Cahill argue workplace friendships are developed by a series of influencing factors: individual/personal factors, contextual factors, and communication changes.<sup>39</sup> First, some friendships develop because we are drawn to the other person. Maybe you're drawn to a person in a meeting because she has a sense of humor that is similar to yours, or maybe you find that another coworker's attitude towards the organization is exactly like yours. Whatever the reason we have, we are often drawn to people that are like us. For this reason, we are often drawn to people who resemble ourselves demographically (e.g., age, sex, race, religion, etc.).

A second reason we develop relationships in the workplace is because of a variety of different contextual factors. Several contextual factors increase the likelihood of forming a friendship. Those who work in close proximity, being either physically close to one another or seeing each other often are more likely to form a friendship. Further, those who have task interdependence, relying on one another to accomplish a shared goal are also likely to become friends.<sup>40</sup> Opportunity and prevalence are also common reasons for friendships to form. Friendship opportunity refers to the degree to which an organization promotes and enables workers to develop friendships within the organization. Not surprisingly, individuals who work in organizations that allow for and help friendships tend to be satisfied, more motivated, and generally more committed to the organization itself. Friendship prevalence, on the other hand, is less of an organizational culture and more the degree to which an individual feels that they have developed or can develop workplace friendships. You may have an organization that attempts to create an environment where people can make friends, but if you don't think you can trust your coworkers, you're not very likely to make workplace friends.<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, as friendships develop, our communication patterns within those relationships change. For example, when we move from being just an acquaintance to being a friend with a coworker, we are more likely to increase the amount of communication about non-work and personal topics. When we transition from friend to close

friend, Sias and Cahill note that this change is marked by decreased caution and increased intimacy. According to Sias and Cahill, “Because of the increasing amount of trust developed between the coworkers, they felt freer to share opinions and feelings, particularly their feelings about work frustrations. Their discussion about both work and personal issues became increasingly more detailed and intimate.”<sup>42</sup>

## Ending Workplace Relationships

Like any relationship, a workplace friendship can end. Some friendships sour because one person moves into a position of authority of the other, so there is no longer perceived equality within the relationship. Other friendships occur when there is a relationship violation of some kind. Some friendships devolve because of conflicting expectations of the relationship. Maybe one friend believes that giving him a heads up about insider information in the workplace is part of being a friend, and the other person sees it as a violation of trust given to her by her supervisors. When we have these conflicting ideas about what it means to “be a friend,” we can often see a schism that gets created. So, how does an individual get out of workplace friendships? Sias and Perry discuss how colleagues disengage from relationships with their coworkers in three forms: state-of-the-relationship talk, cost escalation, and depersonalization.<sup>43</sup> People may use one or more technique and do not necessarily progress through the three in any order.

The first strategy people use when disengaging from workplace friendships involves state-of-the-relationship talk. **State-of-the-relationship talk** is exactly what it sounds like; you officially have a discussion that the friendship is ending. The goal of state-of-the-relationship talk is to engage the other person and inform them that ending the friendship is the best way to ensure that the two can continue a professional, functional relationship.

The second strategy is cost escalation. **Cost escalation** involves tactics that are designed to make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship. For example, a coworker could start belittling a friend in public, making the friend the center of all jokes, or talking about the friend behind the friend’s back. All of these behaviors are designed to make the cost of the relationship too high for the other person.

The final strategy involves **depersonalization**. Depersonalization happens when one coworker keeps all content focused on the tasks involved in work, avoiding discussion of personal matters. It can also occur when one coworker avoids the other, removing the benefits of proximity and interdependence by avoiding being in the same location as the coworker one is distancing from. According to Sias and Perry’s research, depersonalization tends to be the most commonly used tactic for friendship dissolution in the workplace.<sup>44</sup>

## Key Takeaways

- People engage in workplace relationships for several reasons: mentoring, information, power, and support.
  - We also engage in coworker relationships for trust, relational maintenance, and the ability to focus.
- There are three different types of workplace relationships: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer. Information peers are coworkers we rely on for information about job tasks and the organization itself. Collegial peers are coworkers with whom we have moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure and more openness that is shared between two individuals. Special peers, on the other hand, are coworkers marked by high levels of trust and self-disclosure, like a “best friend” in the workplace.
- There are three different ways that coworkers can disengage from coworker relationships in the workplace. First, individuals can engage in state-of-the-relationship talk with a coworker, or explain to a coworker that a workplace friendship is ending. Second, individuals can make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship, which is called cost escalation. The final disengagement strategy coworkers can utilize, depersonalization occurs when an individual stops all the interaction with a coworker that is not task-focused or simply to avoid the coworker.

## Romantic Relationships at Work

In 2014 poll conducted by CareerBuilder.com and Harris Interactive Polling, they found that 38% of U.S. workers had dated a coworker at least once, and 20% of office romances involve someone who is already married.<sup>45</sup> According to the researchers, “Office romances most often start with coworkers running into each other outside of work (12 percent) or at a happy hour (11 percent). Some other situations that led to romance include late nights at work (10 percent), having lunch together (10 percent), and love at first sight (9 percent).” Furthermore, according to data collected by Stanford University’s “How Couples Meet and Stay Together” research project, around 12% of married couples meet at work.<sup>46</sup> Meeting through friends is the number one way that people meet their marriage partners, but those who met at work were more likely to get married than those who met through friends.

In essence, workplaces are still a place for romance, but this romance can often be a double-edged sword for organizations. In the modern organization, today's office fling can easily turn into tomorrow's sexual harassment lawsuit.

## Understanding Romantic Workplace Relationships

According to Pierce and colleagues a **romantic workplace relationship** occurs when “two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.”<sup>47</sup> From this perspective, the authors noted five distinct characteristics commonly associated with workplace romantic relationships:

1. Passionate desire to be with one's romantic partner;
2. Shared, intimate self-disclosures;
3. Affection and mutual respect;
4. Emotional fulfillment; and
5. Sexual fulfillment/gratification.

## A Model of Romantic Workplace Relationships



Figure 6 Romantic Workplace Relationship Model

start participating in that romantic workplace relationship.

Once you start engaging in a romantic workplace relationship, there will be consequences of that relationship. Now, some of these consequences are positive, and others could be negative. For our purposes, we broadly put these consequences into three different categories: personal, professional, and organizational.

### Personal Outcomes

The first type of outcomes someone may face are personal outcomes or outcomes that affect an individual and not their romantic partner. Ultimately, romantic relationships can have a combination of both positive and negative outcomes for the individuals involved in them. For our purposes here, we will assume that both romantic partners are single and not in any other kind of romantic relationship. As long as that romantic relationship is functioning positively, individuals will be happy, which can positively impact someone's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. Employees engaged in romantic workplace relationships will even work longer hours so they can be with their romantic partners.

In their article examining romantic workplace relationships, Pierce and colleagues proposed a model for understanding workplace relationships. Figure 6 is a simplified version of that basic model. The basic model is pretty easy to follow. First, it starts with the issue of propinquity, or the physical closeness of two people in a given space. One of the main reasons romantic relationships develop in the workplace is because we are around people in our offices every day. It's this physical proximity that ultimately leads people to develop interpersonal attractions for some people. However, just because we find someone interpersonally attractive doesn't mean we're going to jump in a romantic relationship with them. Most people (if not all people) that we find interpersonally attractive at work will never develop romantic attractions towards. However, romantic attraction does happen. At the same time, if you don't desire a workplace relationship, then even a romantic attraction won't lead you to start engaging in a workplace relationship. If, however, you decide or desire to workplace relationship, then you are likely to

On the flip side, romantic relationships always have their ups and downs. If a relationship is not going well, then the individuals in those romantic workplace relationships can lead to adverse outcomes. In this case, we could see a decrease in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. You could also see romantic partners trying to put more distance between themselves and their romantic partner at work. In these cases, you could see people avoid being placed on the same project or working longer hours to avoid extra time with their romantic partner.

Overall, it's important to remember that romantic workplace relationships can lead to personal outcomes in the workplace environment. People often think they can keep their romantic and professional selves apart, but these distinctions can often become blurry and harder to separate.

## Professional Outcomes

The second type of outcomes someone in a romantic workplace relationship may face are professional. According to Robert Quinn, there is a range of professional outcomes that can occur when someone is involved in a romantic relationship.<sup>48</sup> Quinn listed six basic outcomes someone people achieve professionally as a result of engaging in a romantic workplace relationship: advancement, job security, increased power, financial rewards, easier work, job efficiency. Each of these professional outcomes are not guaranteed, and depend on the nature of the romantic relationship and who the partner is. If someone's partner has more power within the organization, then they can show more favoritism towards their romantic power. Whereas, individuals on the same rung of the hierarchy, may not have the ability to create professional advancement.

There is also the flipside to professional outcomes. If a relationship starts to sour, someone could see their career advancement slowed, less job security, less power in the workplace, etc.... It's in cases where romantic relationships sour (especially between individuals at different rungs of an organization's hierarchy) when we start to see the real problems associated with romantic workplace relationships.

## Organizational Outcomes

The final type of outcomes happens not directly to the individuals within a romantic workplace relationship, but rather to the organization itself. Organizations face a wide range of possible outcomes that stem from romantic workplace relationships. When romantic workplace relationships are going well, organizations have members who are more satisfied, motivated, and committed. Of course, this all trickles over into higher levels of productivity.

On the other hand, there are also negative outcomes that stem from romantic workplace relationships. First, people who are in an intimate relationship with each other in the workplace are often the subjects of extensive office gossip.<sup>49</sup> And this gossiping is time-consuming and can become a problem from a wide range of organizational members. Second, individuals who are "dating their boss" can lead to resentment by their peers if their peers perceive the boss as providing any kind of preferential treatment for their significant other in the workplace. Furthermore, not all romantic workplace relationships are going to turn out well. Many romantic

workplace relationships simply will dissolve. Sometimes this dissolution of the relationship is amicable, or both parties are OK with the breakup and can maintain professionalism after the fact. Unfortunately, there are times when romantic workplace relationships dissolve, and things can get a bit messy and unprofessional in the workplace. Although happy romantic workplace relationships have many positive side-effects, negative romantic workplace relationships can have the opposite outcomes for an organization leading to a decrease in job satisfaction, employee motivation, and organizational commitment, which leads to decreased productivity.

Many dissolutions of romantic workplace relationships could lead to formerly happy and productive organizational members looking for new jobs away from the person they were dating. In other cases (especially those involving people on different rungs of the organizational hierarchy), the organization could face legal claims of sexual harassment. Many organizations know that this last outcome is a real possibility, so they require any couple engaged in a romantic workplace relationship to enter into a consensual relationship agreement or “love contract” (see Side Bar for an example love contract). Other organizations ban romantic workplace relationships completely, and people found violating the policy can be terminated.

## Why Romantic Workplace Relationships Develop

Robert Quinn was the first researcher to examine why individuals decide to engage in romantic workplace relationships.<sup>51</sup> Renee Cowan and Sean Horan more recently updated the list of motives Quinn created.<sup>52</sup> Cowan and Horan found that the modern worker engages in romantic workplace relationships for one of four reasons: ease of opportunity, similarity, time, and the hookup. The first three of these motives are very similar to other motives one generally sees in interpersonal relationships in general. Furthermore, these categories were not mutually exclusive categories. Let’s examine these motives in more detail

### Ease of Opportunity

The first reason people engage in romantic workplace relationships; **ease of opportunity** happens because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another. We interact with a broad range of people in the workplace, so finding someone that one is romantically attracted to is not that surprising. This is similar to the idea of propinquity discussed by Pierce, Byrne, and Aguinis in their romantic workplace relationship development model discussed earlier in this chapter.<sup>53</sup>

### Similarity

The second motive discussed by Cowan and Horan is **similarity**, or finding that others in the workplace may have identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc.... As discussed earlier in this book, we know that when people perceive others as having the same attitude, background, or demographic similarities (homophily), we perceive them as more like us and are more likely to enter into relationships with

those people. The longer we get to know those people, the greater that probability that we may decide to turn this into a special peer relationship or a romantic workplace relationship.

## Time

As we discussed at the very beginning of this chapter, we spend a lot of our life at work. In a typical year, we spend around 92.71 days at work (50-weeks a year \* 5 days a week \* 8.9 hours per day). You ultimately spend more **time** with your coworkers than you do with almost any other group of people outside your immediate family. When you spend this much time with people, we learn about them and develop a sense of who they are and what they're like. We also know that time is a strong factor when predicting sexual attraction.<sup>54</sup>

## The Hook Up

Speaking of sexual attraction, the final motive people have for engaging in romantic workplace relationships was called “the hook up” by Cowan and Horan. The purpose of “**the hook up**” is casual sex without any romantic entanglements. Unlike the other three motives, this one is less about creating a romantic workplace relationship, and more about achieving mutual sexual satisfaction with one's coworker. In Cowan and Horan's study, they did note, “What we found interesting about this theme was that it was only attributed to coworker's WRs. Although several participants described WRs they had engaged in, this motive was never attributed to those pursuit.”<sup>55</sup>

## How Coworkers View Romantic Workplace Relationships

The final part of this section examines the research related to how coworkers view these romantic workplace relationships. The majority of us will never engage in a romantic workplace relationship, but most (if not all) of us will watch others who do. Sometimes these relationships work out, but often these relationships don't. Some researchers have examined how coworkers view their peers who are engaging in romantic workplace relationships.

- Coworkers trust peers less when they were involved in a romantic workplace relationship with a supervisor than with a different organizational member.<sup>56</sup>
- Coworkers reported less honest and accurate self-disclosures to peers when they were involved in a romantic workplace relationship with a supervisor than with a different organizational member.<sup>57</sup>
- “[C]oworkers perceived a peer dating a superior to be more driven by job motives and less by love motives than they perceived peer dating individuals of any other status type.”<sup>58</sup>
- Coworkers reported that they felt their peers were more likely to get an unfair advantage when dating one's leader rather a coworker at a different level of the hierarchy.<sup>59</sup>
- Peers dating subordinates were also felt to get an unfair advantage than peers dating people outside the

organization.<sup>60</sup>

- Gay or lesbian peers who dated a leader were trusted less, deceived more, and perceived as less credible than a peer dating a peer.<sup>61</sup>
- “[O]rganizational peers are less likely to deceive gay and lesbian peers involved in WRs and to perceive gay and lesbian peers in WRs as more caring and of higher character than heterosexual peers who date at work.”<sup>62</sup>
- Women who saw higher levels of sexual behavior in the workplace have lower levels of job satisfaction, but there was no relationship between observing sexual behaviors at work and job satisfaction for men.<sup>63</sup>
- When taking someone’s level of job satisfaction out of the picture, people who saw higher levels of sexual behavior in the workplace were more likely to look for another job.<sup>64</sup>

As you can see, dating in the workplace and open displays of sexuality in the workplace have some interesting outcomes for both the individuals involved in the relationship, their peers, and the organization.

### Key Takeaways

- According to Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis, a romantic workplace relationship occurs when “two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.”
- Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis’ model of romantic workplace relationships (Seen in Figure 13.6) have six basic stages: propinquity, interpersonal attraction, romantic attraction, desire for romantic relationship, engage in workplace relationship, and outcomes of workplace relationship (personal, professional, and organizational).
- Renee Cowan and Sean Horan found four basic reasons why romantic workplace relationships occur: ease of opportunity, similarity, time, and the hookup. First, relationships develop because we are around people a lot, and we are naturally drawn to some people around us. Second, we perceive ourselves as similar to coworkers having identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc.... Third, we spend a lot of time at work and the more we spend time with people the closer relationships become and can turn into romantic ones. Lastly, some people engage in romantic workplace relationships casual sex without any kind of romantic entanglements, known as the hookup.
- As a whole, the research on coworkers and their perceptions of romantic workplace

relationships are generally more in favor of individuals (both gay/lesbian and straight) who engage in relationships with coworkers at the same level. Coworkers do not perceive their peers positively when they are dating someone at a more senior level (especially one's direct supervisor). Furthermore, observing coworkers engaging in sexual behaviors tends to lead to decreases in job satisfaction, which can lead to an increase in one's desire to find another job.

## Language and Actions in the Workplace

### Language Use

In the workplace, the type of language and how we use language is essential. A 2024 study showed the top skills for college graduates included written communication (72.7%), verbal communication (67.5%), problem-solving skills (88.7%), ability to work in a team (78.9%), and interpersonal skills (58.2%). Today's workplace requires effective written and oral communication, and an ability to form and maintain personal and team relationships.<sup>12</sup> From the moment someone sends in a resume with a cover letter, their language skills are being evaluated, so knowing how to use both formal language effectively and jargon/specialized language is paramount for success in the workplace.

### Respect for Others

Our second category related to professionalism is respecting others. You've probably heard the saying "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." This guidance is particularly relevant to workplace interactions. Similarly, if you might caveat something with "Not to be racists but..." or "Not to be sexist but..." or "I'm not homophobic, but..." well, you get the idea and you probably don't need to say the racist, sexist, or otherwise biased comment. From workplace bullying to sexual harassment, many people simply do not always treat people with dignity and respect in the workplace. So, what do we mean by treating someone with respect? There are a lot of behaviors one can engage in that are respectful if you're interacting with a coworker or interacting with leaders or followers. Here's a list we created of respectful behaviors for workplace interactions:

- *Be courteous, polite, and kind to everyone.*
- *Do not criticize or nitpick at little inconsequential things.*
- *Do not engage in patronizing or demeaning behaviors.*
- *Don't engage in physically hostile body language.*
- *Don't roll your eyes when your coworkers are talking.*

- *Don't use an aggressive tone of voice when talking with coworkers.*
- *Encourage coworkers to express opinions and ideas.*
- *Encourage your coworkers to demonstrate respect to each other as well.*
- *Listen to your coworkers openly without expressing judgment before they've finished speaking.*
- *Listen to your coworkers without cutting them off or speaking over them.*
- *Make sure you treat all of your coworkers fairly and equally.*
- *Make sure your facial expressions are appropriate and not aggressive.*
- *Never engage in verbally aggressive behavior: insults, name-calling, rumor mongering, disparaging, and putting people or their ideas down.*
- *Praise your coworkers more often than you criticize them. Point out when they're doing great things, not just when they're doing "wrong" things.*
- *Provide an equal opportunity for all coworkers to provide insight and input during meetings.*
- *Treat people the same regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, etc....*
- *When expressing judgment, focus on criticizing ideas, and not the person.*

Certainly there are a wide range of ways that you can show your respect for your coworkers, but it would be remiss if we didn't bring up one specific area where you can demonstrate respect, the language we use. Without really intending to use language that is sex-based, we often do use terms that imbue biased meanings. Consider the phrase "grandfathered in" which is very common, this phrase has a biological sex connotation that limits it to males. The English language is filled with sexist language examples, and they come all too quickly to many of us because of tradition and the way we were taught the language. Thus, it is important to think about how we may (inadvertently) perpetuate sexist and biased language and how it impacts the workplace. Table 2 is a list of common sexist or biased language and corresponding inclusive terms that one could use instead.

Sexist or Biased Language	Inclusive Term
Businessman	business owner, business executive, or business person
chairman	chairperson or chair
confined to a wheelchair	uses a wheelchair
congressman	congressperson
Eskimo	Inuit or Aleut
fireman	firefighters
freshman	first-year student
policeman	police officer
man or mankind	people, humanity, or the human race
man hours	working hours
man-made	manufactured, machine made, or synthetic
manpower	personnel or workforce
master (plan, bedroom)	blueprint, prototype, primary
Negro or colored	African American or Black
old people or elderly	senior citizens, mature adults, older adults
Oriental	Asian, Asian American, or specific country of origin
postman or mailman	postal worker or mail carrier
steward or stewardess	flight attendant
suffers from diabetes	has diabetes
to man	to operate; to staff; to cover
waiter or waitress	server

Table 2. Replacing Sexist or Biased Language with Inclusive Terms

## Personal Responsibility

Let's face it; we all make mistakes. Making mistakes is a part of life. **Personal responsibility** refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave. Whether we're talking about our attitudes, our thought processes, or physical/communicative behaviors, personal responsibility is simply realizing that we are in the driver's seat and not blaming others for our current circumstances. Now, this is not to say that there are never external factors that impede our success. Of course, there are. This is not to say that

certain people have a leg-up on life because of a privileged background, of course, some people have. However, personal responsibility involves differentiating between those things we can control and those things that are outside of our control. For example, I may not be able to control a coworker who decides to yell at me, but I can control how I feel about that coworker, how I think about that coworker, and how I choose to respond to that coworker. Here are some ways that you can take personal responsibility in your own life (or in the workplace):

- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your choices in the workplace.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for how you feel at work.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your behaviors at work.
- Accept that your choices are yours alone, so you can't blame someone else for them.
- Accept that your sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem are yours.
- Accept that you can control your stress and feelings of burnout.
- Decide to invest in your self-improvement.
- Decide to take control of your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Decide on specific professional goals and make an effort and commitment to accomplish those goals.

Although you may have the ability to take responsibility for your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, not everyone in the workplace will do the same. Most of us will come in contact with coworkers who do not take personal responsibility. Dealing with coworkers who have a million and one excuses can be frustrating and demoralizing.

**Excuse-making** occurs any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behavior from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look better and more in control.<sup>8</sup> For example, an individual may explain their tardiness to work by talking about how horrible the traffic was on the way to work instead of admitting that they slept in late and left the house late. People make excuses because they fear that revealing the truth would make them look bad or out of control. In this example, waking up late and leaving the house late is the fault of the individual, but they blame the traffic to make themselves look better and in control even though they were late.

Excuse-making happens in every facet of life, but excuse-making in the corporate world can be highly problematic. For example, research has shown that when front-line service providers engage in excuse-making, they are more likely to lose return customers as a result.<sup>2</sup> In one study, when salespeople attempted to excuse their lack of ethical judgment on their customer's lack of ethics, supervisors tended to punish more severely those who engaged in excuse-making than those who had not.<sup>10</sup> Of course, even an individual's peers can become a little annoyed (or downright disgusted) by a colleague who always has a handy excuse for their behavior. For this reason, Amy Nordam recommends using the ERROR method when handling a situation where your behavior was problematic: Empathy, Responsibility, Reason, Offer Reassurance.<sup>11</sup> Here is an example Nordam uses to illustrate the ERROR method:

I hate that you [burden placed on person] because of me (Empathy). I should have thought things out better

(Responsibility), but I got caught up in [reason for behavior] (Reason). Next time I'll [preventative action] (Offer Reassurance).

As you can see, the critical parts of this response involve validating the other person, taking responsibility, and providing an explanation for how you'll behave in the future to avoid similar problems.

## Workplace Bullying Typology

Bullying is sadly alive and well in corporate America. This individual has a knack of being overly demanding on their peers, but then dares to take credit for their peers' work when the time comes. This is your prototypical schoolyard bully all grown up and in an office job. In 2005, Charlotte Rayner and Loreleigh Keashly examined the available definitions for "workplace bullying" and derived at five specific characteristics:

1. the experience of negative behavior;
2. behaviors experienced persistently;
3. targets experiencing damage;
4. targets labeling themselves as bullied; and
5. targets with less power and difficulty defending themselves.<sup>70</sup>

You'll notice from this list that being a bully isn't a one-off behavior for these coworkers. This behavior targets individuals in a highly negative manner, happens over a long period, and can have long-term psychological and physiological ramifications for individuals who are targeted. We should note that more often than not, bullies do not happen in isolation, but more often than not run in packs. For this reason, a lot of European research on this subject has been called mobbing instead of bullying. Sadly, this is an all-too-often occurrence in the modern work world. In a large study examining 148 international corporations through both qualitative and quantitative methods, Hodson et al., reported that 49 percent of the organizations they investigated had routine patterns of workplace bullying.<sup>71</sup>

Though it is hard to imagine among adults, bullying continues in the work environment. Bully can lead to loss of employment, poor attendance and depression. There are several typologies of bullying. In research conducted with nurses, a typology of bullying was created that is particularly comprehensive.<sup>72</sup> The typology of these researchers includes the bullying behavior and related tactics. **Workplace bullying behaviors** involve those seen in Table 3. As you can see, workplace bullying behaviors involve a wide range of tactics.

<b>Behaviors</b>	<b>Tactics</b>
<b>Isolation and exclusion</b>	Being ignored
	Being excluded from conversation
	Being isolated from supportive peers
	Being excluded from activities
<b>Intimidation and threats</b>	Raised voices or raised hands
	Being stared at, watched and followed
	Tampering with or destroying personal belongings
	Compromising or obstructing patient care
<b>Verbal threats</b>	Being singled out, scrutinized and monitored
	Being yelled at or verbally abused
	Being stood over, pushed or shoved
	Belittlement and humiliation
	Verbal put-downs, insults or humiliation
	Spreading gossip
	Being given a denigrating nickname
	Blamed, made to feel stupid or incompetent
	Suggestions of madness and mental instability
	Mistakes highlighted publicly
<b>Damaging professional identity</b>	Public denigration of ability or achievements
	Questioning skills and ability
	Being given demeaning work
	Unsubstantiated negative performance claims
	Spreading rumors, slander, and character slurs
	Questioning competence or credentials
<b>Limiting career opportunities</b>	Denial of opportunities that lead to promotion
	Being overlooked for promotion
	Excluded from committees and activities
	Exclusion from educational opportunities
	Rostered to erode specialist skills

Behaviors	Tactics
<b>Obstructing work or making work-life difficult</b>	Relocation to make job difficult
	Removal of administrative support
	Excluded from routine information
	Work organized to isolate
	Removal of necessary equipment
	Given excessive or unreasonable workload
	Sabotaging or hampering work
	Varying targets and deadlines
	Excessive scrutiny of work
	<b>Denial of due process and natural justice</b>
Denial of meal breaks	
Compiling unsubstantiated written records	
Denial of sick, study or conference leave	
Unfair rostering practices	
Economic sanctions	
Rostering to lower-paid shift work	
Limiting the opportunity to work	
Dismissal from position	
Reclassifying position to lower status	

Table 3 Bullying in the Workplace: Behaviors and Tactics

Key Takeaways

- Respecting our coworkers is one of the most essential keys to developing a positive organizational experience. There are many simple things we can do to show our respect, but

one crucial feature is thinking about the types of language we use. Avoid using language that is considered biased and marginalizing.

- Personal responsibility refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave. Part of being a successful coworker is taking responsibility for your behaviors, communication, and task achievement in the workplace.

## Research Spotlight



In 2017, Stacy Tye-Williams and Kathleen J. Krone wanted to examine the advice given to victims of workplace bullying. Going into this study, the researchers realized that a lot of the advice given to victims makes it their personal responsibility to end the bullying, “You should just stand up to the bully” or “You’re being too emotional this.”

In the current study, the researchers interviewed 48 people who had been the victims of workplace bullying (the average age was 28). The participants had worked on average for 5 ½ years in the organization where they were bullied. Here are the top ten most common pieces of advice victims received:

1. Quit/get out
2. Ignore it/blow it off/do not let it affect you
3. Fight/stand up
4. Stay calm
5. Report the bullying
6. Be quiet/keep mouth shut
7. Be rational
8. Journal
9. Avoid the bully
10. Toughen up

The researchers discovered three underlying themes of advice. First, participants reported that

they felt they were being told to downplay their emotional experiences as victims. Second, was what the researchers called the “dilemma of advice,” or the tendency to believe that the advice given wasn’t realistic and wouldn’t change anything. Furthermore, many who followed the advice reported that it made things worse, not better. Lastly, the researchers noted the “paradox of advice.” Some participants wouldn’t offer advice because bullying is contextual and needs a more contextually-based approach. Yet others admitted that they offered the same advice to others that they’d been offered, even when they knew the advice didn’t help them at all.

The researchers ultimately concluded, “The results of this study point to a paradoxical relationship between advice and its usefulness. Targets felt that all types of advice are potentially useful. However, the advice either would not have worked in their case or could possibly be detrimental if put into practice.”<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, the researchers argue that responding to bullying must first take into account the emotions the victim is receiving, and that responses to bullying should be a group and not a single individual’s efforts.

Tye-Williams, S., & Krone, K. J. (2017). Identifying and re-imagining the paradox of workplace bullying advice. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 45(2), 218–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2017.1288291>

## Key Terms

### **career strategizing**

The process of creating a plan of action for one’s career path and trajectory.

### **collegial peers**

Type of coworker with whom we have moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure and more openness that is shared between two individuals.

### **cost escalation**

A form of relational disengagement involving tactics that are designed to make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship.

**depersonalization**

A form of relational disengagement where an individual stops all the interaction that is not task-focused or simply to avoid the person.

**deviant workplace behavior**

The voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its members.

**ease of opportunity**

Reason explaining romantic workplace relationships happen because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another.

**excuse-making**

Any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behavior from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look better and more in control.

**followership**

The act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals.

**formal language**

Specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar that uses complex sentences, full words, and the third person.

**informal language**

Specific writing and spoken style that is more colloquial or common in tone; contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations; and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays.

**information peers**

Type of coworker who we rely on for information about job tasks and the organization itself.

**jargon**

The specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless or difficult for outsiders to understand.

**leader-member exchange**

Theory of leadership that explores how leaders enter into two-way relationships with followers through a series of exchange agreements enabling followers to grow or be held back.

### **personal responsibility**

An individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave.

### **relational maintenance**

"[T]he degree of difficulty individuals experience in interpersonal relationships due to misunderstandings, incompatibility of goals, and the time and effort necessary to cope with disagreements."

### **romantic workplace relationship**

When "two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association."<sup>65</sup>

### **similarity**

Reason explaining romantic workplace relationships occur because people find coworkers have identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc.

### **social support**

The perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from those people within their life.

### **special peer**

Type of coworker relationship marked by high levels of trust and self-disclosure; like a "best friend" in the workplace.

### **state-of-the-relationship talk**

A form of relational disengagement where an individual explains to a coworker that a workplace friendship is ending.

### **the hookup**

Reason explaining romantic workplace relationships occur because individuals want to engage in casual sex without any romantic entanglements.

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# DARK SIDES OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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Interpersonal communication often results in positive outcomes, but may also lead to hurt, conflict, psychological damage, and/or relationship termination. The dark side of interpersonal communication generally refers to communication that includes negative behaviors and results in negative outcomes. Some types of communication that are considered to be on the “dark side” are: hurtful messaging, deception, infidelity, jealousy, bullying, and violence, to name a few. For many years, communication scholars failed to focus on the more negative aspects of communication, but in doing so, overlooked opportunities to create solutions for those in relationships featuring them. Awareness of these negative communication strategies may be the first step in preventing these strategies.

## Learning Objectives

1. Identify various hurtful messages and reactions to them.
2. Define the types of, and motives for, deception in relationships.
3. Identify factors leading to infidelity in real life and online.
4. Understand the nature of jealousy and its inherent paradoxes.
5. Acknowledge different kinds of bullying and its consequences.
6. Recognize the variety and severity of domestic violence in the United States.

## Hurtful Messages

“Even in the closest, most satisfying relationships, people sometimes say things that hurt each other.”<sup>1</sup> We have all been in the position of having our feelings hurt or hurting the feelings of others. When feelings are hurt, individuals respond in many different ways. Though hurtful messages have always existed, it was not until 1994 that Anita L. Vangelisti developed a hurtful message typology and explored reactions to them.<sup>2</sup>

## Types of Hurtful Messages

### Evaluations

Evaluations are messages that assess value or worth. When these messages comprise **evaluations** or negative assessments, the target individual may be hurt. Your passenger earnestly concluding, “You are the worst driver ever” may harm your esteem and hurt your feelings.

### Accusations

The second type of hurtful message is an accusation. **Accusations** are assignments of fault or blame. Any number of topics can be addressed in accusations. A common source of conflict in relationships is money. An example of an accusation that might arise in conflict over money is “You are the reason this family is in constant financial turmoil.”

### Directives

**Directives** involve a negative order or command. In everyday interaction, examples might include, “leave me alone,” or “don’t ever call me that.” “Go to hell” is a more extreme example.

### Informative Statements

In the context of hurtful messages, **informative statements** reveal unwanted information. A supervisor might reveal the following to an employee: “I only hired you because the owner made me.” Siblings might reveal “I never wanted a younger sister” or “When Mother was dying, she told me I was her favorite.” Friends might say something like, “When you got a job at the same place as me, I felt smothered.” Informative messages reveal information that could easily be kept a secret, but are intended to hurt.

### Statements of Desire

**Statements of desire** harmfully express an individual preference. A romantic partner might state, “the night I met you, I was more interested in your friend and really wanted to go out with him.” A friend might say, “Callie has always been a better friend than you.”



Figure 1. Effects of Hurtful Messages. “woman-s-palm-with-written-message,” by RDNE Stock. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

## Advising Statements

**Advising statements** call for a course of action such as “you need to get yourself some help.” Imagine a friend complaining about going on many interviews and not getting hired and you say, “There are courses that offer interview training you could take.” The statement might hurt your friend who was only seeking comfort and not advice that indicated she had poor interview skills.

## Questions

**Questions** are asked in a way that implies something negative. A very direct hurtful question is, “What is wrong with you?” Another subtler question that might be perceived as hurtful is, “You’ve been at the bank for ten years. Have you really not been promoted yet?”

## Threats

**Threats** are messages that indicate a desire or the potential to inflict physical or psychological harm. A romantic partner might say, “if you go out with your friends tonight, we are through for good.” A direct physical threat might be, “I’m going to knock the stuffing out of you if you don’t get out of my way.”

## Jokes

**Jokes** are hurtful messages that involve a prank or witticism. A coworker could disparage a supervisor’s relationship with a subordinate, “I can see who’s really in charge here.” *The Breakfast Club* includes a perfect example of a prank carried too far when the jock character, Andrew, explains that he and his wrestling buddies duct-taped together the butt cheeks of a nerd. It was meant to be funny, but results in physical injury to the nerd. Jokes that embarrass or cause physical harm often create emotional pain for the recipient.

## Lies

Lies are deceptive speech acts that result in hurt for the recipient. Allard dishonestly tells Marta that he was at work when she tried to call him and she later finds out that he was actually out drinking with a group of women from work. Lies, when discovered, may result in feelings of being disrespected or betrayal.

## Reactions to Hurtful Messages

Anita Vangelisti and Linda Crumley investigated the reactions individuals have to hurtful messages and revealed three broad categories.<sup>3</sup>

**Active verbal responses** involve attacking the other, defending yourself, or asking for an explanation. “Nothing is wrong with me. What’s wrong with you?” or “Why do you think there is something wrong with me?”

**Acquiescent responses** involve crying, conceding, or apologizing. An example is “I am so sorry. Is there something I can do to change your mind? I don’t want to lose you.”

Finally, hurtful messages can inspire **invulnerable responses** that range from ignoring the message to laughing. They are akin to “sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

### Key Takeaways

- In 1994, Anita L. Vangelisti developed a hurtful message typology and explored reactions to them.
- Ten kinds of hurtful messages were identified, including accusations, threats, and jokes.
- Reactions to hurtful messages include acquiescent, active, and invulnerable responses.

### Exercises

- Remember or create a joke that would serve as a hurtful message and one that would not. What is the key difference?
- On a scale of “active” to “passive,” rank the acquiescent, active, and invulnerable responses to hurtful messages and explain how you determined the ranking order.

## Deception

Lies are such a prevalent and consequential type of hurtful message that they are the essence of another fully examined Dark Side behavior: deceptive communication. We are taught from a young age that we should not lie, but we often witness others engaging in socially acceptable, or “little white,” lies. As communication

scholars, we must distinguish between a lie that is told for the benefit of the receiver and a lie that is told with more malicious intent.

Judee Burgoon and David Buller define **deception** as, “a deliberate act perpetuated by a sender to engender in a receiver beliefs contrary to what the sender believes is true.”<sup>4</sup> H. Dan O’Hair and Michael Cody characterize deception as often purposeful, goal-directed, and used as a relational control device.<sup>5</sup> We will begin our discussion of deception by exploring three types.

## Types of Deception

Three types of deception are discussed in the field of communication: falsification, concealment, and equivocation.<sup>6</sup> **Falsification** is deliberately presenting information that is not true, or fraudulent, as factual. For example, President Bill Clinton once publicly said of his intern, Monica Lewinsky, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman,” even though he eventually admitted that he did. Falsification is recognized as the most common form of deception.



Figure 2. Deception.  
“teacher-caught-his-student-cheating-during-a  
n-exam,” by RDNE Stock. [All photos and videos  
on Pexels are free to download and use;](#)  
[Attribution is not required.](#)

**Concealment** is deception that involves withholding, rather than fabricating, of information. For example, if Simone asks her mother whether she can go to a concert with her teen friends, Luna and Sofia, without mentioning that two college boys will be taking them, she is engaging in concealment.

The third form of deception, **equivocation**, is use of a statement that could be interpreted as having more than

one meaning, for the sake of obscuring the whole truth. For example, if you ask your romantic partner whether she talked to her ex-boyfriend last night, and she says, “no, I didn’t talk to him,” but she did text with him, then she is equivocating.

## Lies in Romantic Relationships

Jennifer Guthrie and Adrienne Kunkel, an alumnus of the University of Kansas’ Department of Communication Studies and her advisor, asked 67 college students to record their deceptive communication in diaries for seven days and coded it into their own deception typology. The 67 students produced 327 deceptive acts, or an average of five each per week: 147 lies, 61 exaggerations, 56 half-truths, 35 diversionary responses, 26 secrets, and two undetailed uses of deception.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the students explained their 327 reported deceptions with 334 reasons, which Guthrie and Kunkel coded into five overarching motives for lying. Deception was used to engage in relational maintenance or to “keep the peace” when a girlfriend was told that her outfit was flattering even though it wasn’t and when she did not mention to her boyfriend that her -ex was at a party she attended. The other four motives, managing face needs, negotiating dialectical tensions, establishing relational control, and continuing previous deception,<sup>7</sup> are also portrayed in Table 1.

<b>Overarching Motives</b>	<b>Individual Reasons</b>
<b>Managing Face Needs</b>	Supporting Positive Face
	Protecting partner's feelings and self-presentation
	Supporting Negative Face
	Avoiding unwanted activities and/or imposition)
<b>Negotiating Dialectical Tensions</b>	Negotiating Autonomy/Connection
	Balancing the need for independence versus the need for togetherness
	Negotiating Openness/Closedness
	Balancing the need for open communication versus the need for privacy
	Negotiating Novelty/Predictability
	Balancing the need for spontaneity versus the need for routine or expected behaviors
<b>Establishing Relational Control</b>	Acting Coercive
	Ensuring that a partner behaves or feels how the other wants them to
<b>Continuing Previous Deception</b>	Participants indicated that they had lied about something in the past and the particular act of deception was a way of continuing or maintaining the lie
<b>Relational Maintenance</b>	Deception employed to "keep the peace," or avoid fights and relational damage

Table 1. Romantic Deception Motives.

Perhaps Guthrie and Kunkel's most important finding is the extent to which participants were able to identify what they believed to be morally acceptable rationales for their acts of romantic deception.<sup>2</sup>

### Key Takeaways

- Deception is a willful act designed to convey falsehoods as true.
- One typology of deceptive acts recognizes falsification, concealment, and equivocation.
- Jennifer Guthrie and Adrienne Kunkel discovered that students can identify at least five reasons for why they deceive romantic partners: relational maintenance, managing face needs, negotiating dialectical tensions, establishing relational control, and continuing

previous deception.

## Exercises

- Can you name a time when you, or someone else felt “trapped in a lie” and needed to continue telling it?
- Would you rather a friend deceived you with falsification, concealment, or equivocation? Why?

## Infidelity

Deception is almost always involved in the performance of relational infidelity. **Infidelity** refers to behaviors of “cheating,” or being unfaithful to a committed spouse or other sexual partner. When extramarital sex occurs, it is called adultery. Some believe that as long as there is no sexual intercourse, there has been no infidelity. Others draw lines around particular other acts of affectionate expression such as sexual acts besides intercourse, kissing, or even holding hands. Apart from sexual or physical infidelity that involves sexual intimacy and physical involvement, there is also emotional infidelity.



Figure 3. Infidelity.  
 “expressive-artists-performing-live-action-in-studio,” by Leonardo Santos. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

Sexual infidelity might include a married person’s hookup with a person employed in a different region at their company’s convention. Emotional infidelity could include a long thread of emails between a corporate trainer and a former trainee that goes deep into problems with their individual relationships and expressions of fondness and gratitude for each other.

Infidelity can cause great feelings of guilt, shame, and fear of being caught for the cheater. It can cause feelings of inadequacy, betrayal, jealousy (see below), and anger for the partner that has been cheated on. As trust may be damaged or destroyed with the revelation of infidelity, relationships may be negatively or severely harmed, perhaps even doomed.

A variety of studies have spoken to the prevalence of infidelity, indicating that more than a quarter of married

heterosexual men and women will engage in it. Researchers reported that sexual infidelity occurred in 30% to 40% of relationships.<sup>8</sup> In romantic relationships outside of marriage, between half to three quarters have featured cheating. From the 1940s to the 1980s, reports of infidelity in the United States steadily increased and it has been traced through many eras and cultures including ancient Greek, Roman, and Asian civilizations.<sup>2</sup>

It was initially proposed that women would perceive emotional infidelity as worse than sexual infidelity and that men would perceive sexual infidelity in their partners as worse than emotional infidelity. This proposal developed from the evolutionary psychology perspective, that predicts males would be concerned with sexual infidelity because they had no way of knowing whether their mate was carrying their child and thus carrying on their genetic material. On the other hand, women were more concerned with emotional infidelity because women feared that their male counterparts would become attached to another female and that his resources (e.g., money, time, etc.) would be directed toward them instead.

Although the evolutionary perspective provides insight into the basic differences that could exist between females and males, research consistently shows that both females and males find sexual infidelity to be worse than emotional infidelity.<sup>10</sup> When sexual infidelity occurs, research shows that how infidelity is discovered determines relational outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Voluntary admission seems to result in increased forgiveness, less likelihood of dissolution, and is the least damaging to relational quality.

Among the factors identified as increasing the likelihood that infidelity will occur are: lack of satisfaction with the relationship, low commitment to it, extroversion, neuroticism, psychopathy, relational power differentials, homosexuality, African American and Hispanic American ethnicity, lower levels of education, and working outside of the home.<sup>2</sup>

## Internet Infidelity

The amount of time spent online by a wide range of people makes the Internet a ripe “meeting place” for relationships of all types. The Internet shrinks our world and enables individuals to find others with similar interests, desirable knowledge (e.g., health information, how to clean, the best campgrounds, etc.), and attractive qualities. Moreover, the Internet provides privacy, the ability to interact frequently, and it enables a feeling of close proximity.

### Research Spotlight

Tony Docan-Morgan and Carol A. Docan set out to examine how men and women view Internet infidelity in a 2007 study. The researchers started by having 43 undergraduates list what they thought could be Internet infidelity. The researchers reviewed the open-ended responses and paired down the list to the following:

- having cybersex (engaging in sexually explicit conversations with someone online)
- flirtatious behavior
- emotional connection
- seeking another partner
- exchanging private information
- casual conversation

Based on these categories and other literature on the subject, the researchers developed a measure of internet fidelity numbering 27 items. The measure ultimately discovered two different patterns of Internet infidelity *superficial/informal acts* (e.g., chatting about sports, talking about current events, joking, etc.) and *involving/goal-directed* (e.g., disclosing love, viewing personal ads, making plans to meet someone, etc.).

The researchers found that superficial/informal acts were rated as less severe than involving/goal-directed ones. Females found involving/goal-directed Internet infidelity as more severe than males did. In general, participants tended to rate their Internet infidelity as less severe than their partner’s on both involving/goal-directed and superficial/informal acts.

Docan-Morgan, T., & Docan, C. (2007). Internet infidelity: Double standards and the differing



views of women and men. *Communication Quarterly*, 55(3), 317-342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370701492519>

### Key Takeaways

- Infidelity involves “cheating,” or being unfaithful to a committed spouse or other sexual partner; when it involves extramarital sex, it is called adultery.
- Emotional infidelity and sexual/physical infidelity are distinct phenomena, though they may occur concurrently.
- The Internet is a particularly ripe context for acts of infidelity.

### Exercises

- Would you expect a present or past romantic partner to have an easier time forgiving your sexual infidelity or your emotional infidelity with a co-worker? What is the reasoning for this?
- Where do you draw the line for whether emotional infidelity has occurred?

## Jealousy

Infidelity, or the suspicion of it, is most often the underlying cause of jealousy. **Jealousy** is a set of “cognitive,

emotional, and coping behaviors” in response to “a potential threat to, or an actual loss of a valued relationship due to a real or imagined rival for a partner’s attention.”<sup>12</sup>

In the Shakespeare play, *Othello*, the main character is experiencing jealousy at his wife, Desdemona’s, affection for Cassio. Othello is warned by his manipulative subordinate, Iago, that jealousy “is the green-eyed monster which doth mock.” The ancient Greeks, informed by Hippocrates’ medical practice based on humors, or substances, believed that jealousy was traceable to an overabundance of bile, that is green in color.

## Dimensions of Jealousy

In contemporary times, jealousy is said to possess three dimensions.<sup>13</sup> **Cognitive jealousy** is comprised by the thoughts and worries that plague us when we suspect a rival’s threat to a relationship.<sup>14</sup> **Emotional jealousy** is the affect dimension and can carry feelings of anxiety, discomfort, anger, fear, sadness, shame, and guilt.<sup>15</sup> **Behavioral jealousy** includes the acts of observing, investigating, and reacting to, fears and suspicions about relational threats.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 4. Jealous Behavior. “a-woman-seeing-a-hair-in-the-collar,” by Ron Lach. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

The behaviors of jealousy might include relentlessly asking a partner about their whereabouts and activities and associations, showing up without notice to their work or social events, scrolling through their phone contacts and messages, recruiting others to report on them, and investigating them financially. Also, when jealous, some control their partner’s exposure to others, seek information from or threaten violence to rivals, mark their territory with labeling of their relationship and public displays of affection, and withdraw from partners or administer the silent treatment.<sup>17</sup> As inevitable and unavoidable as such actions may seem in the throes of jealous episodes, they frequently lead to being self-disgusted and feeling pathetic.

The inextricable tangling of jealousy’s cognitions, emotions, and behaviors becomes aggravated by the potentially cheating partner’s denials or **gaslighting** (i.e., falsely leading another to doubt their own ability to perceive reality accurately).

Unwarranted jealousy will take a toll on the falsely suspected partner. They begin to feel that they are restrained from their natural personality and behavior by fear of triggering their significant other’s jealous spirals.

## Variance in Jealousy

Jealousy may adopt different values in different contexts. Laura Guerrero and Peter Andersen report a “paradoxical societal view of jealousy” so that it can be associated with love yet also with paranoia.<sup>17</sup> It can be evaluated as reprehensible yet so essentially human that it has been employed as a defense in prosecutions of crimes of passion.

Moreover, the nature and extent of jealousy may vary between cultures. Stephen Croucher of the University of Jyväskylä, with seven colleagues at Marist College and the University of Oklahoma, administered a questionnaire survey to a huge sample (i.e., almost 1800 participants!) across four nations. They found that American, Irish, and Indian participants reported expressing more behavioral and emotional jealousy than did those in Thailand. The researchers believe that Thais could be less jealous due to living in a country that is less egocentric and masculine than the U.S. and Ireland, and less patriarchal than India.<sup>12</sup>

### Key Takeaways

- Jealousy is the “green-eyed monster” that responds to threat to, or loss of, a relationship due to a rival for a partner’s attention.
- Jealousy tends to have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.
- Behavioral jealousy manifests as quizzing partners, showing up without notice, scanning phones, contacting rivals, and marking territory.

### Exercises

- Describe why jealousy is sometimes described as paradoxical, meaning that it may have two opposing natures.
- Apart from the four nations examined in the Croucher et. al., study, what countries or cultures would you guess as featuring higher or lower than average levels of jealousy? Which of the three dimensions of jealousy would be most responsible for this?

## Bullying

**Bullying** is a form of repeated communication or behavior by an aggressive individual of greater power who targets an individual perceived as weaker for harm or discomfort. Bullies use authority, size, power, social status, and intimidation to create fear in others. The negative consequences of suffering from bullying include helplessness, anxiety, and depression.<sup>18</sup> Anecdotal evidence is also mounting that bullying can lead its victims to suicidal ideation and even the willingness to commit acts of mass violence.

In 2013, Jadin Bell, a 15-year-old bullied intensely online and in person for his sexuality, hung himself on an elementary school playground in his hometown of La Grande, Oregon.

The day before returning to school after the Covid lockdown in north London, 14-year-old Mia Janin sent a WhatsApp voice note to a friend, "Tomorrow's going to be a rough day...I'm currently mentally preparing myself to be bullied tomorrow." Boys at the school were bullying girls by rating their attractiveness online and posting faked nude photos of them. She was found dead in the family bathroom the next day by her mother.

In early 2024, a 17-year-old shooter injured four students and three staff members, and killed a 6th-grader, at Perry High School in Iowa. Multiple media features relayed findings of the shooter having been relentlessly bullied. According to reporters Anna Merod and Kara Arundel, "a substantial and growing body of research continues to find strong correlations between school shooters and bullying."<sup>19</sup>

Researchers have created a typology of three kinds of bullying: physical, verbal, and relational.<sup>20</sup>

### Physical Bullying

**Physical bullying** involves hitting, kicking, pulling hair, harming possessions, giving a "wedgie," or a plethora of other acts of aggravation or violence. Physical bullying can be prevented by observers, such as teachers or even peers. There are several Public Service Campaigns directed toward bystanders to let them know that they can help prevent or stop bullying. However, bullies may corner victims in private settings, knowing that the weaker individual will not be able to defend themselves.



Figure 5. Bullied. "a-kid-getting-bullied-in-the-library," by Mikhail Nilov. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

### Relational Bullying

The second type is **relational bullying**. This form of

bullying is the manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.<sup>21</sup> This type of bullying includes withholding friendship or excluding from social groups. Relational bullying often increases as children age and physical bullying decreases.

Relational bullying is particularly problematic because it is very painful for victims, but cannot be readily observed nor easily prohibited. When two friends suddenly begin to exclude a third, the rejection is quite painful, but adolescents cannot be required to continue liking and including a third party. Females are more likely to engage in this form of bullying.<sup>22</sup>

When two of three close West Virginia friends, Sheila Eddy and Rachel Shoaf, grew closer, perhaps sexually, they estranged the third, Skylar Neese. In July of 2012, Neese was lured into the woods by the other two and brutally stabbed to death. This was a tragic case of relational bullying escalating into murderous physical bullying.

## Verbal Bullying

The third type is **verbal bullying** and includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdowns, or sarcastic comments.<sup>23</sup> This form of bullying is easily observed and can be addressed by both authorities and peers. The effects of this form of bullying are similar to the impacts of physical and relational bullying, but self-esteem is especially vulnerable to it.



Figure 6. Impacts of Bullying.

The negative consequences of childhood bullying have driven communication scholars to develop educational

tools to provide to teachers and other authority figures. Researchers developed a model to assist teachers in discerning playful, prosocial teasing from destructive bullying.<sup>24</sup> The Teasing Totter Model outlines behaviors that range from prosocial teasing to bullying and offers recommendations for responding to each. Teasing in a prosocial manner is usually done among friends, and laughter is involved, or even affection. Bullying, on the other hand, is a repeated negative behavior in which the victim is visibly distressed.

## Cyberbullying

id="560"]Cyberbullying[/pb\_glossary] is intentional harm, inflicted through online and social media platforms, that is repeated over time.<sup>25</sup> When using electronic communication technologies, young people are exposed to interpersonal violence, social aggression, harassment, and mistreatment.<sup>26</sup> Cyberbullying includes behaviors such as flaming, which involves posting provocative or abusive posts, and outing or doxing, where personal information is posted.<sup>27</sup> Cyberbullying affects victims academically and socially, with 20% of victims reporting Internet avoidance.<sup>27</sup>

Opportunities for bullying used to be confined to school or landline phones; it was essentially limited to eight hour school days and phone calls that could be avoided or ended easily. Now, cyberbullying takes place 24/7, and the only way to avoid it is to cut off a major form of staying connected with the social world. Researchers are just now beginning to understand the impact of cyberbullying, and some speculate that cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying, but research shows mixed results on this assertion.

Cyberbullying is so prevalent that social media such as Facebook have policies to help users avoid this phenomenon.

### Facebook Suggestions for Victims of Cyberbullying

Facebook offers these tools to help with bullying and harassment. Depending on the seriousness of the situation:

- Unfriend — Only your Facebook friends can contact you through Facebook chat or post messages on your Timeline.
- Block — This will prevent the person from starting chats and messages with you, adding you as a friend and viewing things you share on your Timeline.
- Report the person or any abusive things they post.
- The best protection against bullying is to learn how to recognize it and how to stop it. Here are some tips about what you should — and shouldn't — do:

- Don't respond. Typically, bullies want to get a response — don't give them one.
- Don't keep it a secret. Use Facebook's Trusted Friend tool to send a copy of the abusive content to someone you trust who can help you deal with the bullying. This will also generate a report to Facebook.
- Document and save. If the attacks persist, you may need to report the activity to authorities and they will want to see the messages.

Visit Facebook's Family Safety Center for more information, tools and resources.

<https://www.facebook.com/help/116326365118751/>

### Key Takeaways

- Bullying is a form of repeated communication or behavior by an aggressive individual of greater power, who targets an individual perceived as weaker, for harm or discomfort.
- Physical, relational, and verbal are three types of bullying that are widely recognized.
- The consequences of bullying can be severe from damaged esteem to suicide or violence.

### Exercises

- What precautions do you take to minimize the odds of being cyberbullied?
- Even if a teen or young adult has a history of being bullied, what other factors might contribute to their thoughts of becoming a school shooter?

## Domestic Violence

“**Domestic violence** is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one person against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional/psychological abuse.”<sup>28</sup>

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) expands upon this definition to specifically label some acts of domestic violence as “intimate partner violence.”<sup>29</sup> These include sexual violence, stalking, physical violence, and psychological aggression against a romantic or sexual partner, spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, or person that is dating, seeing, or “hooking up” with the abuser. Domestic violence also includes acts between members of the same household or family.

One in four (i.e., 30 million) women and one in ten (i.e., 12.1 million) men have reported domestic partner violence-related impacts which include being fearful, concerned about safety, injury, need for medical care, needed help from law enforcement, missed at least one day of work, missed at least one day of school, any post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, need for housing services, need for victim advocate services, need for legal services, and contacting a crisis hotline.<sup>30</sup>

A typical cyclical narrative of repeated violence within a relationship sees tension, followed by explosion, followed by remorse, followed by a honeymoon period of apologies and promises to cease the behavior.

Of women, the predominant victimized sex, or others on the receiving end of domestic violence, it takes an average of 5 to 7 attempts to leave an abuser permanently. Some never try to leave and others lose their lives before they can. In fact, a study by the 2018 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reported that every 6 hours in the United States, another woman is killed by her abuser.<sup>30</sup> Domestic violence organizations and shelters provide resources that empower survivors to attempt to break the unfortunate, if not tragic, cycle.



Figure 7. Domestic Violence. “human-fist,” by Pixabay. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

Physical violence is common in instances of domestic violence, as is sexual violence, a specific form of domestic violence that may be experienced by women and men and includes rape, which can consist of being forcibly penetrated (or penetrating) someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact.

Still, domestic violence is not only about physical and sexual aggression. Abusers may be manipulative in the ways that they exert power and control over domestic violence survivors (see Figure 8). They may constrain their partners economically, threaten them with consequences for undesired behaviors, abuse emotionally, remove partners from social contexts for the purpose of isolating them, wield male privilege, use children as weapons, and adopt tactics of minimization, gaslighting, denial, and blaming of survivors.



Figure 8. DV Power and Control Wheel. “Power and Control Wheel,” by Domestic Violence Intervention Programs. [Available via license: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported.](#)

thoughts about violence as intervention.<sup>31</sup> Though advice exists for current and potential survivors to reach out to trusted organizations or confidantes in order to secure help, many programs have been instituted to educate men, especially young ones, new visions about masculinity and respect of other people.

Some of the better known initiatives include Man Up, the White Ribbon Campaign, Men Can Stop Rape, and MVP – Mentors in Violence Prevention. The #metoo movement has also helped to instill a new sense of morality around the use and abuse of women and other survivors of harassment and violence.

Sally Fiona Kelly demonstrated that individuals who have committed violent acts in a relationship believe violence is acceptable and are prepared to use it, thus supporting a focus on changing beliefs and

## What Can Individual Students Do To Combat Domestic Violence?

- Focus on domestic violence in your policy speeches, health campaigns, capstone projects, and training sessions.
- Ask anyone you suspect to be a (potential) DV survivor if they want to talk or if there is anything you can do.
- Attend and promote public forums on gender and equity issues, such as “Take Back the Night” Marches that are held around the country.
- Educate young men about the dangers of toxic and privileged masculinity.
- Confront those who perform or endorse bullying, aggression, sexism, racism, or other

forms of insensitivity and exclusion rather than remaining a silent bystander.

- Support local, national, and international campaigns against domestic violence.
- Be an advocate for women and for respecting them in relationships, with friends and family, in the locker room and the workplace, and on social media.
- Vote with your wallet and your endorsements by not consuming media, following public figures, or using products that are aligned with hypermasculine principles or that degrade others.

### Key Takeaways

- Domestic violence can happen to anyone, but women in the United States are very susceptible to serious or deadly attacks.
- Domestic violence often assumes the form of a cycle as regret and apologies calm things down before the violence surfaces again.
- The Domestic Violence Intervention Program's Power and Control wheel illustrates how violence can be replaced or supplemented by acts of intimidation, isolation, and economic and social constraint.

### Exercises

- Can you easily identify instances of movies or television programs that featured domestic violence? If so, did they make these experiences seem more, or less, realistic to you?
- Name three things you will start doing to change the moral environment and decrease the likelihood that acts of domestic violence occur?

## Key Terms

### **accusations**

Hurtful assignments of fault or blame.

### **acquiescent responses**

Involve crying, conceding, or apologizing.

### **active verbal responses**

Involve attacking the other, defending yourself, or asking for an explanation.

### **advising statements**

Hurtfully call for a course of action.

### **behavioral jealousy**

The acts of observing, investigating, and reacting to fears and suspicions about relational threats.

### **bullying**

A form of repeated communication or behavior by an aggressive individual of greater power who targets an individual perceived as weaker for harm or discomfort.

### **cognitive jealousy**

Thoughts and worries that plague one who suspects a rival's threat to a relationship.

### **concealment**

Deception that involves withholding, rather than fabricating, of information.

### **cyberbullying**

Intentional harm, inflicted through online and social media platforms, that is repeated over time.

### **deception**

"A deliberate act perpetuated by a sender to engender in a receiver beliefs contrary to what the sender believes is true."<sup>4</sup>

### **directives**

Involve a negative order or command.

**domestic violence**

The willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.”<sup>29</sup>

**emotional jealousy**

The affect dimension of jealousy that may carry feelings of anxiety, discomfort, anger, fear, sadness, shame, and guilt.

**equivocation**

Use of a statement that could be interpreted as having more than one meaning, for the sake of obscuring the whole truth.

**evaluations**

Messages that assess value or worth, which may be hurtful when delivering a negative assessment.

**falsification**

Deliberately presenting information that is untrue or fraudulent as factual.

**gaslighting**

Falsely leading another to doubt their own ability to perceive reality accurately.

**infidelity**

Behaviors of “cheating,” being unfaithful to a committed spouse or other sexual partner.

**informative statements**

Reveal unwanted information.

**invulnerable messages**

Range from ignoring the message to laughing.

**jealousy**

a set of “cognitive, emotional, and coping behaviors” in response to “a potential threat to, or an actual loss of a valued relationship due to a real or imagined rival for a partner’s attention.”<sup>12</sup>

**jokes**

Hurtful messages that involve a prank or witticism.

**lies**

Deceptive speech acts that result in the hurt of recipients.

### **physical bullying**

Hitting, kicking, pulling hair, harming possessions, giving a “wedgie,” or a plethora of other acts of aggravation or violence.

### **questions**

Asked in a way that implies something negative.

### **relational bullying**

The manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.

### **statements of desire**

Harmfully express an individual preference.

### **threats**

Messages that indicate a desire or the potential to inflict physical or psychological harm.

### **verbal bullying**

Threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdowns or sarcastic comments.

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# PERSUASION

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## Learning Objectives

- Understand what persuasion is as well as how valuable and difficult it is.
- Affect evaluations of worthiness and believability by establishing dimensions of credibility.
- Recognize that influence can be achieved through conditioning to create strong associations and by appealing to motivations.
- Discriminate between the qualities and outcomes of central and peripheral route processing of information and decision making.
- Frame a recommended behavior as a solution to a problem.

Fatima can't decide if she is more annoyed with her best friend, Yara, or with herself. Last spring, Fatima was so excited to get an internship in Chicago with a top-tier marketing firm for the summer. But, Yara convinced her that she was too worn out from a long school year and should spend the summer relaxing with Yara's family at their seafront property in Long Island's Hamptons. It was beautiful and there were some good times but Fatima found herself doing all sorts of activities that only really interested Yara, like clamming, tanning, and hunting for both beachy souvenirs and beefy bronzed boys.

Another summer is approaching and Fatima has somehow managed to snag the same internship opportunity in Chicago. Knowing that she was set in her resolve to do it this time, Yara managed to talk Fatima into splitting an apartment in Chicago where, without a doubt, she will spend her time partying and making it difficult for Fatima to stay focused on her work.

Fatima was all ready to blame herself for being such a pushover. Then she remembered that she had recently turned down two boys who were aggressively pursuing her and also shut down several canvassers who tried to get her to sign a petition on campus. Meanwhile, she overheard Yara spend hours on the phone convincing Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion representatives to restore her immaculate credit score even though she had been delinquent paying credit card bills.

It was now clear to Fatima that Yara was some kind of master persuader. What about her, or what she does, or what she says, leads people to do pretty much whatever she wants them to?

Have you ever tried to swap seats with a stranger on an airline? Ever negotiated the price of a car? Ever tried to convince someone to recycle, quit smoking, or let you into their lane in traffic? Has anyone asked you out on a date, sent you an email about a store sale, or tried to get you to vote? If so, you probably agree that persuasion is a common presence in our everyday lives.



Figure 1. Yara Always Gets Her Way. “Women Having a Meeting,” by Marcus Aurelius. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

## The Impact of Persuasion



Figure 2. Champion Tik Tok Influencer, Charli D’Amelio. “Charli D’Amelio in 2020,” by Brad Mondo. [CC BY 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Charli D’Amelio became popular for her Tik Tok dance videos and proceeded to become the first human to accrue 100 million followers. She has parlayed her influence into sponsored endorsements with the Hollister clothing company, Dunkin Donuts, Pura Vida Charli D’Amelio bracelets, Orosa Beauty nail polish, EOS Cosmetics lip balm, Morphe lip oil and concealer, and along with her sister, the Charli & Dixie Simmons Memory Foam Mattress. D’Amelio was the highest-earning TikTok female personality in 2019 and the highest-earning personality on the app in 2022. Who ever said persuasion doesn’t pay?

**Persuasion** is the communicative process by which one person influences what another person thinks or believes, feels, or does. It is often the primary goal that someone in an interaction has for their conversational partner. Maybe you want to convince your boss at the movie theatre concession stand not to blame you for the discrepancy between soda sales and cups used. This is

critical as you can't afford to lose this job. However, you don't want to betray your favorite co-worker, Sal, who has been doling out free sodas to customers he thinks are "hotties." Preserving your relationship with Sal is your secondary goal (i.e., relational) while escaping the blame is the first order (i.e., persuasive).

To fully understand what we mean by this act of influence known as persuasion, we should recognize some of its most interesting characteristics: prevalence, levels of impact, ethical considerations, and difficulty.

## Prevalence

Simply put, persuasion is (almost) everywhere. Advertisers and marketers throw products and services at us with every entertaining media experience on social media platforms and traditional mass media outlets. Teachers try to get you to read textbook chapters like this one. Your sibling wants to borrow your favorite jacket. You need to convince your roommate to get their share of the rent paid on time. Credit card representatives and recycling activists stalk us on campus. Your Mom needs you to call every weekend no matter how busy you are. You'll just die if you don't get Megan to take your shift on the Friday of the Post Malone concert that you won tickets for. And on. And on. And on.

## Levels of Impact

There are three commonly recognized levels of impact that persuasion may have. The first is the **cognitive** level, which concerns the things we think or believe. Getting a skeptical fan to accept that the Kansas City Royals' young pitching staff will make them a Central Division contender this summer is a cognitive level persuasive effort. So is convincing someone that God exists or that they don't.

The second level of persuasive impact is the **affective**. The term, affect, is often used in psychology literatures as a stand-in for emotion. The affective level includes attitudes, opinions, positions, values, etc. Making your cousin, the St. Louis Cardinal fan, like the Royals more is affective level persuasion as is establishing vaping as an alternative to smoking that is way cooler.

The third level of persuasive impact is the **behavioral**. Attempting to instill a change in action is the realm of the behavioral level. Bringing me back a Coke when you head off to the vending machine for Cheetos is a simple behavioral persuasion goal. Training your pet ferret to stop eating the curtains counts too, as does persuading your neighbor to stop cranking Broadway show tunes when he gets drunk after midnight. Health communication scholars and safety officials are often interested in accomplishing habitual behavior change like eating reasonably portioned meals or staying out from under your tractor during repairs.

Sometimes we pursue persuasive objectives of different levels of the same time. Political campaigners design yard signs to induce you to be aware of the candidate (i.e., cognitive), like them more (i.e., affective), and actually show up to the polls to vote for them (i.e., behavioral).



Figure 3. Political Yard Signs Working at All Levels. “If Winter Ends,” by litterbugs. CC BY-NC 2.0, <https://goo.gl/VnKlK8>.

## Ethical Considerations

It is nearly impossible to overstate the importance of persuasion. Companies’ fortunes, if not their existence, ride on the effectiveness of their marketing and advertising campaigns. Fostering your patient’s adherence to a newly prescribed diet can prevent their pre-diabetic diagnosis from progressing to a possibly deadly condition. Getting your future father-in-law to like and trust you is definitely a real advantage.

Clearly, there are numerous and massive benefits to possessing the powers of persuasion. In fact, it is practically a superpower. And we hope you use it for good as a superhero would. Don’t lie to your targets to get them to agree. Don’t manipulate their emotions unfairly. Don’t leave out information they need to make a fully informed decision.

But do approach them with what we will call “good will” in the next section on credibility. It is okay if you will benefit from a successful persuasive attempt (e.g., meeting your sales quota, keeping your job, lightening your work load) but not if it is at the expense of your persuadee. Ideally, they will benefit as much as, if not more than, you.

If Ricky Roma, from the film *Glengarry Glen Ross*, wants to sell one more plot of land before the sales contest ends so that he wins a car instead of a set of steak knives, that’s understandable. What is not cool or moral or ethical is that Roma knows his mark, Mr. James Lingk, will meet financial ruin if he agrees to the proposed purchase.

## Difficulty

When anything is super valuable, there's a good chance it's super hard, too. Persuasion is incredibly difficult to achieve. Think of all the citizens of the United States who have died because they did not wear their seatbelts even though wearing them has one of the highest benefit (e.g., avoiding paralysis or death) to cost (e.g., a two-second arm motion) ratios and our government agencies have spent millions of dollars trying to convince us to buckle up.

Two of the major reasons that persuasion is so hard are that people develop strategies to resist persuasive efforts and that they are not always terribly motivated to be persuaded in the first place.

## Ways of Resisting Persuasion

One way to avoid persuasion is to avoid persuasion. Huh? Did you read that right? Yep. If you don't want to be persuaded, staying away from likely sources of influence is a pretty smart approach. So we don't listen, watch, or click if we think the speaker, news personality, or Instagram influencer is likely to contradict our current way of thinking or doing.

Persuasion resisters may practice a famous logical fallacy known as "**ad hominem**." This is focusing judgment on the provider of a message rather than on the message itself, " Bobby from Accounting makes a good point, but I don't like that guy; he smells weird."

Particularly frustrating for the persuader is when their target agrees only to back off later. You might get the salesman to hang up the phone by agreeing that you need a new garbage disposal. However, when he calls to schedule a home sales visit, you tell him that you have reconsidered.

Finally, there is a commonly used approach to help other people defend themselves against unwanted persuasion. It is usually referred to as "social inoculation."<sup>1</sup> Research has shown that people who are subjected to weak versions of a persuasive message are less vulnerable to stronger versions later on, in much the same way that being exposed to small doses of a virus immunizes you against full-blown attacks. In a classic study by McGuire,<sup>1</sup> subjects were asked to state their opinion on an issue. They were then mildly attacked for their position and then given an opportunity to refute the attack. When later confronted by a powerful argument against their initial opinion, these subjects were more resistant than were a control group. In effect, they developed defenses that rendered them immune.

But why is it so important to build up defenses to fight off persuasion? Because people don't generally like to be persuaded for a variety of reasons.

## Reasons For Resisting Persuasion

Many folks don't want to be persuaded because to acquiesce is to incur costs. If you're convinced to clean the house, there go a few hours. Makeup lady at Dillard's cosmetics counter influences you to start using a night

repair skin serum? 48 bucks! Changing your position on a reproductive rights controversy means you will have to remind yourself of it every time the topic comes up. Being persuaded usually means you have to invest in some way.

Remember that there are different levels of impact that persuasive attempts may pursue. You might only be chasing one of them but the others might be attached. Veronica just wants the kids at her cafeteria table to stop eating meat, at least around her. This is a behavioral imperative. But there may be some cognitive development needed to achieve the behavioral goal. Maybe her classmates' lack knowledge or awareness (i.e., cognitive) about the levels of suffering animals endure when raised for slaughter. Or perhaps they don't care about (i.e., affective) animals' feelings. Or, Veronica's! So we may need to foster influence on other levels to achieve it on the desired one. That's more difficult.

Some can't be "changed" because their experiences just will not square with it. Your Grandpa is really fun and contemporary but he has always found that Wrangler jeans are the only ones that don't bunch up uncomfortably on him in the seat. No amount of Levi, Gap Factory, Calvin Klein, or Lucky Brand promotions is going to sway him to change his pants!

Ego involvement plays another role in persuasion resistance. In a way, yielding to the belief or attitude or act of another, that contradicts with your own, is an admission of having been wrong. Many fight the perception, held by themselves or others, that they are wrong. Switching up positions also conveys a whiff of inconsistency that most would rather avoid. A politician who has shown the openness and flexibility to allow their mind to be changed on an issue is very likely to be labeled "wishy washy" or "a waffler" by their opposition.

The last item, on this inexhaustive list of reasons that we may not desire to be persuaded, is our inherent doubt of the potential persuader's credibility. Are they lying? Do they even know what they are talking about? And why is it so important to them that we change our minds or behaviors, anyway? Will it benefit them more than us? We next further explore credibility.

### Key Takeaways

- Persuasion is a powerful mode of shaping the world and the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of others.
- Persuasion is difficult to accomplish as its targets have multiple reasons for resisting it and many ways to do so.
- An ethical perspective on altering the positions and practices of others is essential.

## Exercises

- Who is the hardest person in your life to persuade of anything? Why do you think that is?
- Who in your life has the easiest time persuading you? Why do you think that is?
- In a group, generate a list of unethical instances of persuasion and discuss what could be done to make them less objectionable.

## Source Credibility

If there is one positive association between variables you can expect to hear about when you take a communication studies class, it is that of persuasiveness and credibility. The Greek figure of most historical significance to the field of communication studies, Aristotle, focused much of his attention on how public speakers could be convincing to audiences. He offered three proofs, or standards for evaluating their persuasiveness. Logos is their logic, pathos is their use of emotion, and ethos is their known character, or credibility.

**Credibility** is a characteristic we assign to each other that determines whether we pay attention to, and believe, each other. Hopefully, you already see how vital the assignment of credibility to a potential persuader is to their success. How can we even inform someone else if they have decided not to listen to us or to pay us no mind? And how can we hope to get someone else to do something that they would not do otherwise, if they have determined that they cannot believe what we tell them?

As critical as the credibility of the source is to their persuasiveness, it is lucky that we have the opportunity to earn it. The following list of eight dimensions of credibility is a virtual road map for assuring a better chance of successfully persuading. For each of these we check off with a target individual or audience, the amount of attention and belief they invest in us increases.

## Competence

Perhaps the most weighted indicator of credibility, **competence** is the characteristic of possessing knowledge about, or experience with, a topic. Your friends turn to Arvid for advice about dining because he is such a foodie and consumes every restaurant review he can. The veteran journalist who has won several regional

awards for reporting impresses students in her college course as someone who knows what she is talking about. They cannot help but pay attention when she speaks and believe what she says.

## Good Will

When your interaction with someone else is guided by your desire to help them, to leave them better off than you found them, you are displaying **good will** towards them. Mary Jane, a Nissan showroom salesperson, is often met with resistance to her persuasive pitches because of the deficit in good will associated with her job. The stereotype of car sales personnel is that they will do anything, including stick customers with lemons, to obtain their sales commissions. This is why Mary Jane has a file of happy, satisfied customers to serve as references about her past good will for clients.

## Similarity



Figure 4. Similarity.  
“monochrome-photo-of-women-looking-at-each-other,” by Hudson Marques. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

It may just be human nature, but most people are comfortable hanging out with and trusting others who are like them. When Martina offers style tips to Isabella, the fact that they are of the same age, in the same sorority, and from the same hometown, increases Martina's credibility.

## Idealism

Conversely to the appearance of **similarity** on this list, **idealism** is a dimension of credibility, as well. It is the quality of being unlike the targets of persuasion but in ways that they will admire and/or aspire to. Former Major League Baseball players, Kevin Seitzer and Mike Macfarlane, opened the Mac N Seitz training facility in 1996. They rightfully projected that young athletes who dreamed of being professionals like them, would want to receive their instruction.

## Charisma

**Charisma** is almost another way of saying inherent credibility. Some people just seem to be born with enough attractiveness or charm or gravitas that others just pay attention when they are around. Though they could not be more different in how they exhibit it, former presidents Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump all benefit from their larger than life personas, which captivate Americans.

## Dynamism

There is something to be said for good old-fashioned enthusiasm. When a colleague wants to be there at work, is smiling and animated, and having a good time, they are exhibiting **dynamism**. So, we find them more credible than the grouch who reluctantly shows up to put in little effort, and complains nonstop about being there.

## Trustworthiness

Others consider us trustworthy when they have faith in us because we are honest, consistent, and reliable. A deficit in **trustworthiness** will almost certainly trigger a similar shortage in believability. The quickest route to another's doubt is dishonesty. In fact, when caught in a lie, we are likely to be asked, "how can I trust you again?" A reputation for honesty is difficult to establish and astonishingly easy to shatter.

Consistency is another way that trustworthiness is gauged. If you give everyone the same version of a story or opinion, that is consistency. If you not only "talk the talk," but "walk the walk," that is consistency.

Hypocrisy is the opposite of consistency. Reliability means that a person is predictable and steady; they can be counted on.

Once you have provided someone else a reason to distrust your honesty, to find you inconsistent, or to be unreliable, you have damaged your credibility with them.

## Power

In its simplest form, **power** is the ability to reward or punish someone. If Jeanine has the ability to make Fredo feel special, to withhold affection that he desires, to help him plan a dream vacation, to screw up his marriage, or to make others think more or less of him, then Jeanine has power over Freddy. When we find others powerful, we also find them to be more credible. Anyone who can guide your fate towards more or less favorable directions is at least worth paying attention to!

### French and Raven's Five Bases of Power

In 1959, John French and Bertram Raven identified five unique bases of power (i.e., informational, coercive and reward, legitimate, expert, referent) that people can use to enhance their own credibility and thus, better influence others.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 5. French and Raven's Five Bases of Power

## Informational

The first basis of power is the last one originally proposed by Raven.<sup>3</sup> **Informational power** refers to the ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through the provision of information. For example, since you initially started school, teachers have had informational power over you. They have provided you with a range of information on history, science, grammar, art, etc. that shape how you think (e.g., what constitutes history?), feel (e.g., what does it mean to be aesthetically pleasing?), and behave (e.g., how do you properly mix chemicals in a lab?). In some ways, informational power is very strong, because it's often the first form of power with which we come into contact.

## Coercive and Reward

The second base of power is part **coercive power**, which is the ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts, and part **reward power** (i.e., the third base of power), which is the ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts. These are two sides of the same coin. Your parent or guardian who could take away your Nintendo Switch if you neglected your chores or finally get you that puppy if you got good grades, held coercive and reward power over you. This base is closest to the elemental definition of power provided above.

## Legitimate

The fourth base of power is **legitimate power**, or the valid right to influence another person. French and Raven argued that there were two common forms of legitimate power: cultural and structural. Cultural legitimate power occurs when a change agent is viewed as having the right to influence others because of their role in the culture. For example, in some cultures, the elderly may have a stronger right to influence than younger members of that culture. Structural legitimate power, on the other hand, occurs because someone fulfills a specific position within the social hierarchy. For example, your boss may have the legitimate right to influence your thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors in the workplace because they are above you in the organizational hierarchy.<sup>2</sup>

## Expert

The fifth base of power is **expert power**, which is the ability to influence others because of one's knowledge. For example, we often give our physicians the ability to influence our behavior (e.g., eat right, exercise, take medication, etc.) because we view these individuals as having specialized knowledge. Expert power is a close cousin to the original quality of credibility noted earlier, competence.

A contributing factor to the recent political climate of division in the United States is the **Dunning–Kruger effect**, or the tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have

nothing to back up that perception.<sup>39</sup> When people believe they can be counted as experts and that their intuition is just as valuable as valid science and research, any expert power they accrue can become highly problematic within a democratic society such as ours.

## Referent

The final base of power discussed by French and Raven is **referent power**, or the ability to influence another person based on their desire to be associated with the persuader. Referent power often emerges as the person desiring the association adopts similar characteristics to the person they admire. This is a decent approximation of the separate dimension of credibility known as idealism. If a tween girl begins wearing Pura Vida Charli D'Amelio bracelets so as to enhance her association with the Tik Tok influencer, she is under D'Amelio's referent power.

### Key Takeaways

- Credibility, the perception that a message source is worthy of being heard and believable, is a large factor in persuasive success.
- There are at least eight dimensions, including knowledge/experience, similarity, and good will, that can be displayed to earn credibility from others.
- Five bases of power serve to enhance both credibility and persuasiveness.

### Exercises

- Why is it that similarity and idealism can be simultaneously effective for establishing credibility while being such opposites of each other?
- Have a partner generate a persuasive task for you to consider accomplishing with a particular target. Describe the credibility dimensions you possess that would be most helpful in that scenario. Reverse roles. Continue as long as it is fun and/or informative!

## Persuasive Approaches

Besides wielding impressive amounts of indicators of credibility (i.e., competence, good will, similarity, idealism, charisma, dynamism, trustworthiness, power) to garner the attention and belief of others, there are an untold number of approaches to understanding how people make their decisions so as to more effectively influence them. Persuasion is so valuable and so difficult that practitioners and scholars from the fields of communication, psychology, marketing, consumer behavior, political campaigning, health advocacy and more, have been hard at work developing theories, models, techniques, strategies and tactics to inform the messages persuaders use to accomplish their goals.



Figure 6. A Different Persuasive Tool for Each Persuasive Job. “Iron Worker Baytown Texas,” by Baytownbert. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

This book, or really any book, is incapable of containing all of these approaches to persuasion but we can provide a good sample of them. Our philosophical metaphor here is a contractor’s toolbelt. A person who makes their living constructing and fixing things is likely to value having a toolbelt that will contain an implement for any task they might encounter. We hope to provide you with some persuasive tools in the form of well-supported concepts and theories and trust that you will develop the skills of using them and also choosing the right one for the job at hand (i.e., persuading a particular person of a particular thing)!

We will group different approaches to enhancing our persuasive sophistication under the headings of Conditioning Approaches, Motivational Approaches, and Information Processing and Elaboration.

## Conditioning Approaches

A couple of very old, but still relevant, ways of understanding why people (or even animals!) do what they do can inform our attempts to persuade them. They both hinge on **conditioning**, or the act of repeatedly and consistently associating things in perception to create particular desired outcomes.

### Classical Conditioning

In 1897, more than 125 years ago, Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov first promoted his famous studies that live on today under the remembrance of “Pavlov’s dogs.” Pavlov was interested in the idea of getting the

same reactions to different things. He decided to associate an original stimulus with a new one repetitively and consistently until the new one elicited the same response as the original had.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Pavlov noted that dogs salivate when you feed them. He began ringing a bell every time he fed them, and naturally, each time they still salivated.

Then one day, after consistently and repeatedly presenting the food (i.e., original stimulus) and the bell (i.e., new stimulus) together, he only rang the bell. And the dogs would salivate anyway. They had been conditioned to associate the stimuli so well that, at least in terms of their responses, the two stimuli were one and the same.

This process of **classical conditioning** is applied to humans when advertisements tightly and repetitively associate beer and fun or boring cars with attractive young models and when campaigns label an opposing candidate with the same demeaning nickname everytime they're referenced.

## Operant Conditioning

In the 1930s, building on the research of cat-studying behaviorist Edward Thorndike, Harvard University psychologist B.F. Skinner investigated birds and rodents to complete his understanding of **operant conditioning**.

When animals performed particular tasks, they were rewarded for it with incentives like food or punished for it as with bright lights and loud noises. Critically, they received the reward or punishment each and every time they committed the act. In the case of rewarding behavior, this positive reinforcement conditioned more of the behavior. In the case of punishing behavior, negative reinforcement conditioned less of the behavior.

What Skinner demonstrated was that operant conditioning could effectively associate behaviors with consequences and influence behavior with encouragement or discouragement of it in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Humans can be persuaded to quit smoking with consistent electric shocks, to stay out of the street when playing with consistent punishment, or to clean up their room for consistent extra time getting to play Minecraft and Roblox.

## Motivational Approaches

Decision making may sometimes be driven by needs or motivations. The Introduction to Communication chapter includes discussion of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which helps to explain how we may persuade someone to join the Army by highlighting their Self-Actualization needs or to join a campus organization if motivated by a need for belonging to social groups. When we understand ways that persuasive targets may be motivated to minimize discrepancies about themselves or to act in accordance with friends and family, we can apply that knowledge in efforts to influence them.

## Cognitive Dissonance

Leon Festinger was a social psychologist who made many theoretical contributions to our understanding of human cognition. Among them was a concept he called **cognitive dissonance**, which is an unpleasant sensation of experiencing regretted or inconsistent beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. He studied survivors of natural disasters who were especially welcoming of dire news only because it confirmed the fear that they were feeling. In fact, his body of observations and experiments revealed many surprising findings (e.g., subjects enjoying a gross task like eating insects more if forced to by a less likeable researcher) about how individuals deal with dissonance.

His most famous work was a collaborative book, *When Prophecy Fails*, detailing how the members of a 1950s doomsday cult, who believed life on Earth would soon be dominated or terminated by space aliens, doubled down on their devotion to it even with the exposure of its leader as a charlatan, or fake. It was psychologically easier for the cult members to continue their investment in the failed cause than to admit that their prior efforts had been pointless.<sup>6</sup>

And therein lies the potential persuasive power of cognitive dissonance. We are very motivated to not experience the awful feeling that we have hurt ourselves with our decisions or are acting in ways that are inconsistent with our values.

Union representatives may increase membership among Amazon workers by proving to them that not unionizing will lead directly to their own worse working conditions and lower pay. A financial adviser may successfully inspire a client to spend less and save more by having them visualize how awful it will be to have to move out of their home in retirement if they don't invest more in the company pension plan now.

## Theory of Reasoned Action

In the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen introduced their Theory of Reasoned Action to explain how individuals decide whether they are inclined to do something, like buy a particular kind of car or adopt a certain (un)healthy behavior. The researchers actually developed an algebraic equation, and quantified participants' responses about attitudes and desires, all in order to predict how likely they were to adopt specific behaviors.

What it boils down to is that a major factor in whether we intend to do something is how we feel about it. If you think getting plastered drunk every weekend night is cool, you are a lot more likely to do it than if you think it's irresponsible, or even disgusting, behavior.

The Theory of Reasoned Action also recognizes the beliefs or attitudes about the examined behavior of an individual's reference group(s), the people who surround them socially, like friends or family. Critically, the person's motivation to comply with the reference group, to fit in with those they are around the most, determines how their intentions are shaped. This becomes most interesting when one's feelings are different from one's peers and may begin to move in the direction of the reference group's values.<sup>7</sup>

The Theory of Reasoned Action can serve not just to help predict a person's intentions based on their feelings about a behavior, and those of their peers, but also to inform efforts to persuade them.

Benson and Tanner are heavily recruiting an impressive new student named Zach, to join their chapter of the Sigma Chi fraternity. If guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action, they would first try to address Zach's skepticism about Greek life and Sigma Chi. The more he likes it, the more likely he will be to join. When it becomes clear that he likes apartment living more than the fraternity house atmosphere, Benson and Tanner start trying to convince Zach's friends of the benefits of Greek life. Once this is successful, they need to somehow increase Zach's motivation to conform to his peers' attitudes.



Figure 7. Motivation to Comply With Peers Can Shape Actions. ”

photograph-of-a-group-of-friends-playing-poker-on-a-wooden-table,” by cottonbro studio. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

## Information Processing and Elaboration

Richard Petty and John Cacioppo devote the first chapters of their incredible 1996 book about persuasion to reviewing theories that adopt the conditioning or motivational approaches, as well as judgmental and attributional ones. In the book's epilog, they deliver the Elaboration Likelihood Model, perhaps the approach to persuasion applied by more professionals and practitioners than any other.<sup>8</sup>

The Elaboration Likelihood Model focuses on the extent to which we apply effort in making our decisions. Petty and Cacioppo feel that we make a good share of our decisions with little to no **elaboration**, the effortful and careful processing of information, alternatives, and possible outcomes. These represent what the researchers call the **peripheral route** to decision making. The peripheral route to persuasion is one in which influencers look to induce these fast, simple decisions. Most of our other decisions do contain a significant amount of elaboration and represent the **central route** to decision making and persuasion.<sup>8</sup>

Have you ever been checking out your purchases at a grocery store and you reach out and add a pack of gum? Or done something at work in a particular way because that's how everyone else seems to do it? Or voted for someone you don't know to represent you in student government just because they have the same major

as you? If so for any of these examples, you have engaged in peripheral route decision making. Marketers who arrange to have the gum right in your sightlines and candidates who make sure their major is on the fliers they put up in your building are engaging in peripheral route persuasion.



Figure 8. LaserDisc Killed by Central Route Decision Making. “LaserDisc,” by Windell Oskay. CC BY 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

In the 1980s, before CDs and DVDs and Blu-rays and digital streaming networks, consumers in the United States were puzzled about whether to adopt or abandon each of the VHS and Betamax tape recording and LaserDisc formats for home viewing of content like movies and TV shows. Each of these was costly and had a variety of advantages and disadvantages. Family decision makers had to consider price, quality of picture, functionality of controls, title availability, ability to record, and other factors as well. Clearly, this was a decision that required efforts such as researching features, buying technology magazines, reading reviews, talking to friends, visiting retailers, considering budgets, etc. It is a stellar example of central route decision making and if

they were smart, central route persuasion by the marketers of the JVC, Sony, and Music Corporation of America. The VHS format won the battle for American hearts and minds, as many televisions could not deliver the audio and video benefits of Betamax, which also had lesser recording time capabilities. LaserDisc was available for only an extremely small number of movies and could not record at all so it never really had a chance to prevail in these carefully considered, elaborated entertainment choices.

## Implications and Factors of Central and Peripheral Routes

A really fascinating yet intuitive implication of the Elaboration Likelihood Model is that decisions reached by the peripheral route are short term and result in little to no commitment. You might easily reach out and snag a different pack of gum if it happens to be available next time. Central route decisions tend to be lasting and may result in commitment and investment in outcomes. Some American families (okay, maybe just a handful of them) still swear by their old VHS recorders today.

You may have figured out by now that persuaders who subscribe to the **Elaboration Likelihood** Model would do well to predict whether their targets are more **likely** to engage in central route (i.e., much **elaboration**) or peripheral route (i.e., little elaboration) processing and adjust their strategies and messages accordingly. Petty and Cacioppo predict that we will engage in central route processing and decision making when we are BOTH willing AND able to do so.

Willingness is determined by our involvement in the issue at hand, how important it is to us, and whether we are making a big investment of time, money, reputation or other resources into the outcome of our decisions.

Ability is determined by whether we have the intelligence, skill to learn about, processing tools and freedom from distraction or time constraints. Your position on the new tips and taxes legislation might be arrived at in an offhand manner if you don't work in the dining sector. But you may put a ton of work into determining whether to install a gas or electric range in your own kitchen renovation.

Persuaders who desire long-term, commitment-inducing decisions in their favor, and who also address targets that are both willing and able to elaborate, should present detailed, fact-filled, serious information about their products, services, or candidates, thus promoting central route decisions. Persuaders who just need a one-time decision or purchase or who address targets that are either unwilling or unable to elaborate, may as well just employ any of the tactics or strategies described in the next section.

## Peripheral Route Processing and Persuasion

Peripheral route persuaders are likely to employ very simple, fast and easy messages or associations. They may hire a celebrity endorser, rely on a simple slogan, place products where they are readily available, or jazz up product packaging.

Peripheral route persuaders also may attempt to inspire the use of **heuristics**, which are mental shortcuts for making decisions quickly and easily.

### Heuristics

#### Reciprocity

“There is no duty more indispensable than that of returning a kindness,” wrote Cicero. Humans are motivated by a sense of equity and fairness. When someone does something for us or gives us something, we feel obligated to return the favor in kind. If a colleague helps you when you're busy with a project, you might feel obliged to support her ideas for improving team processes.

Reciprocity is sometimes referred to as “quid pro quo” arrangements where a favor is met with a favor, or “you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.” The 45th President of the United States was impeached for, but not convicted of, soliciting a quid pro quo deal with another nation's president so that his desired legal investigations would earn previously promised foreign military resources.

#### Social Proof

The social proof heuristic equates with the logic of “everyone else does it and if everyone is doing it, it must be right.” People are more likely to work late if others on their team are doing the same, to put a tip in a jar that already contains money, or eat in a restaurant that is busy (see Figure 9). In a way, the laugh tracks on situation comedies are social proof that allow, and instruct, us to laugh along, too.



Figure 9. French Quarter Oyster House Must Be Worth Waiting For. “Las New Orleans LA ~ Acme Oyster House ~ Famous Restauranter,” by Bill Badzo. [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, https://goo.gl/Toc0ZF](https://goo.gl/Toc0ZF)

## Liking

We know that celebrities are rarely experts about products they represent, and that they are being paid to say what they’re saying, so why do their endorsements sell so many products? Ultimately, it is because we like them.

The mix of qualities that make a person likable are complex and often do not generalize from one situation to another. One clear finding, however, is that physically attractive people tend to be liked more. In fact, we prefer them to a disturbing extent; various studies have shown we perceive attractive people as smarter, kinder, stronger, more successful, more socially skilled, better poised, better adjusted, more exciting, more nurturing, and, most important, of higher moral character. All of this is based on no other information than their physical appearance.<sup>2</sup>

## Authority

From earliest childhood, we learn to rely on authority figures for sound decision making because their authority signifies status and power, as well as expertise. We are taught to believe that respect for authority is a moral virtue. We assume that parents, teachers, police, judges, doctors, bosses, and religious leaders possess special access to information and power. So, when they tell us what to eat, who to hang out with, even whether to dance (e.g., the Reverend Shaw Moore and his wife, Vi, in the film, *Footloose*), we often comply.

Perhaps the most famous study ever conducted in social psychology, the Milgram Experiment, demonstrated that two-thirds of a sample of psychologically normal men were willing to administer potentially lethal shocks to a stranger for being wrong just because an apparent authority in a laboratory coat ordered them to do so.<sup>10</sup>

Uncritical trust in authority can be problematic for several reasons. First, even if the source of the message is a legitimate, well-intentioned authority, they may not always be correct. Second, when respect for authority becomes mindless, expertise in one domain may be confused with expertise in general. To assume there is credibility when a successful actor promotes a cold remedy, or when a psychology professor offers his views about politics, can spell disaster. Third, the authority may not be legitimate. It is not difficult to fake a college degree or professional credential or to buy an official-looking badge or uniform.

## Scarcity

People tend to perceive things as more attractive when their availability is limited. In a classic study, Jack Brehm and Marcia Weinraub placed 2-year-old boys in a room with a pair of equally attractive toys. One of the toys was placed next to a plexiglass wall; the other was set behind the plexiglass. For some boys, the wall was 1 foot high, which allowed the boys to easily reach over and touch the distant toy. Given this easy access, they showed no particular preference for one toy or the other. For other boys, however, the wall was a formidable



Figure 10. Humphrey Bogart, Candy Expert?

"humphrey-bogart-heres-how-i-remember-whitmans-sampler-1954-2d309c," by garystockbridge. [CC https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/](https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/)

2 feet high, which required them to walk around the barrier to touch the toy. When confronted with this wall of inaccessibility, the boys headed directly for the forbidden fruit, touching it three times as quickly as the accessible toy.

Even adults are appealed to easily by the “get it while you still can” heuristic of scarcity. Why in the heck else would eBay make sure that I know how many other people have just viewed the 2021 Upper Deck Skybox Metal Universe Jambalaya Wayne Gretzky hockey card selling at \$1800, which is one of only 20 to have ever been produced?

## Compliance Gaining Strategies

There are a variety of persuasive tactics and strategies that can easily and quickly be adapted into messages seeking peripheral decisions. A popular anecdote in communication scholar circles is that researchers Gerald Marwell and David Schmitt sat down one night in a restaurant and scrawled out their original sixteen compliance gaining strategies on a napkin. In their 1967 landmark study, they offered these as an initial foray into investigating the types and effects of simple little persuasion and favor-gaining tactics that could easily be designed into messages.<sup>11</sup> Many studies have examined the effectiveness of each of the strategies in a variety of contexts (e.g., simple favors, health behavior changes), expanded the original list, and even refuted the whole notion of asking research participants to forecast their reactions to them.

Some of the original strategies were reward (i.e., benefit the target in return for complying; “I’ll pay you back double for a loaner today”), liking (i.e., buttering up the target with flattery before a request; “Have you been working out? I want to have you look at something...”), aversive stimulation (i.e., ceasing punishment only when the target complies; “you’ll keep sleeping on that couch until you apologize”), moral appeal, (e.g., “You have to do it, it’s the right thing”), and negative esteem of others (e.g., “You don’t want your friends to see you in that!”).

Other strategies have been defined such as guilt, direct request, and threat. All kinds of findings have emerged across the compliance gaining strategies when certain strategies have worked best at gaining compliance of certain people in certain situations.

Some have shown that the presence or absence of other variables or conditions increase the odds of successful persuasion for almost any kind of strategy or message employed. One series of studies found that appeals for healthy behavior are enhanced when the compliance seeker and their target share high amounts of intimacy, especially intellectual and emotional closeness.<sup>12, 13</sup>

## Time-Honored Sales Techniques

Potential buyers have been converted into customers by salespeople using very simple foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face techniques since the heyday of the travelling vacuum cleaner and knife salesmen of the 1950s and 60s.

## Foot-in-the-Door

Westerners have a desire to feel and be perceived as consistent. Once they have made an initial commitment, it is more likely that they will agree to subsequent ones especially if the first resulted from a difficult-to-refuse small request. The persuader follows with progressively larger requests to reach what was always the goal from the beginning.



Figure 11. Got in the Door, Made the Sale.  
 “people-waving-at-each-o-ther” by KindelMedia. [All photos and videos on Pexels are free to download and use; Attribution is not required.](#)

The process is known as getting a foot in the door because salesman were literally trained to at least obtain some interaction with the homeowner by wedging the front of their shoe into the door to prevent it from closing.

Alain is hoping his boss at Helix Consulting, Mr. Hodges, will allow him to work from home full-time just as he did during the pandemic of the early 2020s. He knows that Hodges has a problem with employees not being around and accountable. So, Alain asks permission to spend more time in the home office of one of their major clients and receives it. Soon after, he asks to do so with more clients and next, to meet with them at other locations, hoping all the time to ease his way back into an all Zooming situation.

## Door-in-the-Face

Some techniques bring a paradoxical approach to the escalation sequence of foot-in-the-door by pushing a

request to or beyond its acceptable limit and then backing off. In the door-in-the-face, sometimes called the reject-then-compromise, sequence, the persuader begins with a large request they expect will be rejected. They want the door to be slammed in their face. Looking forlorn, they now follow this with a smaller request, which, unknown to the customer, was their target all along.

In one study, researchers posing as representatives of the fictitious “California Mutual Insurance Co.,” asked university students walking on campus if they’d be willing to fill out a survey about safety in the home or dorm. The survey, students were told, would take about 15 minutes. Not surprisingly, most of the students declined—only one out of four complied with the request. In another condition, however, the researchers door-in-the-faced them by beginning with a much larger request. “The survey takes about two hours,” students were told. Then, after the subject declined to participate, the experimenters retreated to the target request: “. . . look, one part of the survey is particularly important and is fairly short. It will take only 15 minutes to administer.” Almost twice as many then complied.<sup>14</sup>

## Central Route Processing and Persuasion

There is no shortage of approaches to persuasion that recognize more complex, effortful processing of information and decision making than is evident when peripheral route, short cut, heuristic choices are made. In the health psychology and communication literatures alone there are the Stages of Change Model, Protection Motivation Theory, Extended Parallel Process Model, Problematic Integration Theory, and many others.

This chapter concludes with inspection of one very famous and well-respected representation of the perceptions and thoughts sought by persuaders in efforts to help others, who find themselves in states of involvement and willingness to elaborate, act in ways that are healthiest for them.

### Health Belief Model

In the 1950s, a team of social psychologists and health promotion researchers led by Irwin Rosenstock was struggling to understand why people infrequently took the appropriate steps or recommended precautions to improve or protect their health.

There are so many behaviors that increase (e.g., smoking, drinking, poor diets) or decrease (e.g., exercise, hydration, dental hygiene) health risks and it is difficult to inspire people to do what they should, and to not do what they shouldn’t. Moreover, actual patients, given treatment advice by their health care providers so seldom carry them out fully. At home physical therapy, instructions to finish the entire bottle of medication, or to make dietary changes, are ignored to an alarming degree.

So, Rosenstock began promoting the Health Belief Model that he gets credit for today.<sup>15</sup> The Health Belief Model uses a problem/solution or threat/coping sequence to motivate individuals to do what is recommended. Instead of merely providing an instruction to perform a behavior, proponents of the Health Belief Model

provide a series of perceptions that frame the recommended behavior as a solution to some problem the target individual faces.

There are five main components to the original Health Belief Model: cues to action, perceived severity (of a problem or health threat), perceived susceptibility (to a problem or health threat), perceived barriers (to performing the recommended behavior), and perceived benefits (to performing the recommended behavior).

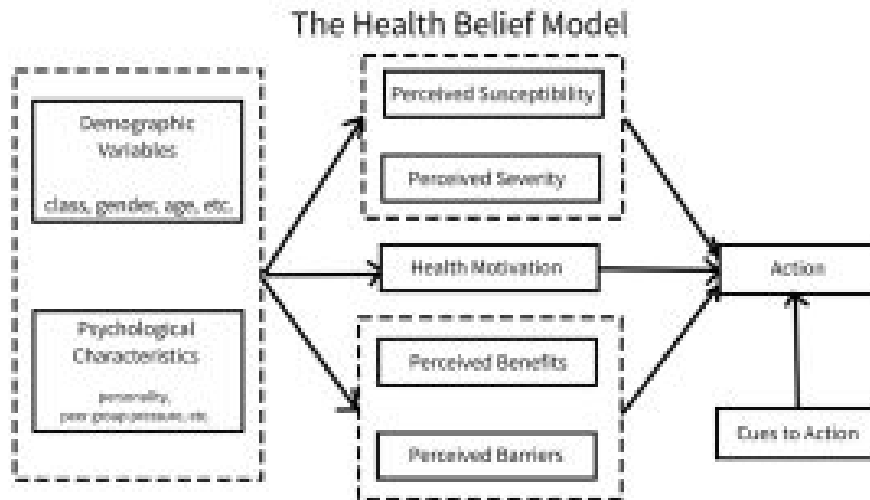


Figure 12. The Health Belief Model. “Health Belief Model” by FanWang0912. [CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/), via [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Health_Belief_Model.png).

The first three elements are related to the threat or problem and motivating the desire to take action to prevent or minimize it. **Cues to action** are any inputs that get the target person to consider the health threat such as news stories, consultation with a physician, a coworker’s diagnosis, etc. **Perceived severity** is the degree to which a problem or threat is believed by the target to be serious and bad. **Perceived susceptibility** is the extent to which the target feels the problem or threat is happening, or could happen, to them. Critically, both the severity and susceptibility perceptions must be extreme enough to promote motivation to do something about the threat/problem. If it is believed that the threat is not sufficiently scary and undesirable or that it is very unlikely to occur, the persuasive effort will almost certainly fail.

The last two components have to do with the solution/coping mechanism which should be the behavior that is being recommended. **Perceived barriers** are anything the target feels will make the recommended behavior difficult or less likely to be performed. **Perceived benefits** are anything the target feels will make the recommended behavior easier or more likely to be performed. Critically, the benefits must be seen to outweigh the barriers to promote the recommended behavior’s performance.

The four perceptions of the problem/threat (i.e., severity and susceptibility) and the solution/coping (i.e., benefits and barriers) may already exist or may have to be provided with messaging.

For example, Ryan has been noticing that he is a bit heavier than he would like to be and his energy is lagging.

He sees a story on a newscast about the increased prevalence of diabetes in people his age (cue to action). His general care provider, Dr. Dawkins, diagnoses Ryan as pre-diabetic. The doctor believes diabetes (threat/problem) could be an outcome for Ryan and wants to get him on a regular exercise program.

Using the Health Belief Model appropriately, Dr. Dawkins shares with Ryan that he is likelier than not (i.e., susceptibility) to become diabetic and that as a disease that can cause circulation problems, eyesight complications, and kidney damage (i.e., severity), he should be motivated to take action. The prescribed treatment is exercise and the two of them discuss what would be entailed. They honestly note that exercise is not great fun for most, takes time out of each day, and may even cost money for a gym membership and workout clothes (i.e. barriers). However, the benefits include helping to prevent the more serious diagnosis, losing weight, building strength and endurance, mood improvement, and social opportunities.

Motivated by thorough consideration of the serious threat that he is truly facing and by the offsetting of barriers by more and larger benefits, Ryan is persuaded to make plans to integrate exercise into his daily lifestyle.

The premises of the Health Belief Model are also applied to dilemmas in other areas of modern life besides health-related issues. For instance, a tax preparation firm might convince potential clients to hire them by framing their services as an affordable solution to the terrible and likely threat of an audit by the Internal Revenue Service.

### Key Takeaways

- Conditioning approaches may persuade by creating strong associations between stimuli or between behavior and consequences.
- Motivational approaches may hinge on targets' needs to reduce dissonance or comply with their peers' values.
- Central and peripheral routes to decision making and persuasion differ on how much elaboration, or mental effort, targets and their persuaders apply to information provision and consideration.
- The Health Belief Model represents framing a recommended behavior as a feasible solution to a likely and serious threat or problem.

## Research Spotlight



There may be a middle ground between the central and peripheral routes of the Elaboration Likelihood Model. A series of experimental investigations shows that processing of complex information may be manipulated by the heuristic of one single instruction.

University of Kansas Communication Studies lecturer and researcher Michael Dennis, with his advisor at Purdue University, Austin Babrow, wondered whether considered decisions about health issues are more influenced by quantitative/statistical information or qualitative/narrative information. The researchers reasoned that the best way to test whether numbers or stories are more persuasive was to give participants contradictory information in the two formats and see which one played a larger role in their reasoning.

Participants were asked to make a prediction about how likely it was that a student they were to read about was sick with either mononucleosis or conjunctivitis (pink eye). Participants were given a description of the multiple symptoms the student was experiencing but were also given a low number as the percentage of students on campus who had the disease. So a high prediction of likelihood the student was sick would indicate that the narrative story was weighed more heavily; a low prediction would indicate the statistic was used more in the processing of information.

Neither qualitative nor quantitative evidence generally or significantly weighed more in participants' predictions.

However, Dennis and Babrow found that they could shape participants' judgments by assigning them either a "paradigmatic" or a "narrative" orientation. Participants who were simply instructed to think like a "scientist" and make judgments like "a scientist analyzing data" employed the numeric information more in their predictions. Others instructed to "call on your general knowledge, sensitivity and empathy" implemented the narrative symptom descriptions more in theirs. Thus, a complex decision task requiring elaboration about contradicting evidence types was affected by a simple heuristic suggestion!

Dennis, M. R., & Babrow, A. S. (2005). Effects of narrative and paradigmatic judgmental orientations on the use of qualitative and quantitative evidence in health-related inference. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 33(4), 328-347.

## Key Terms

### **ad hominem**

A logical fallacy of focusing judgment on the provider of a message rather than on the message itself.

### **affective**

The level of persuasive impact consisting of feelings, attitudes, opinions, positions, and values.

### **behavioral**

The level of persuasive impact consisting of actions and habits.

### **central route**

From the Elaboration Likelihood Model, decision making or persuasion that relies on at least a fair amount of elaboration.

### **charisma**

An indicator of credibility, it is enough attractiveness or charm or gravitas to make others pay attention.

### **classical conditioning**

The process by which a new stimulus is so repetitively and consistently associated with an original stimulus that it elicits the same responses as the original.

### **coercive power**

The base of power that is an ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts.

### **cognitive**

The level of persuasive impact consisting of thoughts and beliefs.

### **cognitive dissonance**

An unpleasant sensation of experiencing regretted or inconsistent beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors.

**competence**

An indicator of credibility, it is the characteristic of possessing knowledge about, or experience with, a topic.

**conditioning**

The act of associating things in perception to create particular desired outcomes.

**credibility**

A characteristic we assign to each other that determines whether we pay attention to, and believe, each other.

**cues to action**

Inputs like media or friends that create awareness or concern about a potential threat, in the Health Belief Model.

**dynamism**

An indicator of credibility, it is a large measure of enthusiasm and animation.

**Dunning-Kruger effect**

The tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have nothing to support that perception.

**elaboration**

The effortful and careful processing of information, alternatives, and possible outcomes, to make a decision.

**expert power**

The base of power that is the ability to influence others because of one's knowledge.

**good will**

An indicator of credibility, it is a desire to help another person, to leave them better off than you found them.

**heuristics**

Mental shortcuts for making decisions quickly and easily.

**idealism**

An indicator of credibility, it is the quality of being unlike the targets of persuasion but in ways that they will admire and/or aspire to.

**informational power**

The base of power that is an ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through the provision of information.

**legitimate power**

The base of power that is the valid right to influence another person based on cultural or structural roles.

**operant conditioning**

The process by which a behavior is so repetitively and consistently associated with a positive or a negative consequence that its continued performance is encouraged or discouraged effectively.

**perceived barriers**

Anything a persuasive target feels will make the recommended behavior difficult or less likely to be performed, in the Health Belief Model.

**perceived benefits**

Anything the persuasive target feels will make the recommended behavior easier or more likely to be performed, in the Health Belief Model.

**perceived susceptibility**

The degree to which a target of persuasion believes they are vulnerable to a problem or threat, in the Health Belief Model.

**perceived severity**

The degree to which a problem or threat is believed by a target of persuasion to be serious and bad, in the Health Belief Model.

**peripheral route**

From the Elaboration Likelihood Model, decision making or persuasion that relies on very little elaboration.

**persuasion**

The communicative process by which one person influences what another person thinks or believes, feels, or does.

**power**

An indicator of credibility, it is the ability to reward or punish someone.

### **referent power**

The base of power that is an ability to influence another person based on their desire to be associated with the persuader.

### **reward power**

The base of power that is an ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts.

### **similarity**

An indicator of credibility, it is the sharing of qualities so as to be like another person.

### **trustworthiness**

An indicator of credibility, it is the quality of others having faith in a person who is honest, consistent, and reliable.

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## Attribution

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# FINDING CREDIBLE SOURCES AND CREATING CITATIONS

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## Learning Objectives

- Explain different information types.
- Describe types of plagiarism.
- Learn how to properly cite sources in APA format.

## Research

What does the word “research” conjure up for you? Do you think about sitting in a library and sorting through books or searching online? Do you picture a particular type of person?

While these images aren’t incorrect (of course libraries are connected with research), “research” can feel like an intimidating process. When does it begin? Where does it happen? When does it stop?

It’s helpful to understand what **research** is – the process of discovering new knowledge and investigating a topic from different points of view. Research is a *process*; it’s an ongoing dialogue with information. But, as you know, not all information is neutral, and not all information is ethical. Part of the research process, then, is evaluating information to determine what knowledge is ethical and best suited for your argument.

This chapter will focus on the research process and the development of **critical thinking** skills—or decision-making based on evaluating and critiquing information— to identify, sort, and evaluate (mostly) scholarly information. To begin, we outline why research matters, followed by insights about locating information, evaluating information, and avoiding plagiarism.

## Why Research?

Research gets a bad rap. It can feel like a boring, tedious, and overwhelming process. In our current

information age, we are guilty of conducting a quick search, finding what we want to read, and moving on. Many of us rarely sit down, allocate time, and commit to digging deep and researching different perspectives about an idea or argument.

But we should.

When conducting research, you get to ask questions and actually find answers. If you have ever wondered what the best strategies are when being interviewed for a job, research will tell you. If you've ever wondered what it takes to be a NASCAR driver, an astronaut, a marine biologist, or a university professor, once again, research is one of the easiest ways to find answers to questions you're interested in knowing.

Research can also open a world you never knew existed. We often find ideas we had never considered and learn facts we never knew when we go through the research process. Maybe you want to learn how to compose music, draw, learn a foreign language, or write a screenplay; research is always the best step toward learning anything.

As public speakers, research will increase your confidence and competence. The more you know, the more you know. The more you research, the more precise your argument, and the clearer the depth of the information becomes.

## Where to Start

With that basic information in mind, ask: “what question am I answering? What should I be looking *for*? What do I need?” Your specific purpose statement or a working thesis are good places to start.

When we begin researching, we have three initial questions that arise from our specific purpose: has the cost of college textbooks increased over time? What are the causes? And what are the opportunities to address rising textbook costs in a way that can improve access relatively quickly at your institution?

These are just our *starting* questions. It's likely that we'll revise and research for information as we learn more. As Howard and Taggart point out in their book *Research Matters*, research is not just a one-and-done task (2010). As you develop your speech, you may realize that you want to address a question or issue that didn't occur to you during your first round of research, or that you're missing a key piece of information to support one of your points.

Use these questions, prior experience, and insight from exploratory brainstorming to determine what to search and where to start. If you still feel overwhelmed, that's OK. Start somewhere (or ask a librarian for help), and use the insights below about information types as a guide.

## Locating Effective Research

Once you have a general idea about the basic needs you have for your research, it's time to start tracking information down. Thankfully, we live in a world that is swimming with information.

As you search, you will naturally be drawn to tools and information types that are already familiar to you. Like most people, you will likely use Google as your first search strategy. As you know, Google isn't a source, per se: it's a search engine. It's the vehicle that, through search terms and savvy wording, will direct you to sources related to those terms.

What information types would you expect to see in your Google search results? We are guessing your list would include: news, blogs, Wikipedia, dictionaries, and social media.

While Google is a great tool, all informational roads don't lead to Google. Learning about different information types and different ways to access information can expand your search portfolio.

## Information Types

As you begin looking for research, an array of information types will be at your disposal.

When you access a piece of information, you should determine what you are looking at. Is it a blog? an online academic journal? an online newspaper? a website for an organization? Will these information types be useful in answering the questions that you've identified?

Common helpful information types include websites, scholarly articles, books, and government reports, to name a few. To determine the usefulness of an information type, you should familiarize yourself with what those sources are and their goals.

Information types are often categorized as either academic or nonacademic.

**Nonacademic information sources** are sometimes also called popular press information sources; their primary purpose is to be read by the general public. Most nonacademic information sources are written at a sixth to eighth-grade reading level, so they are very accessible. Although the information often contained in these sources can be limited, the advantage of using nonacademic sources is that they appeal to a broad, general audience.

Alternatively, **academic sources** are often (not always) peer-reviewed by like-minded scholars in the field. Academic publications can take longer to publish because academics have established a series of checklists that are required to determine the credibility of the information. Because of this process, it takes a while! That delay can result in nonacademic sources providing information before scholarly academics have tested or studied the phenomena.

In addition, be cognizant of *who* produces information and *who* that information is produced for. Table 16.1 simplistically illustrates the producer and audience of our short list of information types.

Information Type	What does it do?	Who is it produced by?	Who is it produced for?
News Report	Inform readers about what's happening in the world.	General Public / Journalist	General Public
Social Media	Connects individuals, groups, and consumers	General Public	General Public
Peer Reviewed Scholarly Journal Article	Provides insight into an academic discipline	Academic Researchers/Scholars	Academic Researchers/Scholar/ Students
Academic Books	Provides insight into an academic discipline	Academic researchers/Scholars	Academic Researchers/Scholars /Students
Government reports	Shares information on behalf of a government agency	Government Agencies	Policy/Decision Makers
Data and Statistics	Reports statistical findings	Government Agencies	Policy/Decision Makers Academic Researcher
E-books	Inform, persuade, or entertain readers about a topic through a digital medium	Can be Self-Published or Published through a Scholar / Agency	General Public

Table 1

This is not an exhaustive list of information types. Others include: encyclopedias, periodicals or blogs. For more insight on information types, check [here](#).

With any information type, the dichotomy of producer/audience helps us with evaluating the information. As you've learned from our discussion of public speaking, the audience informs the message. If you have a clearer idea of who the content is written for, you can determine if that source is best for your research needs.

Having a better understanding of information types is important, but open and closed information systems dictate which source material we have access to.

**Librarians are Resources :** Remember that librarians are research experts and can help you to

find information, refine an argument, locate search terms, cite your sources, and much more!

### Open/Closed Information Systems

An **open system** describes information that is publicly available and accessible. A **closed system** means information is behind a paywall or requires a subscription.

Let's consider databases as an example. It's likely that you've searched your library's database. Databases provide full text periodicals and works that are regularly published. This is a great tool because it can provide you links to scholarly articles, news reports, e-books, and more.

"Does that make databases an open system?" you may be asking. Access to databases is purchased by libraries. The articles and books contained in databases are licensed by publishers to companies, who sell access to this content, which is not freely available elsewhere. So, databases are part of a closed system. The university provides you access, but non-university folks would reach a paywall.

Table 2 illustrates whether different information types are like to be openly available or behind a paywall in a closed system. Knowing if an information is type is open or closed might influence your tools and search strategies used to discover and access the information.

Information Type	Open Access	Closed Access
News Report	Some content exposed to internet search engines and open	Licensed content available with subscription or single access payment
Social Media	General public and open	Privacy settings may limit some access
Peer Reviewed Scholarly Journal Article	Scholarship labeled as "Open access" are free of charge	Licensed content available with subscription or single access payment
Academic Books	"Open access" books are free of charge	Many books require payment and purchase
Government Reports	Government information in the public domain is open	Classified government information – restricted access
Government Data/ Statistics	Open government data	Classified government information – restricted access

Table 2

Information isn't always free. If you are confronted with a closed system, you will have to determine if that information is crucial or if you can access similar information through an openly accessible system.

Having a better understanding of information types and access will assist you in locating research for your argument. We continue our discussion below by diving into best practices for locating and evaluating research.

## Evaluating Research

### Going Deeper through Lateral Reading

Imagine that you're online shopping. You have a pretty clear idea of what you need to buy, and you've located the product on a common site. In a perfect world, you could trust the product producer, the site, and the product itself and, without any research, simply click and buy. If you're like us, however, being a knowledgeable consumer means checking product reviews, looking for similar products, and reading comments about the company. Once we have a deeper understanding of the product and process, then we buy!

Argument research is similar. Feeling literate about the information types described above is key, but inaccurate or untrustworthy content still emerges.

In response, we recommend **lateral reading** – fact-checking source claims by reading other sites and resources.

Lateral reading emerged after a group of [Stanford researchers](#) pitted undergraduates, professors with their Ph.D.s in history, and journalists against each other in a contest to see who could tell if information was fake or real (Wineburg, McGrew, 2017). The results? Journalists identified fake information every time, but the Ph.D.s and undergraduates struggled to sniff out the truth.

Why is this?

Well, journalists rarely read much of the article or website they were evaluating before they dove into researching it. They would read the title and open a new tab to check out if anyone else had published something on the same topic. Reading what other people had written gave the journalists some context or background knowledge on the topic, better positioning them to judge the argument and evidence made. They would circle back to the original article, identify the author, and open more tabs to verify the identity of the author and their credentials to write the piece. Once the journalists were satisfied with this, they had enough background information to start judging the argument of the original piece. Essentially, journalists would read the introduction and pick out big ideas or the argument, people, specific facts, and the evidence referenced in the first paragraph.

Mike Caulfield (2017), a professor who specializes in media literacy, read the Stanford study and identified steps to evaluate sources. One of those steps is to read laterally, and three [additional steps include](#):

- **Check for previous work:** Look around to see if someone else has already fact-checked the claim or provided a synthesis of research.

- **Go upstream to the source:** Go “upstream” to the source of the claim. Most web content is not original. Get to the original source to understand the trustworthiness of the information.
- **Circle back:** If you get lost, hit dead ends, or find yourself going down an increasingly confusing rabbit hole, back up and start over, knowing what you know now. You’re likely to take a more informed path with different search terms and better decisions.

Lateral reading is a great tool to verify information and learn more without getting too bogged down. However, your research doesn’t stop there. As you begin compiling information source types around your argument, verify the credibility and make sure you’re taking notes.

## Questioning Selected Source Information

Practicing lateral reading will provide you better insight on what diverse sources say about your argument. Through that process, you’ll likely find multiple relevant sources, but is that source best for your argument? Perhaps, but ask yourself the following questions before integrating others’ ideas or research into your argument:

- **What’s the date?** Remember that timeliness plays a key role in establishing the relevance of your argument to your audience. Although a less timely source may be beneficial, more recent sources are often viewed more credibly and may provide updated information.
- **Who is the author / who are the authors?** Identify the author(s) and determine their credentials. We also recommend “Googling” an author and checking if there are any red flags that may hint at their bias or lack of credibility.
- **Who is the publisher?** Find out about the publisher. There are great, credible publishers (like the Cato Institute), but fringe or for-profit publishers may be providing information that overtly supports a political cause.
- **Do they cite others’ work?** Check out the end of the document for a reference page. If you’re using a source with no references, it’s not automatically “bad,” but a reputable reference page means that the author has evidence to support their insights. It helps establish if *that* author has done their research, too.
- **Do others cite the work?** Use the lateral reading technique from above to see if other people have cited this work, too. Alternatively, if, as you research, you see the same piece of work over and over, it’s likely seen as a reputable source within that field. So check it out!

It can feel great to find a key piece of information that supports your argument. But a good idea is more than well-written content. To determine if that source is credible, use the questions above to guarantee that you’re selecting the best research for your idea.

## Take Notes

Remember: this is a lot of stuff to keep track of. We suggest jotting down notes as you go to keep everything straight. Your notes could be a pad of paper next to your laptop or a digital notepad – whatever works best for you.

This may seem obvious, but it is often overlooked. Poor note taking or inaccurate notes can be devastating in the long-term. If you forget to write down all the source information, backtracking and trying to re-search to locate citation information is tedious, time-consuming, and inefficient. Without proper citations, your credibility will diminish. Keeping information without correct citations can have disastrous consequences – as discussed below.

## Plagiarism

While issues of plagiarism are mostly present in written communication, the practice can also occur in oral communication and in communication studies courses. It can occur when speakers misattribute or fail to cite a source during a speech, or when they are preparing outlines or notecards to deliver their speeches and fail to cite sources.

According to the National Communication Association (NCA), “ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others” and truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication (“Credo for Ethical Communication,” 2017). This would imply that through oral communication, there is an expectation that you will credit others with their original thoughts and ideas through citation. One important way that we speak ethically is to use material from others correctly. Occasionally we hear in the news media about a politician or leader who uses the words of other speakers without attribution or of scholars who use pages out of another scholar’s work without consent or citation.

But, why does it matter if a speaker or writer commits plagiarism? Why and how do we judge a speaker as ethical? Why, for example, do we value originality and correct citation of sources in public life as well as the academic world, especially in the United States? These are not new questions, and some of the answers lie in age-old philosophies of communication.

Although there are many ways that you could undermine your ethical stance before an audience, the one that stands out and is committed most commonly in academic contexts is plagiarism. A dictionary definition of plagiarism would be “the act of using another person’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Plagiarism is often thought of as “copying another’s work or borrowing someone else’s original ideas” (“What is Plagiarism?”, 2014). Plagiarism also includes:

- Turning in someone else’s work as your own;
- Copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit;

- Failing to put quotation marks around an exact quotation correctly;
- Giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation;
- Changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit;
- Copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not.

Plagiarism exists outside of the classroom and is a temptation in business, creative endeavors, and politics. However, in the classroom, your instructor will probably take the most immediate action if he or she discovers your plagiarism either from personal experience or through using plagiarism detection (or what is also called “originality checking”) software.

In the business or professional world, plagiarism is never tolerated because using original work without permission (which usually includes paying fees to the author or artist) can end in serious legal action. So, you should always work to correctly provide credit for source information that you’re using.

## Types of Plagiarism

There are many instances of speakers or authors presenting work they claim to be original and their own when it is not. Plagiarism is often done accidentally due to inexperience. To avoid this mistake, let’s work through two types of plagiarism: stealing and sneaking. Sometimes these types of plagiarism are intentional, and sometimes they occur unintentionally (you may not know you are plagiarizing). However, as everyone knows, “Ignorance of the law is not an excuse for breaking it.”

### Stealing

No one wants to be the victim of theft; if it has ever happened to you, you know how awful it feels. When someone takes an essay, research paper, speech, or outline completely from another source, whether it is a classmate who submitted it for another instructor, from some sort of online essay writing service, or from elsewhere, this is an act of theft. The wrongness of the act is compounded when someone submits that work in its entirety and labels it as their own.

Most colleges and universities have a policy that penalizes or forbids “self-plagiarism.” This means that you can’t use a paper or outline that you presented in another class a second time. You may think, “How can this be plagiarism if the source is in my works cited page?” The main reason is that by submitting it to your instructor, you are still claiming it is original, first-time work for the assignment in that particular class. Your instructor may not mind if you use some of the same sources from the first time it was submitted, but he or she expects you to follow the instructions for the assignment and prepare an original assignment. In a sense, this situation is also a case of unfairness, since the other students do not have the advantage of having written the paper or outline already.

## Sneaking

Instead of taking work as a whole from another source, an individual might copy two out of every three sentences and mix them up so they don't appear in the same order as in the original work. Perhaps the individual will add a fresh introduction, a personal example or two, and an original conclusion. This kind of plagiarism is easy today due to the Internet and the word processing functions of cutting and pasting. It also most often occurs when someone has waited too long to start a project and it seems easier to cut and paste portions of text than it is to read, understand, and synthesize information into their own words.

You might not view this as stealing, thinking, "I did some research. I looked some stuff up and added some of my own work." Unfortunately, this is still plagiarism because no source was credited, and the individual "misappropriated" the expression of the ideas as well as the ideas themselves.

## Avoiding Plagiarism

To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit to the words, research, or insights of others. When you're integrating supporting research or using a key idea or theory, let the audience know! As you add research into your outline, you can either:

- Use direct quotes: this means that you're including information from a source verbatim.
- Paraphrase: express the source's idea but not verbatim.
- Summarize: explain the main ideas or arguments from the source's findings.

Citing others will bolster your credibility because it demonstrates that you have in-depth knowledge about the topic.

In English classes, you've likely used style guides (like MLA or APA) to ethically cite research in an essay. Continue this practice. Regardless of how you're integrating that research – verbatim or paraphrasing—the source reference should appear both in the writing and through an oral citation.

### Key Takeaway

- Using Oral Citations: research must be orally cited in a speech to note where you're using ideas, concepts, or findings from someone else's work. Rehearse your oral citations and be clear about why that source is credible for your topic.

## Citing Your Sources

Now that you've learned effective strategies for searching for, accessing, and evaluating sources, let's review the final stage of the research process: using those sources in your project. In this section you will learn the basics about citations and using sources ethically.

### Why cite sources?

As a writer, there are also reasons to cite your sources:

- to meet the requirements for your assignment,
- to give the original creators credit for their ideas,
- to help your readers find and learn from the sources you used, and
- to lend credibility to your argument.

You are likely familiar with the first three reasons already, so let's examine the last one in more detail. How does citing sources lend credibility to your argument? Research projects involve reading, analyzing, and synthesizing information from multiple sources and using their ideas to inform your work. There is a common misconception that academic research consists of one person making amazing breakthroughs all alone in their lab or office, but that's not what actually happens in most cases. Instead, research is a process where scholars build on older work while sharing their new ideas. When you cite others' research, you're doing the same thing. By citing a scholar that has done research on your topic area, you are using their authority and experience to support your claims, and adding your own insights.

### When to cite

Whenever you use someone else's ideas, you need to cite them. This is true for any source where there is interpretation involved (opinions, research findings, recent discoveries, statistics, etc). In the examples below, we've bolded words that indicate you probably need to cite a source:

- **Some** biographers of Abraham Lincoln say he suffered from clinical depression. (Which biographers?)
- The quart measurement **might** have originated in medieval England as a measurement for beer. (Says who?)
- **60%** of art majors believe that Pablo Picasso's paintings are more interesting than his sculptures. (Where did this percentage come from?)
- In recent studies of Y-chromosomes, geneticists have found that Genghis Khan has **approximately 16**

**million** descendants living today. (Where did they get that number?)

No matter where ideas come from you still need to cite them, whether they're from images, tables, charts, statistics, websites, podcasts, interviews, emails, speeches, songs, movies, or any other source.

## How to Cite

Once you have done your research and found sources, the next step is writing your paper. As you write, you'll need to communicate your ideas to your audience. You'll also need to demonstrate that you know how to integrate others' ideas in your writing in an ethical, clear, and consistent way. This means incorporating citations when paraphrasing or using direct quotes.

### Cite purposefully

Citations aren't just there to fill up space. Each citation you include in your paper should be relevant and serve a purpose. Maybe you agree with the author and wish to further explore their main points. Or perhaps you disagree with their conclusions and wish to explain your own perspectives. In either case, the ideas you are citing must somehow add to your argument. Keep in mind that no single article or book will be exactly what you need. To strengthen your argument, you need to examine the work of multiple authors.

### When to use direct quotes

Sometimes an author presents an idea in a way that you cannot rephrase without losing something important from the original quote. In these cases, you can use a direct quote by copying the text and putting it into your paper with quotation marks around the phrase –and citing, of course!

When you do this, keep the quote as short as you can and still make your point. Be careful not to rely too heavily on quoted material. Remember, the purpose of research is to make an original argument, and not to just pull together big blocks of quotes.

You may have been told at some point that you don't need to use quotation marks unless you copy some specific number of words in a row from an author's work. There's more to it than that. If the author has used words or phrases in a distinctive way, make sure that you use quotation marks if you use the same words in your paper. For example, a source might define a new process or system that must be cited, such as "action painting," a term which combines common words in a new way, and was coined by a specific art critic.

### Common knowledge

**Common knowledge** is factual information that can *easily be verified in multiple authoritative sources* (e.g.,

encyclopedias, dictionaries, reputable websites, and books). You always need to cite things like opinions, ideas, or new research findings, but well-established facts don't need citations. Even if it's something new to you, if it's a long-held fact, it is considered common knowledge and doesn't need to be cited.

Here are some types of common knowledge, with examples of each:

- Widely-known facts: that water boils at 100° Celsius.
- Uncontested historical dates: 1776 was the year the Declaration of Independence was signed in the United States of America.
- Well-known cultural references, such as important facts, people, or historical events within that culture: Suleiman the Magnificent was the longest ruling sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

These examples were adapted from MIT's Academic Integrity Handbook for Students.<sup>1</sup>

Be aware that some common knowledge may also be contextual. For example, what is common knowledge among microbiologists may not be common knowledge among lawyers, and vice versa. But if you have any doubt whether something is or isn't common knowledge, the best practice is to cite.

## Citations

A **citation** contains elements (e.g. author, date, title) that uniquely identify a resource. You will primarily find citations in the works cited or reference section of a paper or book. They may also appear on websites, your course syllabus, or other materials provided by your instructor. Your instructors expect you to include citations in your papers to tell them where your ideas came from. Scholars out in the wider world include citations in their work for the same purpose. You can use their citations to trace back where their ideas originated, the same way your instructors check your work.

You may be familiar with different citation styles. Some fields have only one citation style, while others have multiple. Note that different citation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) will have different rules or ways of representing common elements of citations, such as author name, title of article or book, and so on. Often times, particular journals have specific guidelines for the exact citation style they prefer. In this course, we will use APA.

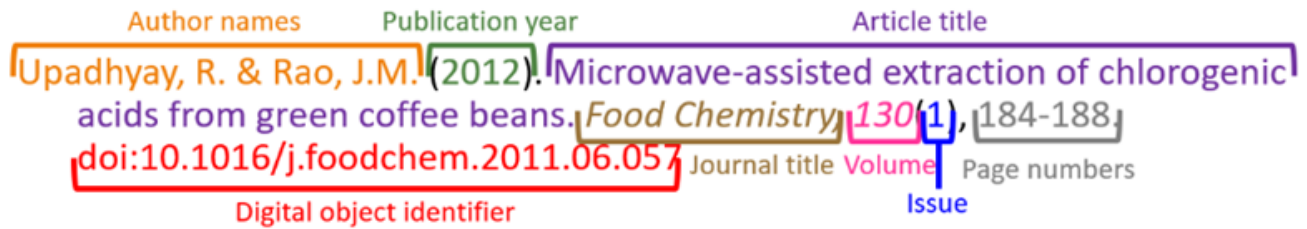
## APA Citation Examples

### Example Journal citation in APA style:

Upadhyay, R. & Rao, J.M. (2012). Microwave-assisted extraction of chlorogenic acids from green coffee beans. *Food Chemistry*, 130(1), 184-188. doi: 10.1016/j.foodchem.2011.06.057

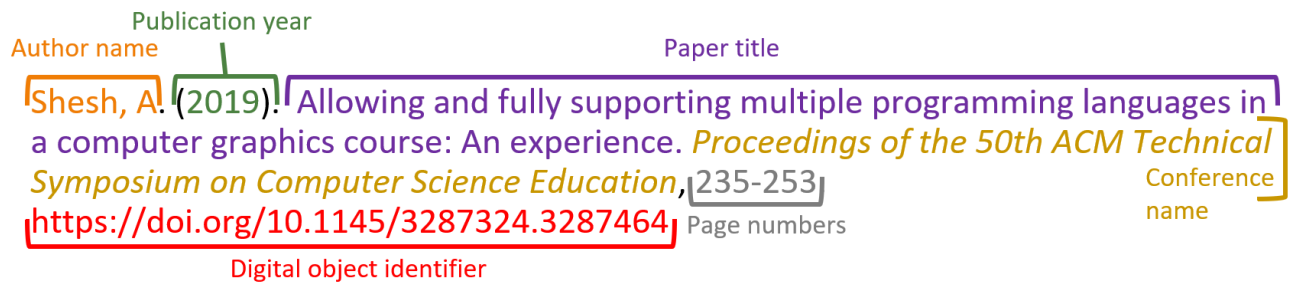
Typical article citation elements include author and title of the article, journal name, journal volume and

issue numbers. There are several ways to find a journal article from a citation. You can search for the article by its title or by the journal it's found within.



### Example Conference Presentation citation (APA):

Shesh, A. (2019). Allowing and fully supporting multiple programming languages in a computer graphics course: An experience. *Proceedings of the 50th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education*, 235-253. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3287324.3287464>



### Example Newspaper Article Citation (APA):

Reynolds, G. (2019, May 1). How exercise affects our memory. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/01/well/move/how-exercise-affects-our-memory.html>

It is imperative that you learn how to properly cite your sources. For more information on APA citations, please reference APA Citation Style Guidelines ([APA Style](#)). Additional resources may be found at Owl Purdue APA ([APA Formatting and Style Guide \(7th Edition\) – Purdue OWL® – Purdue University](#)).

#### Key Takeaways

- Finding credible research is imperative. There are many ways to evaluate and determine if information is trustworthy.
- Plagiarism is a serious issue that can be remedied by giving credit to original work.

## Conclusion

Having a strong research foundation will give your speech interest and credibility. This chapter has shown you how to access information but also how to find reliable information and evaluate it.

This process may seem exhausting at first, but you likely already are doing this in your everyday life. We simply are asking you to be a bit more aware of and practice lateral reading. Doing so will help you better understand the context and judge the veracity of an author's argument and their evidence. It will also likely give you plenty of new evidence to inform your own argument.

Learning how to cite sources properly is a beneficial skill that increases your credibility. Giving proper credit is ethical.

### Glossary

#### **Academic sources**

Often (not always) peer-reviewed by like-minded scholars in the field

#### **Closed system**

Information is behind a paywall or requires a subscription

#### **Critical thinking skills**

Decision-making based on evaluating and critiquing information

#### **Nonacademic information sources**

Popular press information sources

#### **Open system**

Information that is publicly available and accessible

#### **Research**

The process of discovering new knowledge and investigating a topic from different points of view

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (n.d.). What is common knowledge? *Academic integrity at MIT: A handbook for students*. <https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/citing-your-sources/what-common-knowledge> ↴

## Attribution

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# PRESENTING YOUR IDEAS

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## Learning Objectives

- Recognize the role of a specific purpose in crafting an informative speech
- Explain the process of grouping information
- Review and apply major organizational patterns
- Describe outlining best practices
- Identify strategies for effective introduction and conclusions
- Understand the key principles guiding presentation aid creation and utilization
- Describe core speech delivery element

Selecting and constructing an argument that advocates can be tough. First we select a **general purpose** for the argument. Are you seeking to inform, persuade or entertain the audience? The most basic general purpose, and one we'll use in this course is to inform. Next, we formulate an overarching thesis, "I want to inform the class about..." For example, "I want to inform the class how physicians use nonverbal communication to convey uncertainty" or "I want to inform the class how couples breaking up in the workplace affects their coworkers." The process, however, doesn't stop there. A well-reasoned, researched, and constructed argument is key to effectively crafting and conveying information. The next step is determining how to organize and outline that information so that the audience can follow along. This chapter overviews how to craft a specific purpose for a speech, how to group an organize information, and how to create a cohesive speech including crafting introductions and conclusions.

## Start with a Specific Purpose

A **specific purpose statement** builds on your general purpose (such as to inform) and makes it more specific (as the name suggests). So, if you're giving a persuasive speech, your general purpose will be to persuade your audience about, for example, the rising cost of textbooks. Written together, your specific purpose would read, "to persuade my audience to support campus solutions to rising textbook costs."

Your general purpose and audience will influence how to write your specific purpose statement (see Table 1).

General Purpose	Audience	Topic
To inform	my audience	<b>about</b> the usefulness of scrapbooking to save a family's memories.
To persuade	a group of kindergarten teachers	<b>to</b> adopt a new disciplinary method for their classrooms.
To entertain	a group of executives	<b>by</b> describing the lighter side of life in "cubicleville."
To inform	community members	<b>about</b> the newly proposed swimming pool plans that have been adopted.
To persuade	my peers in class	<b>to</b> vote for me for class president.
To entertain	the guests attending my mother's birthday party	<b>by</b> telling a humorous story followed by a toast.

Table 1 (*Stand Up, Speak Out*).

Table 1 demonstrates how to move from the general purpose to the specific purpose while keeping your audience in mind. So far, so good, right? Before moving forward with writing the thesis, main points, etc. be aware these common pitfalls for writing specific purpose statements.

## Being Too Broad

Specific purpose statements sometimes try to cover far too much and are too broad. You are funneling a broad topic to a specific argument, so don't stop at the topic. Instead, ask, "am I trying to do too much?"

Consider this specific purpose statement: *To explain to my classmates the history of ballet.*

This subject could result in a three-hour lecture, maybe even a whole course. You will probably find that your first attempt at a specific purpose statement will need refining.

These examples are much more specific and much more manageable given the limited amount of time you will have:

*To explain to my classmates how ballet came to be performed and studied in the U.S.*

*To explain to my classmates the difference between Russian and French ballet.*

*To explain to my classmates how ballet originated as an art form in the Renaissance.*

*To explain to my classmates the origin of the ballet dancers' clothing.*

Often, broadness is signaled by the use of “and,” where a specific statement is making two arguments.

These examples cover two different topics:

*To explain to my audience how to swing a golf club and choose the best golf shoes.*

*To persuade my classmates to be involved in the Special Olympics and vote to fund better classes for the intellectually disabled.*

## Too Specialized

The second problem with specific purpose statements is the opposite of being too broad, in that some specific purposes statements are so focused that they might only be appropriate for people who are already extremely interested in the topic or experts in a field. For example:

*To inform my classmates of the life cycle of a new species of lima bean (botanists, agriculturalists).*

*To inform my classmates about the Yellow 5 ingredient in Mountain Dew (chemists, nutritionists).*

*To persuade my classmates that JIF Peanut Butter is better than Peter Pan. (organizational chefs in large institutions).*

## Group Ideas (Create Main Points)

Organizing information and reflecting on the best way to communicate an idea isn’t unique to a public speech; we do it all the time in private. Consider the following scenario:

*Two friends – Anne and Stevie – have been dealing with interpersonal conflict. They can’t get along. Stevie decides that it’s time to sit down and tell Anne how she’s feeling, but first, she jots some notes. “Where to start?” she thinks, and tries to consider how she wants to breach the topic. “From the first time I was upset?” “Should I talk generally about the main 2 issues that keep bothering me?” “How do I start?”*

Stevie is trying to process how to organize the information that she’ll present to Anne – the main audience member. She’s also processing the best way to start – or to introduce – that information to her friend, and outlining key ideas that she wants to remember.

The same is true for preparing arguments in a speech. Having your information in a organized effectively can make or break audience understanding of your content. This chapter discusses ways to effectively categorize your information that will (a) support your thesis statement, and (b) increase audience comprehension of that information. To accomplish these tasks, we will introduce different organizational patterns, tips for outlining, and strategies for crafting your introduction and conclusion. Before you can select an organizational pattern, you should first work to group your information.

Have you ever organized a garage sale? The first step, before putting up signs or pricing items, is to go through your closets and garage and create “piles” of items that you want to sell: children’s items, tools,

kitchen items, furniture, trash, etc. Researchers have found that “**chunking**” information, that is, the way it is grouped, is vital to audience understanding, learning, and retention of information. [1,2,3](#)

As we listen, we have limits as to how many categories of information we can keep in mind. In public speaking, use approximately three (3) categories to group your information. 2-3 main points – or groups – is safe territory, and you should avoid having more than 5 main points for an audience, as they will be far less likely to follow your argument.

“How does this work in practice?” you may be asking. “How do I group information to find my categories?”

Use your research and your brainstorming tactics! As you research, look at the articles and websites you read and say, “That information relates to what I read over here” and, “That statistic fits under the idea of . . .” You are looking for similarities and patterns. Think back to the yard sale example – you would group according to customer interest and the purpose of each item. As you learn more about your topic and expand your expertise, the patterns and groups will become clearer.

Once you locate a pattern, that information can likely be grouped into your speech’s main points. Return to your thesis statement and determine what groups are more suitable to support your specific purpose. If you continue to find more groups, you may want to limit and narrow your topic down further.

Finally, because your audience will understand you better and perceive you as organized, you will gain more credibility as a speaker if you are organized, assuming you also have credible information and acceptable delivery. [4,5](#)

### **Research Insight: Grouping Content Helps Your Writing!**

Yun and colleagues (2012) found a side benefit to learning to be an organized public speaker: your writing skills will improve, specifically your organization and sentence structure. Working on your organization will increase your critical thinking skills all around.

After you group, the next step is determining what type of organizational pattern works best.

## Patterns of Organization

At this point, you should see how much your audience needs organized ideas. You also know that as you do research, you will group together similar pieces of information from different sources. As you group your research information, you will want to make sure that your grouped content is adhering to your specific purpose statement.

Interestingly, there are some standard ways of organizing these categories, which are called **patterns of**

**organization.** This list isn't exhaustive, this chapter briefly reviews five (5) organizational patterns with a few embedded examples. In each example, only the three to five main sections or “points” (Roman numerals) are given, without the other essential parts of the outline. But don't worry—we'll cover outlines later in this chapter.

## Chronological

A **chronological organizational pattern** groups information based on time order or in a set chronology—first this occurred, then this, then this, then that. The use of a chronological pattern is appropriate when the argument needs to be traced linearly or for speeches that instructor or demonstrate. For a speech about creating a meaningful and memorable protest poster, providing the instructions in order will allow audience members to actively deploy that information after the speech.

One of the problems with chronological speeches is the tendency to create a long list of activities rather than categorizing the content. It is important to chunk the information into three to five groups so that the audience has a framework. For example, in a speech about the history of the Civil Rights Movement, your “grouping” or “chunking” might be:

- I. The movement saw African-Americans struggling for legal recognition before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.
- II. The movement was galvanized and motivated by the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- III. The movement saw its goals met in the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

It would be easy in the case of the Civil Rights Movement to list the many events that happened over decades, but that could be overwhelming for the audience. In this grouping of events, the audience is focused on the three events that pushed it forward.

## Spatial

You can see that chronological is a highly-used organizational structure, since one of the ways our minds work is through time-orientation—past, present, future. Another common thought process is movement in space or direction, which is called the **spatial pattern**. For example:

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates the three regional cooking styles of Italy.

- I. In the mountainous region of the North, the food emphasizes cheese and meat.
- II. In the middle region of Tuscany, the cuisine emphasizes grains and olives.
- III. In the southern region and Sicily, the diet is based on fish and sea-food.

In this example, the content is moving from northern to southern Italy, as the word “regional” would indicate. If you were to actually study Italian cooking in depth, sources will say there are twenty regions, but “covering”

twenty regions in a speech is not practical, so research can help you limit and determine which regions would be more appropriate.

For a more localized application, consider this example:

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates the geographic layout of the Midwest Science March.

- I. The main vein of the protest took place on the Kansas City Plaza.
- II. Vendor booths promoting educational opportunities about science were grouped at Washington Square.
- III. Counter-protesting was predominantly south of the river.

A spatial organizational pattern can assist audiences in visualizing your main points by grouping based on a spatial or geographic layout.

## Topical/Categorical

The **topical organizational pattern** groups information into key categories. Many subjects will have main points that naturally divide into “types of,” “kinds of,” “sorts of,” or “categories of.” Other subjects naturally divide into “parts of the whole.” For example:

Specific purpose: To support the proposition that capital punishment should be abolished in the United States.

- I. Capital punishment does not save money for the justice system.
- II. Capital punishment does not deter crime in the United States historically.
- III. Capital punishment has resulted in many unjust executions.

Another principle of organization to think about when using topical organization is “climax” organization. That means putting your strongest argument or most important point last when applicable. In the example above, “unjust executions” is a bigger reason to end a practice than the cost, since an unjust execution means the loss of an innocent life and a violation of our principles. If you believe Main Point III is the strongest argument of the three, putting it last builds up to a climax.

When using a topical pattern, you want to keep your categories simple, clear, and distinct by reducing repetition or blurriness between the groupings.

## Cause/Effect Pattern

In a **cause/effect pattern**, the main points of a topic start with the cause(s), followed by the effect(s). If the specific purpose mentions words such as “causes,” “origins,” “roots of,” “foundations,” “basis,” “grounds,” or “source,” it is a causal order; if it mentions words such as “effects,” “results,” “outcomes,” “consequences,” or “products,” it is an effect order. If it mentions both, it would be cause/effect order. This example shows a cause/effect pattern:

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates the causes and effects of schizophrenia.

- I. Schizophrenia has genetic, social, and environmental causes.
- II. Schizophrenia has educational, relational, and medical effects.

This pattern can be helpful for an audience to understand how and/or why something has occurred. If your topic looks at a key problem, tracing how that problem originated may be worthwhile, even necessary, for an audience to track the outcomes.

## Problem-Solution Pattern

The **problem-solution pattern** is closely related to cause/effect, but it also includes advocating for a key solution. This is a common organizational strategy used to persuade because a speaker is often asking the audience to address a problem with a concrete course of action. When you want to persuade someone to act, the first reason is usually that something is wrong!

We use a problem-solution pattern in everyday exchanges. If you and your friends were hungry (a problem), you'd invite them to dinner (the solution). However, if they'd recently eaten you might identify a secondary problem—you miss their company, for example.

Alternatively, let's say that you want school board members to provide more funds for music at the three local high schools in your county. Ask yourself: What is missing because music or the arts are not funded? What is the problem? How is that a problem something that the school board should intervene to resolve? How does funding those programs resolve the problems that you've identified? For example:

Specific Purpose: To persuade the members of the school board to take action to support the music program at the school.

- I. There is a problem with eliminating extracurricular music programs in high schools.
  - a. Students who do not have extracurricular music in their lives have lower SAT scores.
  - b. Schools that do not have extracurricular music programs have more instances of community violence.
- II. The solution is to provide \$200,000 in the budget to sustain extra-curricular music in our high schools.
  - a. \$120,000 would go to bands. This would be enough money to hire additional instructors and reserve after-school spaces.
  - b. \$80,000 would go to choral programs.

Of course, this is a simple outline and you would need to provide evidence to support the arguments, but it shows how problem-solution works. Psychologically, it makes more sense to use problem-solution rather than solution-problem. The audience will be more motivated to listen if you address needs, deficiencies, or problems in their lives rather than giving them solutions first.

# Outlining

After identifying an organizational pattern, an outline will assist you to compile information into that pattern. An **outline** provides a visual structure where you can compile information into a well-organized document. There are two primary types of outlines that we will discuss: preparation outlines and speaking outlines.

## Preparation Outlines

**Preparation outlines** are comprehensive outlines that include all of the information in your speech. These are often full-sentences and include in-text citations and a reference page (if necessary). If someone were to read your outline, there should be enough depth to provide a skeleton of what will be accomplished.

Generally, we recommend starting from the outline format shown in Table 1, which is also presented as a template in the workbook:

**Table 1**  
**Sample Outline Template**

- 
- I. Introduction
    - a. Attention Getter
    - b. Credibility Statement
    - c. Relevance Statement
    - d. Thesis Statement
    - e. Preview
  
  - II. Main body
    - 1. First Main Point
      - a. Subpoint a
        - 1. Evidence
        - 2. Warrant
      - b. Subpoint b
        - 1. Evidence
        - 2. Warrant
    - 2. Second Main Point
      - a. Subpoint a
        - 1. Evidence
        - 2. Warrant
      - b. Subpoint b
        - 1. Evidence
        - 2. Warrant
    - 3. Third main Point
      - a. Subpoint a
        - 1. Evidence
        - 2. Warrant
      - b. Subpoint b
        - 1. Evidence
        - 2. Warrant
  
  - III. Conclusion
    - a. Review of Main Points
    - b. Restate Thesis
    - c. Clincher

*Note: Connective transitions will be necessary to move between each main point and each major section.*

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This is just a start, and each main point may have more than one piece of evidence, for example.

An outline is a visual structure, and it can aid you in determining where you need more or less information. For example, if you work on a problem/solution speech, your outline may visually demonstrate that most of

your research is located under the “problem” main point, signaling to you that more “solution” research is required. Outlines also assist in reminding speakers to warrant all of their claims.

You should think of the outline as the blueprint for your speech. It is not the speech—that is what comes out of your mouth in front of the audience. The outline helps you prepare and, as such, they are a living document that you can adjust, add, and delete. We recommend beginning to add information to an outline right away. You don’t, however, often speak from that outline. Instead, you’ll use a speaking outline.

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**Table 2**  
**Tips for Effective Outlining**

- Use consistent numbering;
  - Full sentences are your friend!
  - Use in-text citations for references to your research.
  - Generally, numbers should be in 2’s (if there’s a 1, there should be a 2).
  - Make sure indentations are consistent and clear.
  - Follow your organizational pattern.
  - Revise. Revise. Revise.
- 

## Speaking Outlines

A **speaking outline** is a keyword outline used to deliver a speech – often extemporaneous. Delivering an aesthetic experience, the notes that you use to speak can aid or hinder in an effective delivery. A speaking or keyword outline – which you’ll use to rehearse and deliver – will allow greater embodiment and engagement with the audience. As you practice, you will be able to summarize the full preparation outline down to more usable notes. In those notes, create a set of abbreviated notes for the actual delivery. The more materials you take up with you to speak, the more you will be tempted to look at them rather than have eye contact with the audience, reducing your overall engagement.

Your speaking notes should be in far fewer words than the preparation, arranged in key phrases, and readable for you. Your speaking outline should provide cues to yourself to “slow down,” “pause,” or “change slide.” The biggest suggestion is to make the notes workable for you. Many people use multiple colors for main points, sub points, and evidence to help make the speaking outline easy to follow visually.

Finally, always double check that your speaking outline includes your oral citations. An authors name and publication date are difficult to remember, so add all references directly into your notes.

## Connective Statements and Internal Organization

At this point, you may be realizing that preparing for public speaking does not always follow a completely linear process. In writing your speech, you might begin outlining with one organizational pattern in mind, only to re-craft the main points into a new pattern after more research has been conducted. This is normal, but wherever your process takes you, you will need to make sure that each section of your speech outline is connected – what we call connective statements. **Connective statements** are statements generally designed to help “connect” parts of your speech to make it easier for audience members to follow. Connectives are vital tools for helping the audience listen, retain information, and follow your structure.

Connectives perform a number of functions:

- Remind the audience of what has come before;
- Remind the audience of the central focus or purpose of the speech;
- Forecast what is coming next;
- Help the audience have a sense of context in the speech—where are we? (this is especially useful in a longer speech of twenty minutes or so);
- Explain the logical connection between the previous main idea(s) and next one, or previous subpoints and the next one;
- Explain your own mental processes in arranging the material as you have;
- Keep the audience’s attention through repetition and a sense of movement.

Connectives can include internal summaries, signposting or internal previews. Each of these terms all help connect the main ideas of your speech for the audience, but they have different emphases and are useful for different types of speeches. Connectives are particularly important in a speech because the audience does not have a page to look at; instead, listeners are relying on you to tell us what you have covered, what you are covering, and what you will be covering in the presentation.

### Types of connectives and examples

**Internal summaries** emphasize what has come before and remind the audience of what has been covered.

*“So far I have shown how the designers of King Tut’s burial tomb used the antechamber to scare away intruders and the second chamber to prepare royal visitors for the experience of seeing the sarcophagus.”*

**Internal previews** let your audience know what is coming up next in the speech and what to expect with regard to the content of your speech.

*“In this next part of the presentation I will share with you what the truly secret and valuable part of the King Tut’s pyramid: his burial chamber and the treasury.”*

**Transitions** serve as bridges between seemingly disconnected (but related) material, most commonly between your main points. At a bare minimum your transition is saying, “Now that we have looked at (talked about, etc.) X, let’s look at Y.”

**Signposts** emphasize the physical movement through the speech content and let the audience know exactly where they are. Signposting can be as simple as “First,” “Next,” “Lastly” or using numbers such as “First,” “Second,” “Third,” and “Fourth.” Signposts can also be lengthier, but in general signposting is meant to be a brief way to let your audience know where they are in the speech. It may help to think of these like the mile markers you see along interstates that tell you where you are or like signs letting you know how many more miles until you reach your destination.

Connectives are an important way to assist the audience in understanding (a) where you’ve been, (b) where you are, and (c) where you’re going. We recommend labeling them directly in your outline to make sure that they’re integrated and clear.

## Introductions and Conclusions

Now that you have a deeper understanding of organizational patterns and placing your information into an outline, let’s discuss introductions and conclusions. We recommend writing these sections after you have a substantial amount of the main body constructed in your outline.

Introductions and conclusions serve to frame the speech and give it a clearly defined beginning and end. They help the audience to see what is to come in the speech, and then let them mentally prepare for the end. In doing this, introductions and conclusions provide a “preview/review” of your speech as a means to reiterate to your audience what you are talking about. Because speeches are auditory and live, you need to make sure that audiences remember what you are saying.

The general rule is that the introduction and conclusion should each be about 10% of your total speech, leaving 80% for the body section. It can be tempting to have longer introductions, but that often leaves less time to introduce key research and warrant your ideas through the main points. Even though they are only 10% of your total speech, these sections are probably the most important because they clearly preview and review the structure of your argument and help the audience by providing a frame what you are sharing. Table 3 shows the most common mistakes people make when creating an introduction.

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**Table 3**  
**Common Errors to Avoid in Introductions**

- rambling and meandering; not getting to the point;
- starting with a vocalized pause;
- saying the specific purpose statement first;
- beginning to talk as you approach the platform;
- reading your introduction directly from your notes;
- Talking too fast.

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## Structuring the Introduction

Many speakers struggle with how to start their speech because they're often worried that their words won't be memorable, attention-capturing, and clever enough to get their audience interested. This is a problem for many of us because the first words you say, in many ways, set the tone for the rest of your speech. There may not be any one "best" way to start a speech, but we can provide some helpful guidelines that will make starting a speech much easier.

With that in mind, there are five basic elements that you will want to incorporate into your introduction and speech outline.

### Element 1: Get the Audience's Attention

The first major purpose of an introduction is to gain your audience's attention and make them interested in what you have to say. The first words of a speech should be something that will perk up the audience's ears. Starting a speech with "Hey everybody. I'm going to talk to you today about soccer" has not tried to engage the individuals in the audience who don't care about soccer.

To create interest, the key is selecting an option that's appropriate and relevant to your specific audience. You will also want to choose an attention-getting device appropriate for your speech topic. Ideally, your attention-getting device should have a relevant connection to your speech. Below are a number of possibilities for crafting an attention getter.

### Anecdotes and Narratives

An **anecdote** is a *brief* account or story of an interesting or humorous event. Notice the emphasis here is on the

word “brief.” An example of an anecdote used in a speech about the pervasiveness of technology might look something like this:

*In July 2009, a high school girl named Miranda Becker was walking along a main boulevard near her home on Staten Island, New York, typing in a message on her cell phone. Not paying attention to the world around her, she took a step and fell right into an open construction hole.*

Notice that the anecdote is short and has a clear point. From here the speaker can begin to make their point about how technology is controlling our lives.

A **personal story** is another option here. You may consider starting your speech with a story about yourself that is relevant to your topic. Some of the best speeches are ones that come from personal knowledge and experience. If you are an expert or have firsthand experience related to your topic, sharing this information with the audience is a great way to show that you are credible during your attention getter.

## Startling Statement/Statistic/Fact

Another way to start your speech is to surprise your audience with startling information about your topic. Often, startling statements come in the form of statistics and strange facts. The goal of a good startling statistic is that it surprises the audience and gets them engaged in your topic. For example, if you’re giving a speech about oil conservation, you could start by saying, “A Boeing 747 airliner holds 57,285 gallons of fuel.” You could start a speech on the psychology of dreams by noting, “The average person has over 1,460 dreams a year.”

A strange fact, on the other hand, is a statement that does not involve numbers but is equally surprising to most audiences. For example, you could start a speech on the gambling industry by saying, “There are no clocks in any Las Vegas casino.”

Although startling statements are fun, it is important to use them ethically. First, make sure that your startling statement is factual. Second, make sure that your startling statement is relevant to your speech and not just thrown in for shock value.

## A Rhetorical Question

A **rhetorical question** is a question to which no actual reply is expected. For example, a speaker talking about the history of Mother’s Day could start by asking the audience, “Do you remember the last time you told your mom you loved her?” In this case, the speaker does not expect the audience to shout out an answer, but rather to think about the questions as the speech goes on.

## Quotation

Another way to capture your listeners’ attention is to use the words of another person that relate directly to your topic. Maybe you’ve found a really great quotation in one of the articles or books you read while

researching your speech. If not, you can also use a number of Internet or library sources that compile useful quotations from noted individuals. Quotations are a great way to start a speech, so let's look at an example that could be used during the opening of a commencement address:

*The late actress, fashion icon, and social activist Audrey Hepburn once noted that, "Nothing is impossible. The word itself says 'I'm possible!'"*

## Element 2: Establish or Enhance Your Credibility

Whether you are informing, persuading, or entertaining an audience, they will expect you to know what you're talking about. The second element of an introduction is to let your audience know that you are a knowledgeable and credible source for this information. To do this, you will need to explain how you know what you know about your topic.

For some people, this will be simple. If you are informing your audience about a topic that you've researched or experienced for years, that makes you a fairly credible source. You probably know what you are talking about. Let the audience know! For example, "I've been serving with Big Brothers Big Sisters for the last two years."

However, you may be speaking on a subject with which you have no history of credibility. If you are just curious about when streetlights were installed at intersections and why they are red, yellow, and green, you can do that. But you will still need to give your audience some sort of reason to trust your knowledge. Since you were required to do research, you are at least more knowledgeable on the subject than anyone else in the class. So you might say something like "I'm not a traffic engineer, but after extensive research I've learned a lot about traffic control devices, the technical term for stop lights."

## Element 3: Establish Relevance through Rapport

The next element of your introduction will be to establish rapport with your audience. **Rapport** is basically a relationship or connection you make with your audience. In everyday life, we say that two people have a rapport when they get along really well and are good friends. In your introduction, you will want to explain to your audience why you are giving them this information and why it is important or relevant to them. You will be making a connection through this shared information and explaining to them how it will benefit them. For instance, "Since 69% of us in this room will be parents someday, and all of us have parents or guardians, parent-child communication is relevant to each of us."

## Element 4: State your Thesis

The fourth major function of an introduction after getting the audience's attention is to reveal the purpose of your speech to your audience. Have you ever sat through a speech wondering what the basic point was? Have you ever come away after a speech and had no idea what the speaker was talking about? An introduction should

make the topic, purpose, and central idea clear. The **thesis** is simply a succinct, single-sentence, description of the main idea for the presentation. Theses are often based on and very similar to the specific purpose for the presentation.

When stating your topic in the introduction, be explicit with regard to exactly what your topic is. Spell it out for them if you have to. If an audience is unable to remember all your information, they should at least be able to walk away knowing that the purpose of your presentation was.

## Element 5: Preview Your Main Points

Just like previewing your topic, **explicitly previewing** your main points helps your audience know what to expect throughout the course of your speech and prepares them for what you are going to speak on. Your preview of main points should be clear and easy to follow so that there is no question in your audience's minds what they are. Long, complicated, or verbose main points can get confusing. Be succinct and simple, we include numerals to show the main points in this example: "Today, in our discussion of Abraham Lincoln's life, (i) we will look at his birth, (ii) his role as a president, and (iii) his assassination." From that there is little question as to what specific aspects of Lincoln's life the speech will cover. However, if you want to be extra sure they get it, you can always enumerate them by using signposts: "In discussing how to make chocolate chip cookies, first we will cover what ingredients you need, second we will talk about how to mix them, and third we will look at baking them."

These five elements prepare your audience for the bulk of the speech (i.e. the body section) by letting them know what they can expect, why they should listen, and why they can trust you as a speaker. Having all five elements starts your speech off on much more solid ground than you would get without having them.

### Exercise

Check out [Sheryl Sandberg's speech](#), "Why we have few too women leaders," and listen to the first few messages. Can you identify and label the parts of her introduction? How did it help you in understanding her message? Was it clear? Did it grab your attention?

## Structuring the Conclusion

Similar to the introduction, the conclusion has three specific elements that you will want to incorporate in order to make it as strong as possible. Given the nature of these elements and what they do, these should generally be incorporated into your conclusion in the order they are presented below. Table 4 shows some common errors tied to conclusions.

---

**Table 4**  
**Common Errors to Avoid in Conclusions**

- signal the end multiple times. In other words, no “multiple conclusions” or saying “As I close” more than once;
  - ramble; if you signal the end, end;
  - talk as you leave the platform or lectern;
  - indicate with facial expression or body language that you were not happy with the speech.
  - conclude with an abrupt “thank you.”
- 

## Element 1: Review the Main Points

Introductions preview your main points; the conclusion provides a review. One of the biggest differences between written and oral communication is the necessity of repetition in oral communication. Your audience only has one opportunity to catch and remember the points you are trying to get across in your speech, so the review assists in repeating key ideas that support your thesis statement.

Because you are trying to remind the audience of your main points, you want restate the main points using the same language used to introduce and present them. Be sure not to bring up any new material or ideas. For example, if you said, “There are several other issues related to this topic, such as...but I don’t have time for them,” that would make the audience confused and perhaps wonder why you did not address those in the body section. The hardcore facts and content are in the body.

## Element 2: Restate the Thesis

Make sure to re-state your thesis because this is the main argument that you’re leaving the audience with. While this may come before or after the review of your main points, it’s important because it often directs the audience and reminds them why they’re present. Concluding without reiterating your thesis statement requires the audience to remember an idea from the introduction – which can feel like a long time ago.

## Element 3: Clincher – Close with Impact

The third element of your conclusion is the **clincher**, or something memorable with which to conclude your speech. The clincher is sometimes referred to as a concluding thought. These are the very last words you will say in your speech, so you need to make them count.

In many ways the clincher is the inverse of the attention-getter. You want to start the speech off with something strong, and you want to end the speech with something strong. To that end, similar to what we discussed above with attention getters, there are a number of ways you can make your clincher strong and memorable. Table 5 presents some strategies for a strong clincher.

**Table 5****Strategies for Effective Concluding Thoughts**

<b>Conclude with a Challenge</b>	A challenge is a call to engage in some kind of activity that requires
<b>Conclude with a Quotation</b>	Select a quotation that's related to your topic
<b>Visualize the Future</b>	Help your audience imagine the future you believe can occur.
<b>Conclude by Inspiration</b>	Use inspiration to stir someone's emotions in a specific manner.
<b>Conclude with a Question</b>	Ask a rhetorical question that forces the audience to ponder an idea.
<b>Refer to the Introduction</b>	Come full circle by referencing an idea, statistic, or insight from the attention getter
<b>Conclude with a Story</b>	Select a brief story aimed at a strong emotional appeal

For the conclusion, make sure your purpose – informative, persuasive, entertaining – is acknowledged.

## Making Information Easy to Remember: Presentation Aids

In many, if not all of the classes you have taken, your instructors have used **presentation aids**. Projectors, PowerPoint, models, and even the whiteboard are all examples of visual aids. In addition, demonstrations of how to do things, like how to glove and gown in a surgical tech class, are examples of using visual aids. In a Music Technology course, the instructor will use recorded examples so students can better hear the concepts at work. This is also an example of a presentation aid. Similarly, in your speeches, you will use presentation aids to help your intended audience better understand and remember information.

### Definition and Purpose

Presentation aids are a form of supporting materials, and they are simply visual and/or auditory examples and tools used to help your intended audience better understand and remember the key ideas in your speech.

Presenters use visual aids to get and hold the audience's attention, help clarify ideas and concepts, provide examples and reinforce ideas, and contribute to the credibility of the speaker. There are lots of connections between presentation aids and nonverbal messages, such as gestures, which is covered in the final section of this chapter.

### Creating your Presentation Aids

When it comes to creating your presentation aids, the key points emphasized in this chapter still hold true:

strive for clarity, and keep the intended audience in mind. With all of the technology tools we have available, it can be tempting to try to create something fancy or visually exciting, but remember that you don't want your presentation aids to distract from your speech. You want them to enhance your speech, and often simple is better. In addition, be sure to only use the presentation aids you need; don't include presentation aids just because they are available. As always, the key is clarity.

Most students use a PowerPoint for their visual aid, because they are easy to create, and they are easy for the audience to see, regardless of where they are sitting in the classroom. Consider a speech covering how to make a nutritious smoothie. While the person presenting this speech could bring in the ingredients and the tools to use as presentation aids, it would be hard for anyone sitting towards the back of the room to actually see what is going on. In addition, the presenter would have to bring a lot of things with them, and it would require time to set up for the speech. A better approach would be to take pictures of the tools, ingredients, and process and put those pictures in a PowerPoint. Those pictures could also be combined with text to help the audience understand. Not only would this approach better allow the audience to see, it would free up the presenter to focus on delivering the speech, rather than trying to create the smoothie in front of the audience.

When creating a PowerPoint (or any other readily available presentation format), you can use one of the readily available templates. All of the set up work has been done in these templates, which will make it easier for you to focus on creating the presentation aid, rather than designing it. Other things to keep in mind are to be consistent in your font choice, although you may alternate between font sizes for header text versus body text. Speaking of text, you don't want to overwhelm your audience with excessive amounts of text. Do NOT simply read the slides to the audience. Further, there shouldn't be so much text the audience is reading the slide while you are speaking; the text on the slides should simply serve as category holders. In addition, it is very helpful to animate the text on the slides so it only appears as you need it. That way the audience isn't reading ahead to point number four (4) while you're still talking about point number one (1).

Another helpful thing to do with PowerPoint is to insert a blank slide when you are talking but not referencing something on the screen. That way the audience isn't looking at what's coming next or what you just talked about while you're introducing a new idea. Inserting a blank slide is simple, and doing so adds a nice professional polish to your speech. Overall, speakers ought to follow the **6 X 6 rule**. The 6 X 6 rule is a guide for text on visual aids. Generally present no more than six bullet points with no more than six words per bullet point on a slide. Only break this rule if you have a compelling reason.

A note on using video: the guideline for using video is that it can be no longer than 30 seconds of the speech. Still, using video can make it much more complicated to deliver the speech instead of simplifying. You will need to ensure that the visual and audio components of the video are accessible to the audience before your presentation. Consider what you will do while the video is playing: will you simply stand there and watch it with the audience? Will you be pausing it to point things out? Will you need to rewind it to point things out? While it certainly isn't incorrect to use a video, keep in mind that *you* need to be delivering the speech, not the video. As such, you need to carefully consider whether you want to invest some of the time you have in

showing a video and whether it is going to be helpful to your audience in terms of understanding. Again, it is not incorrect to use video, but using video well is more complicated than it might first appear.

## Rehearsal with Presentation Aids

When it comes to using your presentation aids, rehearsal with the presentation aid is key. You don't want it to seem like you are looking at your PowerPoint for the first time when you open it in front of the class. Know how to make your PowerPoint full screen, advance the slides, etc. In addition, you need to make sure you can access your presentation aid if you don't have it on a thumb drive. Be sure you can open it on a campus computer, or the technology that you're using to display it will interface with the classroom computer, before the day of the speech. Also keep in mind that if you are using something like Google drive, you may be prompted to receive a code and enter it before you can access your materials on the classroom computer.

The important thing is to make sure that your presentation aids are available, as you obviously don't want to have to deliver your speech without them, and it can be nerve-racking to have the class sit and watch while you try to figure out the technology. It is essential that you are prepared both to access and use your presentation aids.

A few more things regarding presentation aids: your presentation aids are not your delivery outline! Your presentation aids shouldn't be something you are turning around and talking to (unless that is appropriate for where you are in your speech). Your focus is on talking to your audience, not your presentation aid. Similar to what was emphasized before regarding delivery, you want to rehearse delivering the speech (as opposed to memorizing it), and the rehearsal of delivering the speech includes rehearsing with your presentation aids.

## Delivering your Speech

Finally, we will cover some key topics and strategies for delivering your speech.

### Paralanguage

When presenting it's important to strategically use of paralanguage. **Paralanguage** is the vocal but nonverbal dimension of speech. It involves things like inflection, stresses, volume, rate, pauses, rhythm, and creating variety.

The simplest and most direct thing to remember is that **variety** is important. What this means is that you want to avoid the delivery of your speech sounding repetitive. Probably the most common thing is falling into a repetitive rhythmic pattern. This occurs when the speech starts to sound something like this: blah blah blah blah blah blah pause blah blah blah blah blah blah pause, etc.

When the speech delivery sounds like this, it seems like the person is reading until they run out of breath, taking a breath, and then reading some more. It creates a steady rhythm that can distract the listener from the words and message, and it also can make the message hard to hear because it tends to lead to breaks in the middle of sentences in places where you normally wouldn't have breaks. This often comes from trying to memorize the speech, rather than practicing delivering the speech. When it comes to paralanguage, the important thing is to remember that you want your delivery to feel conversational. When you have a conversation, you will naturally fall into inflection patterns, stresses, pauses, etc. That will provide the variety that you need to keep your paralanguage interesting, and it really points to the importance of practicing delivering the speech rather than trying to memorize the speech.

One other important thing regarding paralanguage is to articulate clearly and effectively. This involves not speaking too fast or too slow, and it also means we need to pay attention to enunciating clearly. In casual conversation, we sometimes tend to blend words together; for example, “do you know what I am saying?” tends to sound more like “gnome saying?,” and “what time is it?” sounds more like “what timezit?” Those expressions can be fine in casual conversation, but in a speech, we want to be sure we are articulating clearly and enunciating our words fully to best help our audience understand and hear our message.

It can be helpful to add notes about paralanguage on your delivery outline, such as “slow down here,” or “be sure to really accent these words,” etc.

## Eye, Facial, and Body Communication

When it comes to eye communication, you definitely want to make eye contact with your audience (without staring at any one person too long). This includes your instructor; sometimes students begin delivering their speech to the instructor, which is a natural thing to do, but you want to make sure you're making eye contact with your entire audience. This obviously means you don't want to be reading from your notes too much, and you don't want to have your back turned to the audience and be reading or speaking to your PowerPoint slides. As with paralanguage, variety is important: you want to look around the room, making eye contact with your audience, and occasionally looking at your notes and/or your PowerPoint as appropriate.

Similarly, with facial communication, you will want some variety, and you will want to try to avoid a negative expression or a scowl. If you are passionate about your topic and prepared, your facial expressions will most likely just be natural and reflect that passion. However, it can be helpful to add some notes to your delivery outline if this is something you struggle with.

Finally, consider what you will do with your body when you deliver the speech. Moving around while delivering the speech can feel much more challenging than making eye contact, and, fortunately, unless it is an integral part of your speech, it is often unnecessary. When it comes to your body movement and body communication, the two most important things are to have good posture and to avoid hiding behind something. When it comes to posture, sometimes students try to make themselves “smaller” by slumping, which doesn't work well for projecting confidence. In addition, it makes it harder to breathe well and speak

well. Regarding hiding, sometimes students are tempted to stand behind the lectern/computer station, which is something you want to avoid. Stand where your audience can see you fully so you can communicate most effectively.

## Using your Delivery Outline

Finally, when it comes to using your delivery outline, you want to be subtle (this is really a part of eye contact, as discussed earlier). You aren't reading your speech – never use your preparation outline for your delivery outline – so you shouldn't be staring at your delivery outline. Know your speech well, be rehearsed, and use your delivery outline to prompt you or remind you of specific quotes and things regarding the delivery of the speech itself. As with all parts of delivery, the goal is to have the use of notes feel natural.

Sometimes students focus on the delivery outline/note cards because doing so is more comfortable than looking at the audience, but this is not a good strategy. Communicate with your audience by looking at them, rather than your notes.

When it comes to delivery and rehearsal, the key thing is that you are rehearsing the actual delivery of the speech, not trying to memorize it. There is a big difference between having a speech memorized and having practiced the delivery of the speech, and students often find giving a speech is much more stressful if they have only tried to memorize it, rather than focusing on rehearsing the actual delivery.

## Conclusion

The organization and outlining of your speech may not be the most interesting part to think about, but without it, great ideas will seem jumbled and confusing to your audience. Even more, good connectives will ensure your audience can follow you and understand the logical connections you are making with your main ideas, introduction, and conclusion.

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## Chapter Attribution:

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## "you" statements

Moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.

## 6 X 6 rule

A guide for text on visual aids. Generally present no more than six bullet points with no more than six words per bullet point on a slide. Only break this rule if you have a compelling reason.

## abstract

Refers to words that relate to ideas or concepts that exist only in your mind and do not represent a tangible object.

## abstraction ladder

A diagram that explains the process of abstraction.

## academic sources

Peer-reviewed, published articles, journals, and sources

## accent

Nonverbal communication that emphasizes a portion of a message or word rather than the message as a whole.

## accidental communication

When an individual sends messages to another person without realizing those messages are being sent.

## Accusations

Hurtful assignments of fault or blame.

## acquiescent responses

Involve crying, conceding, or apologizing.

### acting with awareness

Purposefully focusing one's attention on the activity or interaction in which one is engaged.

### action models

A category of communication models that view communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver.

### active

Strategy of asking around about, or investigating, another person to learn information about them.

### active friendships

Type of stabilized friendship where there is a negotiated sense of mutual accessibility and availability for both parties in the friendship.

### active verbal responses

Involve attacking the other, defending yourself, or asking for an explanation.

### ad hominem

A logical fallacy of focusing judgment on the provider of a message rather than on the message itself.

### advising statements

Hurtfully call for a course of action.

### affect

“Any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. Often described in terms of positive affect or negative affect, both mood and emotion are considered affective states.”

### affect displays

Nonverbal cues that show feelings and emotions.

### affectionless psychopathy

The inability to show affection or care about others.

### affective

The level of persuasive impact consisting of feelings, attitudes, opinions, positions, and values.

### affective orientation

An individual's recognition of their own emotions and the emotions of others and reliance on these emotions during decision making processes.

### affiliation

A connection or association with others.

### agape

The love style that involves altruism, giving, caring, kindness, and other-centered love.

### agentic friendships

Friendships marked by activity.

### Agreeableness

degree to which someone engages in prosocial behaviors like altruism, cooperation, and compassion

### alexithymia

A general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way.

### ambiguous language

Language that has multiple meanings.

### analyzing

This is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message.

### anecdote

a brief account or story of an interesting or humorous event.

### anonymous CMC identity

People in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is simply not known.

### anticipation of future interaction

The belief that we will deal with someone again, thus boosting the need to reduce uncertainty.

### anxious shyness

The fear associated with dealing with others face-to-face.

### appreciative listening

The type of listening you engage in for pleasure or enjoyment.

### appropriate communication

Communication featuring tactics and behaviors that most people would consider acceptable and ethical.

### argument

A verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.

### argumentativeness

Communication trait that predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues.

### ARPANET

The U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, which was the precursor to what is now known as the Internet.

### Artifacts

Items with which we adorn our bodies with or carry with us.

### assertiveness

The degree to which an individual can initiate, maintain, and terminate conversations, according to their interpersonal goals during interpersonal interactions.

### asynchronous communication

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication.

### attending

The act of focusing on specific objects or stimuli in the world around you

### attention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of what's happening internally and externally moment-to-moment.

### attitude

Factor of mindful practice that involves being curious, open, and nonjudgmental.

### attraction

Interest in another person and a desire to get to know them better.

### attribution error

The tendency to explain another individual's behavior in relation to the individual's internal tendencies rather than an external factor.

### authoritarianism

A form of social organization where individuals favor absolute obedience to an authority (or authorities) as opposed to individual freedom.

### autonomy

An individual's independence in their behaviors and thoughts within a marriage relationship.

## avoidance

Conflict management style where an individual attempt to either prevent a conflict from occurring or leaves a conflict when initiated.

## avoidance strategies

Used to evade communication that might threaten a relationship.

## avoiding

The fourth stage of Coming Apart when a couple stays away from each other entirely, ceases communication, and considers moving out of the shared residence.

## Balance strategies

Used to maintain equality in the relationship so that partners do not feel underbenefited or overbenefited.

## behavioral

The level of persuasive impact consisting of actions and habits.

## Behavioral CQ

The degree to which an individual behaves in a manner that is consistent with what they know about other cultures.

## behavioral jealousy

The acts of observing, investigating, and reacting to fears and suspicions about relational threat.

## belief

Assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something.

## bias

An attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness.

## biased language

Language that shows preference in favor of or against a certain point-of-view, shows prejudice, or is demeaning to others.

## bonding

The final stage of Coming Together when commitment is increased and announced to wider social networks.

## boundary turbulence

Chaotic condition resulting when violations of explicit or implicit privacy rules are broken within a relationship.

## breadth

Amount various topics discussed.

## bullying

A form of repeated communication or behavior by an aggressive individual of greater power who targets an individual perceived as weaker for harm or discomfort.

## buzz word

Informal word or jargon used among a particular group of people.

## career strategizing

The process of creating a plan of action for one's career path and trajectory.

## catfishing

Deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting victims into an emotional/romantic relationship.

## cause/effect pattern

A common organizational pattern which groups main points of a topic start with the cause(s), followed by the effect(s)

### central route

From the Elaboration Likelihood Model, decision making or persuasion that relies on at least a fair amount of elaboration.

### channel

The mode, means or media that transmits a message.

### Charisma

An indicator of credibility, it is enough attractiveness or charm or gravitas to make others pay attention.

### Chronemics

The meaning(s) of time and use of it to communicate.

### chronological organizational pattern

An organizational pattern that groups information based on time order or in a set chronology—first this occurred, then this, then this, then that

### chunking

purposefully grouping information into an order the audience can logically follow

### circumscribing

The second stage of Coming Apart, when partners strive to limit the number of interactions and amount of communication with each other.

### Cisnormativity

A bias involving presumptions about gender assignment, such as the presumption of a gender binary, or expectations of conformity to gender roles even when transgender identities are otherwise acknowledged.

### classical conditioning

The process by which a new stimulus is so repetitively and consistently associated with an original stimulus that it elicits the same responses as the original.

## cliché

Idea or expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.

## clincher

something memorable with which to conclude your speech

## closed system

Information is behind a paywall or requires a subscription.

## co-culture

Regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that exerts influence in society.

## co-present interactions

When people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another.

## code-switching

Differences in language use based on the environment, who you are talking to, and the reason for communicating.

## coercive power

The base of power that is an ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts.

## cognitive

The level of persuasive impact consisting of thoughts and beliefs.

## cognitive complexity

A characteristic of seeing the world from multiple and nuanced perspectives that is associated with communication effectiveness.

## Cognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual has cultural knowledge.

### cognitive dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people respond and react to the world around them.

### cognitive dissonance

An unpleasant sensation of experiencing regretted or inconsistent beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors.

### cognitive jealousy

Thoughts and worries that plague one who suspects a rival's threat to a relationship.

### collective self-esteem

The aspect of an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.

### collectivism

Characteristics of a culture that values cooperation and harmony and considers the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of the individual.

### collegial

A type of relationship explicitly united in a common purpose and respect each other's abilities to work toward that purpose.

### collegial peers

Type of coworker with whom we have moderate levels of trust, self-disclosure, and openness.

### colloquialism

Informal expression used in casual conversation that is often specific to certain dialects or geographic regions of a country.

### commemorative friendships

Type of stabilized friendship that reflects a specific space and time in our lives, but current interaction is minimal and primarily reflects a time when the two friends were highly involved in each other's lives.

### communal friendships

Friendships marked by intimacy, personal/emotional expressiveness, amount of self-disclosure, quality of self-disclosure, confiding, and emotional supportiveness.

### communication

The process by which messages representing information, meaning, and emotion are sent and received between two or more people.

### communication apprehension

The fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.

### communication competence

Communication that is both socially appropriate and personally effective.

### communication dispositions

General patterns of communicative behavior.

### communication ethics

Considering the consequences of your messages and whether you are treating others fairly and with the same respect that you deserve and desire.

### communication motives

Reasons why we communicate with others.

### communication needs

Shows us how communication fulfills our needs.

### communicator style

the way one verbally, nonverbally, and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, filtered, or understood

### comparison level (CL)

The minimum standard for satisfaction that a relational partner is willing to tolerate.

### comparison level of alternatives (CLalt)

The threshold for satisfaction in a relationship determined by available alternative arrangements.

### Compassion

The sympathetic consciousness for someone who is suffering or unfortunate

### compatible

Able to exist together harmoniously.

### competence

An indicator of credibility, it is the characteristic of possessing knowledge about, or experience with, a topic.

### complement

Nonverbal communication that reinforces verbal communication.

### complementary

When people fulfill each other's needs by featuring differing characteristics.

### compliance

When an individual accepts an influencer's influence and alters their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

### comprehension listening

Listening for facts, information, or ideas that may be of use to you.

### computer mediated communication

The use of some form of digital technology to facilitate interaction between two or more people.

## Concealment

Deception that involves withholding, rather than fabricating, of information.

## concept-orientation

Family communication pattern where freedom of expression is encouraged, and communication is frequent and family life is pleasurable.

## conditioning

The act of associating things in perception to create particular desired outcomes.

## conflict

An interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations, resources, and/or values.

## Connective statements

statements generally designed to help “connect” parts of your speech to make it easier for audience members to follow.

## connotation

What a word suggests or implies; connotations give words their emotional impact.

## connotative definitions

The emotions or associations a person makes when exposed to a symbol.

## Conscientiousness

the degree to which an individual is aware of their actions and how their actions impact other people.

## contact frequency

How often relational partners communicate with each other.

## content level

Information that is communicated through the denotative and literal meanings of words.

## Context-Situated Communication

The type of communication that may be accomplished as interpersonal, mass, public, and organizational but that takes place in specific and well-established areas or contexts, such as politics, health, sports, and gender.

## contextual dialectics

Friendship dialectics that stem out of the cultural order where the friendship exists.

## contradict

Nonverbal communication conveying the opposite meaning of verbal communication.

## converge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be similar.

## Conversational narcissism

an extreme focusing of one's interests and desires during an interpersonal interaction while completely ignoring the interests and desires of another person

## conversations

Interpersonal interactions through which you share facts and information as well as your ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people.

## cost escalations

A form of relational disengagement involving tactics designed to make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship.

## Credibility

A characteristic we assign to each other that determines whether we pay attention to, and believe, each other.

## critical listening

To analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence.

### cross-group friendship

Friendship that exists between two individuals who belong to two or more different cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, etc.).

### cues filtered out perspective

The argument that mediated communication (CMC) is inherently impersonal.

### cues to action

Inputs like media or friends that create awareness or concern about a potential threat, in the Health Belief Model.

### cultural intelligence

The degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations.

### culture

A group of people who through a process of learning can share perceptions of the world that influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior.

### culture as normative

The basic idea that one's culture provides the rules, regulations, and norms that govern a culture and how people act with other members of that society.

### cyberbullying

Intentional harm, inflicted through online and social media platforms, that is repeated over time.

### deception

“a deliberate act perpetuated by a sender to engender in a receiver beliefs contrary to what the sender believes is true.”<sup>4</sup>

### denotation

The dictionary definition or descriptive meaning of a word.

## denotative definitions

Definitions for words commonly found in dictionaries.

## depersonalization

A form of relational disengagement where an individual stops all the interaction that is not task-focused or simply avoids the person.

## depression

A psychological disorder characterized by varying degrees of disappointment, guilt, hopelessness, loneliness, sadness, self-doubt, all of which negatively impact a person's general mental and physical wellbeing.

## depth

How deep or intensely a topic is discussed.

## describing

Being detailed focused on what is occurring while putting it into words.

## deviance

Behavior that is unexpected or out of place and boosts the need to reduce uncertainty.

## deviant workplace behavior

The voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its members.

## dialectical tension

How individuals deal with struggles in their relationship.

## dialectics

Opposing forces that create everyday experiences of feeling pushed and pulled at the same time.

## differentiating

The first stage of coming apart when parties start to disengage with their identity as a couple in favor of their own.

## direct strategies

Used to remind a partner of relationship objectives.

## directive support

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership model that involves a leader overseeing the day-to-day tasks that a follower accomplishes.

## Directives

Involve a negative order or command.

## disagreement

A difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people.

## discourse

Spoken or written discussion of a subject.

## dismissing attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as worthy of love, but generally believe that others will be deceptive and reject them in interpersonal relationships.

## distributive conflict

A win-lose approach, whereby conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses.

## diverge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be drastically different.

## dogmatism

The inclination to believe one's point-of-view as undeniably true based on insufficient premises and without consideration of evidence and the opinions of others.

## domestic violence

The willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.”[29](#)

## dominant culture

The established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs of a society.

## dormant friendships

Type of stabilized friendship that “share either a valued history or a sufficient amount of sustained contact to anticipate or remain eligible for a resumption of the friendship at any time.”

## Dunning-Kruger effect

The tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have nothing to support that perception.

## duration

The length in time of a relationship.

## dynamism

An indicator of credibility, it is a large measure of enthusiasm and animation.

## dysfluencies

Vocal fillers or sounds that we make to fill dead air while we are thinking of what to say next.

## ease of opportunity

When romantic workplace relationships happen because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another.

### effective communication

Communication that achieves the goal(s) at least one party had for an interaction.

### elaboration

The effortful and careful processing of information, alternatives, and possible outcomes, to make a decision.

### emblems

Gestures that are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.

### emoticon

A series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended feelings and/or tone.

### emotional awareness

An individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why.

### emotional blackmail

Trying to influence someone's behavior or persuade them to do something by making them feel guilty or exploiting their emotions.

### emotional intelligence

The ability to recognize your own emotions and the emotions of others.

### emotional jealousy

The affect dimension of jealousy that may carry feelings of anxiety, discomfort, anger, fear, sadness, shame, and guilt.

### emotional loneliness

Form of loneliness that occurs when an individual feels that he or she does not have an emotional connection with others.

## emotional vampires

A colloquial term used to describe individuals with whom we interact that use more of our emotional resources when interacting with people, which often causes an increase in our levels of stress.

## emotions

The physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment.

## empathic listening

Attempting to put yourself in another person's shoes or to provide a supportive listening environment.

## empathizing

This is used to show that you identify with the speaker's information.

## empathy

The ability to recognize and mutually experience another person's attitudes, emotions, experiences, and thoughts.

## environment

The context or situation where communication occurs.

## equivocation

Use of a statement that could be interpreted as having more than one meaning, for the sake of obscuring the whole truth.

## eros

The love style that emphasizes love and romance, physical beauty and attraction, emotional intensity, and strong commitment.

## ethics

The judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.

## ethnocentrism

The degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating

different cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior.

### euphemism

Replacing blunt words with more polite words.

### Evaluations

Messages that assess value or worth, which may be hurtful when delivering a negative assessment.

### evaluative listening

Listening for a speaker's main points and determining the strengths and weaknesses to formulate a rebuttal or present important points that may not have been covered.

### excuse-making

Any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behavior from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look better and more in control.

### expectancy violation theory

An understanding of what happens when an individual within an interpersonal interaction violates the norms for that interaction.

### experimenting

The second stage of coming together when "small talk" happens and commonalities are discovered.

### expert power

The base of power that is the ability to influence others because of one's knowledge.

### explicitly previewing

clear and easy to follow statement of main points so that there is no question in your audience's minds what they are.

### expressive communication

Messages that are sent either verbally or nonverbally related to an individual's emotions and feelings.

### external locus of control

The belief that an individual's behavior and circumstances exist because of forces outside the individual's control.

### extraversion

An individual's likelihood to be talkative, dynamic, and outgoing.

### eye gaze

The act of fixing your eyes on someone.

### face

The standing or position a person has in the eyes of others.

### Falsification

Deliberately presenting information that is untrue or fraudulent as factual.

### family

Two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; living together or apart by choice or circumstance; having interaction within family roles; creating and maintaining a common culture; being characterized by economic cooperation; deciding to have or not to have children, either own or adopted; having boundaries; and claiming mutual affection.

### fearful attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as unworthy of love and generally believe that others will react negatively through either deception or rejection.

### Features

options within a channel/mode, what can be done in the mode.

## feedback

The response to the message.

## feelings

The responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.

## feminine

Cultures focused on having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial).

## followership

The act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals.

## formal language

Specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar that uses complex sentences, full words, and third-person pronouns.

## gaslighting

Falsely leading another to doubt their own ability to perceive reality accurately.

## gatekeeper

A "middleman" who passes along a message somewhere between the source and the receiver.

## gender

The behaviors and traits society considers masculine and feminine.

## general purpose

the overall goal of a presentation, usually limited to three categories: to inform, to persuade, or to entertain

## genogram

A pictorial representation of a family across generations that can be used to track generations of family interactions, medical issues, psychological issues, relationship patterns, and any other variable a researcher or clinician may be interested in studying.

## Gestures

Movements of the body, especially the arms and hands, that convey meaning.

## goals

Expectations and hopes for relational functions and outcomes.

## good will

An indicator of credibility, it is a desire to help another person, to leave them better off than you found them.

## group

Three or more people interacting together to achieve a common goal.

## haptics

The study of touch as a form of communication.

## hearing

A passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear.

## Hereonormativity

a bias whereby people assume that others are heterosexual

## heuristic function

The use of language to explore and investigate the world, solve problems, and learn from your discoveries and experiences.

## heuristics

Mental shortcuts for making decisions quickly and easily.

## high-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by relying more on nonverbal context or behavior than on verbal symbols in communication.

## High-quality LMX relationships

relationships "characterized by greater input in decisions, mutual support, informal influence, trust, and greater negotiating latitude."

## hyperpersonal

CMC interactions that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions.

## ideal-self

The version of yourself that you would like to be, which is created through our life experiences, cultural demands, and expectations of others.

## idealism

An indicator of credibility, it is the quality of being unlike the targets of persuasion but in ways that they will admire and/or aspire to.

## identification

When an individual accepts influence because they want to have a satisfying relationship with the influencer or influencing group.

## ideology of traditionalism

Marriages that are marked by a more historically traditional, conservative perspective of marriage.

## idiom

Expression or figure of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally.

## illustrators

Kinesics that emphasize or explain a word.

### imaginative function

The use of language to play with ideas that do not exist in the real-world.

### Imaginative functions

language which helps to create imaginary constructs and tell stories

### importance to identity

The degree to which group membership is important to an individual.

### impression formation

How we present ourselves to others through our online persona.

### impression management

"The attempt to generate as favorable an impression of ourselves as possible, particularly through both verbal and nonverbal techniques of self-presentation."

### incentive value

The belief that knowing someone will benefit us in some way, thus boosting the need to reduce uncertainty.

### independents

Marital definition where couples have a high level of interdependence, an unconventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement.

### indigenous peoples

Populations that originated in a particular place rather than moved there.

### indirect suggestions

Joking or hinting about more serious stages of a relationships such as marriage or having children.

### individualism

Characteristics of a culture that values being self-reliant and self-motivated, believes in personal freedom and privacy, and celebrates personal achievement.

## individuality

Aspect of Murray Bowen's family system theory that emphasizes that there is a universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward separateness, uniqueness, and distinctiveness.

## indulgence

Cultural orientation marked by immediate gratification for individual desires.

## Infidelity

Behaviors of "cheating," being unfaithful to a committed spouse or other sexual partner.

## inflection

Changes in vocal pitch.

## influence

When an individual or group of people alters another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors through accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communication.

## informal language

Specific writing and spoken style that is more colloquial or common in tone; contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations; and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays.

## information peers

Type of coworker who we rely on for information about job tasks and the organization itself.

## informational power

The base of power that is an ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through the provision of information.

## informative statements

Reveal unwanted information.

### initiating

The first stage of coming together when making contact and signaling interest are the goals.

### instrumental function

The use of language as a means for meeting your needs, manipulating and controlling your environment, and expressing your feelings.

### integrating

The fourth stage of coming together when deeper levels of expectations and commitment, perhaps including exclusivity, are reached.

### integrative conflict

A win-win approach to conflict, whereby both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial.

### intensifying

The third stage of coming together when identity as a couple is established and knowledge about partners increases greatly.

### intensity

The volume of your speech; how loudly or softly you express yourself.

### intention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of why you are doing something.

### interaction model

Communication model that views the sender and the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication.

### interaction models

A category of communication models that portray both the sender AND the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication they share.

### interaction variability

The variety of interaction types experienced, and topics covered, with particular relational partners.

### interactional dialectics

Friendship dialectics that help us understand how communicative behavior happens within friendships

### interactional function

The use of language to help you form and maintain relationships.

### interactive

Strategy of participating in interaction with another person to learn information about them.

### interdependence

When individuals involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important.

### internal locus of control

The belief that an individual can control their behavior and life circumstances.

### Internal previews

Connective statements that let your audience know what is coming up next in the speech and what to expect with regard to the content of your speech.

### Internal summaries

Connective statements which emphasize what has come before and remind the audience of what has been covered.

### internalization

When an individual adopts influence and alters their thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors because doing so is intrinsically rewarding.

### interpersonal communication

Communication between a small number of people that is the essence of relationships and often face-to-face and synchronous.

## interpreting

Interpretation is the act of assigning meaning to a stimulus and then determining the worth of the object (evaluation).

## intrapersonal

Something that exists or occurs within an individual's self or mind.

## intrapersonal communication

Communication phenomena that exist within or occurs because of an individual's self or mind.

## introversion

An individual's likelihood to be quiet, shy, and more reserved

## invulnerable responses

Range from ignoring the message to laughing.

## jargon

The specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless or difficult for outsiders to understand.

## jealousy

A set of "cognitive, emotional, and coping behaviors" in response to "a potential threat to, or an actual loss of a valued relationship due to a real or imagined rival for a partner's attention."[12](#)

## Johari Window

A model that illustrates self-disclosure and the process by which you interact with other people.

## Jokes

Hurtful messages that involve a prank or witticism.

## kinesics

The study of how the body is used in communication and includes facial expressions, eye behaviors, posture, and gestures.

## language

A system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols.

## language adaptation

The ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner

## language awareness

a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.

## lateral reading

Fact-checking source claims by reading other sites and resources.

## launching stage

Period in a family life cycle when late adolescents leave the parental home and venture out into the world as young singles themselves.

## leader-member exchange

Theory of leadership that explores how leaders enter into two-way relationships with followers through a series of exchange agreements enabling followers to grow or be held back.

## legitimate power

The base of power that is the valid right to influence another person based on cultural or structural roles.

## Lies

deceptive speech acts that result in the hurt of recipients.

## linguistic determinism

The perspective that language influences thoughts.

## linguistic relativity

The argument that the structure of a language influences its speakers' worldview or cognition, and thus individuals' languages determine or influence their perceptions of the world.

## listening

A complex psychological process that can be defined as the process of physically hearing, interpreting that sound, and understanding the significance of it.

## locus of control

An individual's perceived control over their behavior and life circumstances.

## loneliness

An individual's emotional distress that results from a feeling of solitude or isolation from social relationships.

## long-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the future and not the present or past.

## looking glass self

The concept that recognizes our self-images are shaped by how others act around, and speak to, us as well as by what we inherently know about ourselves.

## love style

A persistent attitude about how love is perceived and valued, practiced and experienced, that is usually stable but may change over time.

## low-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by placing a great deal of emphasis on the words someone uses.

## low-quality LMX relationships

relationships "characterized by less support, more formal supervision, little or no involvement in decisions, and less trust and attention from the leader."

## ludic

The love style that features viewing of love as a game to be played according to rules that include acceptance of multiple partners, deception, and manipulation.

## Machiavellianism

Personality trait posed by Richard Christie where cunningness and deceit are exalted as a means of attaining and maintaining power to accomplish specific, self-centered goals.

## mania

The love style characterized by dependence, uncertainty, jealousy, and obsessive need for affirmation.

## masculine

Cultures focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge.

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Theory of motivation proposed by Abraham Maslow comprising a five-tier, hierarchical pyramid of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.

## mass communication

The process by which sources use mediated channels to address large, diverse audiences whose members are usually anonymous, dispersed in space and possibly, time.

## matching hypothesis

A prediction that people are more likely to find themselves in romantic relationships with people who are perceived as similarly physically attractive.

## Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis

Hypothesis posed by John Bowlby that predicts that infants who are denied maternal attachment will experience problematic outcomes later in life.

## membership esteem

The degree to which an individual sees themselves as a “good” member of a group.

## message

The information, meaning, and/or emotion conveyed by verbal or nonverbal means, the content of a communication interaction.

## message/bulletin boards

Online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages.

## metacognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual is consciously aware of their intercultural interactions in a manner that helps them have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures.

## Metacommunication

communication about communication

## metamessage

The meaning beyond the words themselves.

## microculture

Cultural patterns of behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization.

## mindful awareness

To be consciously aware of your physical presence, cognitive processes, and emotional state while engaged in an activity.

## mindful communication

The process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice

## mindful practice

The conscious development of skills such as greater ability to direct and sustain our attention, less reactivity, greater discernment and compassion, and enhanced capacity to disidentify from one's concept of self.

## model

A simplified representation (often graphic) of a system that highlights the crucial components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real world.

## modes

a synonym for communication channels, like text messaging, phone calls, video calls, and email are all unique channels

## monotone

The quality of voice that features virtually no change in pitch and may be evaluated as droning and lifeless.

## motivational CQ

The degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to differing cultural environments.

## narcissism

A psychological condition (or personality disorder) in which a person has a preoccupation with one's self.

## netiquette

The set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediated technologies.

## Neuroticism

the degree to which an individual is vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and emotional instability.

## noise

Anything that interferes with, hinders, or distorts a message.

## Nonacademic information sources

Popular press information sources.

## nonjudging of inner experience

Being consciously aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them.

## nonreactivity to inner experience

Taking a step back and evaluating things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective.

## Nonverbal communication

Communication that is produced by some means other than words such as eye contact, body language, or vocal cues.

## nonverbal immediacy

Physical and/or psychological closeness.

## nonverbal vocalization

A type of paralanguage that consists of sounds, noises, and behaviors that are often accompanied by body language.

## norms

Informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

## observing

Being aware of what is going on inside yourself and in the external environment.

## oculesics

The study of how individuals communicate through eye behavior.

## olfactics

The study of scent and communication.

## open system

Open system describes information that is publicly available and accessible.

## Openness

“openness to experience,” or the idea that some people are more welcoming of new things.

## operant conditioning

The process by which a behavior is so repetitively and consistently associated with a positive or a negative consequence that its continued performance is encouraged or discouraged effectively.

## organization

A social, structured collectivity in which activities are coordinated in order to achieve individual and collective goals

## organizational communication

The interaction between members of an organization.

## organizing

Organizing is making sense of the stimuli or assigning meaning to it.

## ostracized

Excluded or removed from a group by others in that group.

## outcomes

iohboihb

## outline

a visual structure where you can compile information into a well-organized document

## paralanguage

Voice characteristics and nonverbal vocalizations that communicate feelings, intentions, and meanings. In a speech, paralanguage involves things like inflection, stresses, volume, rate, pauses, rhythm, and creating variety.

## paraphrase

To restate what another person said using different words.

## passive

Strategy of observing another person to learn information about them.

## patterns of organization

Common ways to organize a speech logically, these include chronological, spatial, topical, cause-effect, and problem-solution formats.

### Perceived barriers

Anything a persuasive target feels will make the recommended behavior difficult or less likely to be performed, in the Health Belief Model.

### Perceived benefits

Anything the persuasive target feels will make the recommended behavior easier or more likely to be performed, in the Health Belief Model.

### Perceived severity

The degree to which a problem or threat is believed by a target of persuasion to be serious and bad, in the Health Belief Model.

### Perceived susceptibility

The degree to which a target of persuasion believes they are vulnerable to a problem or threat, in the Health Belief Model.

### perception

The process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information that comes in through your five senses.

### peripheral route

From the Elaboration Likelihood Model, decision making or persuasion that relies on very little elaboration.

### personal function

The use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self.

### personal responsibility

An individual's willingness to be accountable for how they feel, think, and behave.

### personal story

a story about yourself that is relevant to your topic

## personality

The combination of traits or qualities such as behavior, emotional stability, and mental attributes that make a person unique.

## Persuasion

The communicative process by which one person influences what another person thinks or believes, feels, or does.

## physical attraction

The degree to which one person finds another person aesthetically pleasing.

## physical bullying

Hitting, kicking, pulling hair, harming possessions, giving a “wedgie,” or a plethora of other acts of aggravation or violence.

## pitch

The placement of your voice on the musical scale; the basis on which singing voices are classified as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, or bass voices.

## postmodern friendship

Friendship where the “participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific friendships. This co-construction involves negotiating and affirming (or not) identities and intersubjectively creating relational and personal realities through communication.”

## Posture

The shape of our bodies when standing or sitting and varies from curved and slouched to erect and straight.

## power

An indicator of credibility, it is the ability to reward or punish someone.

### power distance

The degree to which those people and organizations with less power within a culture accept and expect that power is unequally distributed within their culture.

### pragma

The love style that is practical, logical and rational, resulting sometimes in arranged relationships.

### preoccupied attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who do not perceive themselves as worthy of love, but do generally see people as trustworthy and available for interpersonal relationships.

### Preparation outlines

A written comprehensive outline that include all of the information in your speech. These are often full-sentences and include in-text citations and a reference page

### presentation aids

a form of supporting materials, visual and/or auditory examples and tools used to help your intended audience better understand and remember the key ideas in your speech.

### presenting the relationship to outsiders

Form of secret testing in which the partner publicly declares their relationship status to gauge a partner's response.

### Privacy boundaries

Symbolically placed borders between personal private information and details that are shared with others.

### private collective esteem

The degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group.

### problem-solution pattern

A common organizational pattern asking the audience to address a problem with a concrete course of action

### procedural disagreements

Disagreements concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented.

### process

Something that is ongoing, dynamic, and changing with a purpose or towards some end

### profession

An occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience.

### professionalism

The aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession.

### proxemics

The study of communication through the use and understanding of physical space.

### pseudonymity CMC identity

Identity that someone takes on that is beyond themselves in the creation of CMC messages.

### public affairs and issue management

The communication employed as organizations as collectives interact with their publics such as citizens, consumers, government bodies, and the media.

### public collective self-esteem

The degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively.

### public communication

A one-to-many mode of communicating that occurs when an individual addresses an entire audience in a public setting.

## questions

Asked in a way that implies something negative.

## racism

Bias against others on the basis of their race or ethnicity.

## racist language

Language that demeans or insults people based on their race or ethnicity.

## Rapport

Demonstrating care, concern, and interest in a partner. In a speech it is the relationship or connection you make with your audience.

## real-life CMC identity

When our CMC identity and our FtF identities are congruent.

## receiver

The individual who decodes the message and tries to understand the source of the message and the meaning they intended.

## referent power

The base of power that is an ability to influence another person based on their desire to be associated with the persuader.

## regulate

Nonverbal communication which controls the flow of conversation.

## regulators

Gestures like head nods and eye contact that help initiate, coordinate, or terminate the flow of conversational turn taking.

## regulatory function

The use of language to control behavior.

### rejection sensitivity

The degree to which an individual expects to be rejected, readily perceives rejection when occurring, and experiences an intensely negative reaction to that rejection.

### relational bullying

The manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.

### relational dialectics

A “dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies”<sup>20</sup> such as integration vs. separation, expression vs. privacy, and stability vs. change.

### relational dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people view and organize themselves in relationships.

### relationship

A connection or association between people that is marked by affiliation, attachment, and commitment.

### relationship dialectic

Tensions in a relationship where individuals need to deal with integration vs. separation, expression vs. privacy, and stability vs. change.

### relationship maintenance

The behaviors and strategies that enable the stabilization point between relationship initiation and potential relationship destruction.

### relative language

Language that gains understanding by comparison.

### repeat

Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication, but could stand alone.

## representational function

The use of language to represent objects and ideas and to express your thoughts.

## Research

the process of discovering new knowledge and investigating a topic from different points of view

## responsiveness

The degree to which an individual considers other's feelings, listens to what others have to say, and recognizes the needs of others during interpersonal interactions.

## restraint

Cultural orientation marked by the belief that gratification should not be instantaneous and should be regulated by cultural rules and norms.

## reward power

The base of power that is an ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts.

## rhetoric

the practice, art, and study of using communication, particularly public address, to convince and persuade.

## rhetorical communication

Purposefully creating and sending messages to another person in the hopes of altering another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors.

## rhetorical question

a question to which no actual reply is expected.

## rhythm

Variation in the flow of your voice created by differences in the pitch, intensity, tempo, and length of word syllables.

## richness

The potential information carrying capacity of data.

## right-wing authoritarians

Individuals who believe in submitting themselves to established, legitimate authorities; strict adherence to social and cultural norms; and the need to punish those who do not submit to authorities or who violate social and cultural norms.

## romantic relationship

A union that features any or all of: affection, caregiving, shared relational identity, and intimacy in the form of emotional, intellectual, physical or sexual closeness.

## romantic relationships

Romantic relationships involve a bond of affection with a specific partner that researchers believe involves several psychological features: a desire for emotional closeness and union with the partner, caregiving, emotional dependency on the relationship and the partner, a separation anxiety when the other person is not there, and a willingness to sacrifice for the other love.

## romantic workplace relationship

When two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.

## rules

Explicit guidelines (generally written down) that govern acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

## Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

A theory that suggests that language impacts perceptions. Language is ascertained by the perceived reality of a culture.

## secret tests

Indirect strategies individuals use to assess the state of their relationship.

### secure attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who believe that they are loveable and expect that others will generally behave in accepting and responsive ways within interpersonal interactions.

### selective perception

Due to our limited cognitive abilities we are always focusing on a particular things and ignoring other things

### Self-Compassion

Being touched by the suffering of others, opening one's awareness to others' pain and not avoiding or disconnecting from it, so that feelings of kindness toward others and the desire to alleviate their suffering emerge.

### Self-compassion

Being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience.

### self-concept

An individual's relatively stable mental picture of him or herself.

### self-conscious shyness

Feeling conspicuous or socially exposed when dealing with others face-to-face.

### self-disclosure

The process of sharing information with another person.

### self-esteem

An individual's subjective evaluation of their abilities and limitations.

## self-image

The view an individual has of themselves.

## Self-kindness

Extending the same level of care and understanding to ourselves as we would to others

## self-monitoring

The ability to focus on and recognize your own behavior, including communication.

## self-worth

The degree to which you see yourself as a good person who deserves to be valued and respected.

## semantic rules

the dictionary definition of the word

## sender

The person who decides to communicate, identifies the intent of the message (entertain, inform, distract), and constructs its content.

## separates

Marital definition where couples have low interdependence, conventional ideology, and low levels of conflict engagement.

## sex

A person's biological status as male or female, as determined by chromosomes and secondary sex characteristics.

## sexism

Bias of others based on their biological sex.

## sexist language

Language that excludes individuals on the basis of gender or shows a bias toward or against people due to their gender.

## sharing

The process of revealing and disclosing information about oneself to another.

## short messaging service (SMS)

Communication technology allowing for the exchange of short alphanumeric messages between digital and mobile devices found in phones, the Web, or in mobile communication systems (commonly referred to as “text messaging”).

## short-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the past or present and not in the future.

## shyness

Discomfort when an individual is interacting with another person(s) in a social situation.

## sibling hostility

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors as causing trouble, getting into fights, teasing/name-calling, taking things without permission, etc.

## sibling warmth

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors such as sharing secrets, helping each other, teaching each other, showing physical affection, sharing possessions, etc.

## signifier

something that represents or signifies something else (e.g., the word 'dog')

## Signposts

connective statements that emphasize the physical movement through the speech content and let the audience know exactly where they are. Signposting can be as simple as “First,” “Next,” “Lastly” or using numbers such as “First,” “Second,” “Third,” and “Fourth.”

## silent listening

This occurs when you say nothing and is appropriate for certain situations.

## similarity

An indicator of credibility or romantic potential, it is the sharing of qualities so as to be like another person.

## similarity thesis

The idea that we tend to form relationships with others who are like us due to validation, predictability, and affiliation.

## slang

The nonstandard language of a particular culture or subculture.

## small group communication

Any interaction that involves at least three people interacting towards a common goal.

## social attraction

The degree to which an individual is seen as entertaining, intriguing, and/or fun to be around.

## Social Identity Theory

Explains how individuals develop their self-concept from social group membership.

## social loneliness

Form of loneliness that occurs from a lack of a satisfying social network.

## social penetration theory

Theory originally created by Altman and Taylor to explain how individuals gradually become more intimate as individuals self-disclose more and those self-disclosures become more intimate (deep).

## social presence

The degree to which we, as individuals, perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a relationship.

### social support

The perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from those people within their life.

### social-personal dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people socially relate to others or view themselves.

### socio-orientation

Family communication pattern where similarity is valued over individuality and self-expression, and harmony is preferred over expression of opinion.

### sociocommunicative orientation

The degree to which an individual communicates using responsive or assertive communication techniques.

### source

The person who decides to communicate, identifies the intent of the message (entertain, inform, distract), and constructs its content.

### spatial pattern

A common organizational pattern which moves thorough the thought process based one movement in space or direction

### speaking outline

a keyword outline used to deliver a speech – often extemporaneous

### special peer

Type of coworker relationship marked by high levels of trust and self-disclosure; like a “best friend” in the workplace.

### specific purpose statement

builds on your general purpose (such as to inform) and makes it more specific (as the name suggests)

## spin

The manipulation of language to achieve the most positive interpretation of words, to gain political advantage, or to deceive others.

## stagnating

The third stage of Coming Apart when the relationship has stopped improving or growing and emotional inertia blocks hopes for reconciliation.

## state-of-the-relationship talk

A form of relational disengagement where an individual explains to a coworker that a workplace friendship is ending.

## statements of desire

Harmfully express an individual preference.

## static evaluation

Language shows that people and things change.

## stereotype

A set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.

## storge

The love style that resembles, or develops slowly out of, friendship where stability and psychological closeness are valued more than passion.

## substantive disagreement

A disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue.

## substitute

Nonverbal communication that has a direct verbal translation.

## support

Any message or behavior that conveys caring or comfort to another person so as to improve their condition.

## supportive leadership behavior

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership model that occurs when a leader is focused on providing relational support for their followers

## symbol

A mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention

## synchronous

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are concurrently engaged in communication.

## system

Sets of elements standing in interrelation.

## task attraction

The perception that another possesses specific knowledge, skills, and/or contacts that may help with accomplishing specific goals.

## temperament

The genetic predisposition that causes an individual to behave, react, and think in a specific manner.

## tempo

The rate of your speech; how slowly or quickly you talk.

## temporal regularity

The degree to which a couple sticks to a consistent schedule in their day-to-day lives.

## terminating

The fifth and final stage of Coming Apart, and tenth overall, when the parties end the relationship, gradually or suddenly, and make arrangements for life after the "break-up."

## the hookup

When romantic workplace relationships occur because individuals want to engage in casual sex without any romantic entanglements.

## thesis

a succinct, single-sentence, description of the main idea for the presentation. Thesis are often based on and very similar to the specific purpose for the presentation.

## third-culture

When a couple negotiates their cultural background with the cultural background of their partner essentially creating a third-culture or hybrid culture between the two.

## Threats

Messages that indicate a desire or the potential to inflict physical or psychological harm.

## timbre

(pronounced "TAM-ber") The overall quality and tone, which is often called the "color" of your voice; the primary vocal quality that makes your voice either pleasant or disturbing to listen to.

## time

When romantic workplace relationships occur because people put in a great deal of time at work, so they are around and interact with potential romantic partners a great deal of the average workday.

## togetherness

Aspect of Murray Bowen's family system theory that emphasizes the complementary, universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward relationship, attachment, and connectedness.

### tolerance for disagreement

The degree to which an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.

### topical organizational pattern

A common organizational pattern that groups information logically into natural divisions such as “types of,” “kinds of,” “sorts of,” or “categories of.”

### traditionals

Marital definition where couples are highly interdependent, conventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement

### transaction models

A category of communication models that demonstrate how individuals often act as both sender and receiver simultaneously.

### Transitions

Connective statements that bridge between seemingly disconnected (but related) material, most commonly between your main points.

### trustworthiness

An indicator of credibility, it is the quality of others having faith in a person who is honest, consistent, and reliable.

### Uncertainty

An uncomfortable state of not knowing much or enough about something or someone.

### uncertainty avoidance

The extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations.

### uncertainty reduction theory

The tendency of human beings to eliminate unknown elements of individuals whom they have just met.

Individuals wish to predict what another person thinks and how another person behaves. Strategies for reducing uncertainty include passive, active, and interactive.

### undifferentiated space

The degree to which spouses do not see her/his/their ownership of personal belongings as much as they do ownership as a couple.

### uses and gratifications theory

Theoretical explanation for why people use the types of mass media they do.

### values

Important and lasting principles or standards held by a culture about desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes.

### variety

Efforts to vary the stress, tone, rate, etc. of a speech to avoid sounding monotonous and repetitious.

### verbal aggression

The tendency to attack the self-concept of individuals instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication.

### verbal bullying

Threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdowns or sarcastic comments.

### verbal surrogates

The sounds humans make as they attempt to fill dead air while they are thinking of what to say next (e.g., uhh, umm).

### versatility

The degree to which an individual can utilize both responsiveness and assertiveness that is appropriate and effective during various communication contexts and interpersonal interactions.

## vocabulary

All the words understood by a person or group of people.

## vocalics

Vocal utterances or characteristics, other than words, such as pitch, tempo, and volume, that serve as forms of communication.

## Volume

How loudly or softly an individual speaks.

## willingness to communicate

An individual's tendency to initiate communicative interactions with other people.

## workplace bullying behaviors

Workplace bullying involves isolation and exclusion, intimidation and threats, verbal threats, damaging professional identity, limiting career opportunities, obstructing work or making work-life difficult, and denial of due process and natural justice.

## workplace socialization

The process by which new organizational members learn the rules (e.g., explicit policies, explicit procedures, etc.), norms (e.g., when you go on break, how to act at work, who to eat with, who not to eat with), and culture (e.g., innovation, risk-taking, team orientation, competitiveness) of an organization.