COMM⁶

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CONTENTS

Part 2 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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Part 3
GROUP COMMUNICATION

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9 Communicating in Groups 110

10 Group Leadership and Problem Solving 126

1

COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to . . .

1-1 Define scripts, contexts, and settings as they operate in communication

1-2 Explain the communication process

1-3 Identify the characteristics of communication

1-4 Assess messages using the principles of ethical communication

1-5 Develop a personal communication improvement plan
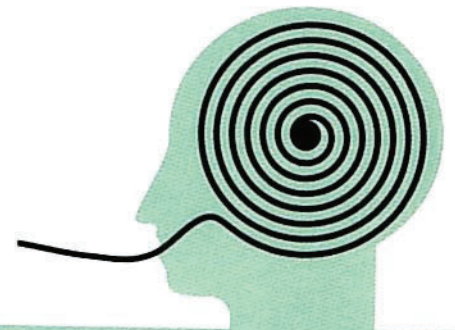
Without exception, survey after survey reports that employers seek candidates who demonstrate effective oral communication skills (College learning for the new global century, 2007; Hansen & Hansen, n.d.; Young, 2003). For example, an article on the role of communication in the workplace reported that in engineering, a highly technical field, speaking skills were very important for 72 percent of the employers surveyed (Darling & Dannels, 2003). A survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (Hart Research Associates, 2006) reported the top 10 personal qualities and skills that employers seek from college graduates. The number one skill was communication, including face-to-face speaking, presentational speaking, and writing. Other "Top 10" skills, which you will learn about and practice in this course, include teamwork skills (number three), analytical skills (number five), interpersonal skills (number eight), and problem-solving skills (number nine). The employers also said that these very skills are, unfortunately, the ones many new graduates lack (Hart Research Associates, 2010). And, in a follow-up survey for *Job Outlook 2019*, communication skills again topped the list. Other top 10 skills included problem solving, teamwork, and leadership. Not only that, communication skills are touted as the most important key to rising to a position of leadership and being successful once you get there (Froschheiser & Chutkow, 2006). As you can see, the skills you will learn in this course are precisely the ones that will help you land a job when you graduate, regardless of your field of study.

How effectively you communicate with others is important not only to your career but also to your personal relationships. Your ability to make and keep friends, to be a good family member, to have satisfying intimate relationships, to participate in or lead groups, and to prepare and present speeches depends on your communication skills. During this course, you will learn about the communication process and have an opportunity to practice basic communication skills that will help you improve your relationships.

We begin this chapter by describing the nature of communication and the communication process. From there, we discuss several principles of communication and five tenets of ethical communication. Finally, we explain how to develop a personal communication improvement plan you can use as a guide to hone your skills based on what you learn throughout the semester.

1-1 THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is a complex process through which we express, interpret, and coordinate messages with others. We do so to create shared meaning, meet social goals, manage personal identity, and carry out our relationships. At its core, communication is about messages.

Messages are the verbal utterances, visual images, and nonverbal behaviors used to convey thoughts and feelings. We refer to the process of creating messages as **encoding** and the process of interpreting them as **decoding**. So when the toddler points to her bottle and cries out "Ba-ba," her message (consisting of a nonverbal gesture—pointing—and a verbal utterance—"Ba-ba") expresses her desire for the bottle of milk she sees on the table. How her father responds, however, depends on how he decodes it. He might respond by handing her the bottle or by saying, "Sorry, cutie, the bottle is empty." Or he may just look at her with a puzzled expression on his face. Any response is also a message. **Feedback** consists of the verbal and nonverbal messages sent by receivers to let senders know how the message is being interpreted.

1-1a Canned Plans and Scripts

How do we form and interpret messages? We do so, in part, based on our canned plans and scripts. A **canned plan** is a "mental library" of scripts each of us draws from to create messages based on what worked for us or others in the past (Berger, 1997). A **script** is

communication the process through which we express, interpret, and coordinate messages with others

messages the verbal utterances, visual images, and nonverbal behaviors used to convey thoughts and feelings

encoding the process of creating messages

decoding the process of interpreting messages

feedback consists of the verbal and nonverbal messages sent by receivers to let senders know how the message is being interpreted

canned plan a "mental library" of scripts each of us draws from to create messages based on what worked for us or others in the past

script an actual text of what to say and do in a specific situation

Great apes are known for their ability to learn sign language to communicate with humans. Do you believe we can truly talk to the animals? Why or why not?

an actual text of what to say and do in a specific situation. We have canned plans and scripts for a wide variety of typical interactions, such as greeting people, making small talk, giving advice, complimenting or criticizing someone, and persuading others.

We develop canned plans and scripts from our own previous experiences and by observing what appears to work for other people (even fictitious people we see on TV or in movies) (Pajares, Prestin, Chen, & Nabi, 2009). We draw on scripts from our canned plans and usually customize them based on the person and the situation. For example, you might have several canned "greeting" plan scripts to draw from when addressing a close friend, a parent, a supervisor, or a stranger. You may also have tailored scripts for greeting someone in person, over email, or on social media. Keyera, for example, typically begins online messages to her friends by using their first name. When she writes to her professors, however, she always begins with "Dear Professor." Doing so helps convey respect for their authority.

The point is that we don't usually start from scratch to form messages. Instead, we recognize what type of message we want to form, search our mental canned plan library for an appropriate script, and then customize it to fit the unique parts of the current situation. All of this mental choosing happens in nanoseconds and somewhat subconsciously. We also use our canned plans and scripts when we interpret messages from others.

Obviously, the larger your canned plan library and the more scripts you have for each canned plan, the more likely you will be to form appropriate and effective messages, as well as to understand and respond appropriately to the messages of others. (Just for fun, search YouTube for different scripts used to say "hello." What do you find? Which do you think are appropriate/inappropriate and why?)

1-1b **Communication Contexts**

According to noted German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, the ideal communication situation is impossible to achieve, but we can get closer to that goal by considering the context (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2016). The context in which a message is embedded affects the expectations of the participants, the meaning these participants derive, and their subsequent behavior. The **communication context** is made up of the physical, social, historical, psychological, and cultural situations that surround a communication event.

The **physical context** includes the location of a communication encounter, the environmental conditions surrounding it (temperature, lighting, noise level), and the physical proximity of participants to each other. The physical situation may also be virtual as we interact with others via social media on our computers, tablets, and smart phones. We are likely to be most successful when we are present with others, either literally as in face-to-face encounters or virtually. The term we use for creating a sense of "being there" virtually is **social presence**. And while online communication allows us to interact at a distance, it sometimes causes misunderstandings. For instance, when you telephone a friend, you lose nonverbal cues such as posture, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions that are part of a face-to-face message. Without these cues, you have less information to use as you decode your friend's message. Email and text messages are missing even more of the nonverbal cues that help us interpret messages accurately. Alex Kleinman (2014) summarizes research provided by a number of experts to keep emails short: An email should be no more than five sentences long. If it will take more sentences to explain your message, pick up the phone or make an appointment to discuss the topic in person. Also, don't waste the subject line. Provide the topic in the subject line, not just "hi."

communication context the physical, social, historical, psychological, and cultural situations that surround a communication event

physical context the location of a communication encounter, the environmental conditions surrounding it (temperature, lighting, noise level), and the physical proximity of participants to each other

social presence a sense of "being there" with another person virtually

The **social context** is the nature of the relationship that already exists between the participants. The better you know someone, the more likely you are to accurately interpret their messages.

The **historical context** is the background provided by previous communication between the participants. For instance, suppose Chas texts Victoria saying he will pick up the draft of the report they had left for their manager. When Victoria sees Chas at lunch later that day, she asks, "Did you get it?" Another person listening to the conversation would have no idea what "it" is. Yet Chas may well reply, "It's on my desk." Victoria and Chas understand one another because of their earlier exchange.

The **psychological context** includes the moods and feelings each person brings to the communication encounter. For instance, suppose Corinne is under a great deal of stress. While Corrinne is studying for an exam, a friend stops by and asks her to take a break to go to the gym. Corinne, who is normally good-natured, may respond with irritation, which her friend may misinterpret as Corinne being mad at him.

The **cultural context** includes the beliefs, values, orientations, underlying assumptions, and rituals that belong to a specific culture (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2010). Everyone is part of one or more cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability). When two people from different cultures interact, misunderstandings may occur because of their different cultural values, beliefs, orientations, and rituals. Cultural context is extremely critical for effective leadership. In fact, according to the American Management Association (2019), people of different cultures often have different norms for time management, respect for authority, teamwork, and ethics. Effective leaders are those that make these differences transparent and do so in ways that ensure that all workers feel valued. Just for fun, go to YouTube and search "ways to offend people from different cultures." What did you find? Did anything surprise you?

1-1c Communication Settings

The setting also affects how we encode and decode messages. **Communication settings** differ based on the number of participants and the level of formality in the interactions (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). These settings are classified as intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, and mass.

Intrapersonal communication refers to the interactions that occur in our minds when we are talking to ourselves. We usually don't verbalize our intrapersonal communication. When you think about what you'll do later today or when you send yourself text reminders, you are communicating intrapersonally. Much of our intrapersonal communication occurs subconsciously (Kellerman, 1992). When you drive to work or walk to class "without thinking" about each turn you make along the way, you are communicating intrapersonally on a subconscious level. The study of intrapersonal communication often focuses on its role in shaping self-perceptions and in managing communication apprehension—that is, the fear associated with communicating with others (Richmond & McCroskey, 1997). In this book, our study of intrapersonal communication focuses on self-talk as a means to improve self-concept and self-esteem and, ultimately, communication competence in a variety of situations.

Interpersonal communication is characterized by informal interaction between two people who have an identifiable relationship with each other (Knapp & Daly, 2002). Talking to a friend between classes, visiting on the phone with your mother, and texting or chatting online with your brother are all examples of interpersonal communication. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on how interpersonal communication helps us develop, maintain, improve, and end interpersonal relationships.

Small-group communication typically involves three to 20 people who come together to communicate with one another (Beebe & Masterson, 2006; Hirokawa, Cathcart, Samovar, & Henman, 2003). Examples of small groups include a family, a group of friends, a group of classmates working on a project, and a workplace management team. Small-group communication can occur in face-to-face settings as well as online through electronic mailing lists, discussion boards, virtual meetings, and blogs. Chapters 9 and 10 focus on the characteristics of effective groups, ethical and effective communication in

social context the nature of the relationship that already exists between participants

historical context the background provided by previous communication between participants

psychological context the moods and feelings each person brings to a communication encounter

cultural context the beliefs, values, orientations, underlying assumptions, and rituals that belong to a specific culture

communication setting the different communication environments characterized by the number of participants and the extent to which the interaction is formal or informal

intrapersonal communication the interactions that occur in our minds when we are talking to ourselves

interpersonal communication informal interaction between two people who have an identifiable relationship with each other

small-group communication three to 20 people who come together to interact

Intrapersonal Communication

Interpersonal Communication

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Small-Group Communication

Public Communication

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Mass Communication

channels. For example, when a president delivers the State of the Union address, some people may be in attendance on location, others watch on TV or online, and still others view it later in the form of televised broadcast snippets, digital recordings, or online video. The Internet is also a medium of choice for posting job ads and résumés, for advertising and buying products, and for political activism. In Part IV of this book we focus on preparing, practicing, and delivering effective oral presentations in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

Mass communication is delivered by individuals and entities through mass media to large segments of the population. Some examples include newspaper and magazine articles and advertisements, as well as radio and television programs and advertisements. Interestingly, the lines between interpersonal, small group, public, and mass communication are becoming more and more blurred today with the growing use of social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest. In fact, communication scholars have coined a term, *polymedia*, to describe this new relationship between interpersonal communication and technology (Madiano & Miller, 2012).

Think Pair Share: Think about your own communication in intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, or mass communication settings. Describe your communication in at least three of these settings to a classmate. Which do you engage in most often and why? Discuss.

1-2 THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The **communication process** is a complex set of three different and interrelated activities intended to result in shared meaning (Burleson, 2009). These activities are message production, message interpretation, and interaction coordination.

First, **message production** is what we do when we *encode* a message. We begin by forming goals based on our understanding of the situation, as well as our values, ethics, and needs. Based on these goals, we recall an effective canned plan script and adapt it to the current situation.

Second, **message interpretation** is what we do when we *decode* a message. We read or listen to someone's words, observe their nonverbal behavior, and take note of other visuals. Then we interpret the message based on our recollection of similar canned plan scripts. Based on this interpretation, we prepare a feedback message.

public communication one participant delivers a message to a group of more than 20 people

mass communication messages delivered by individuals and entities through mass media to large segments of the population

communication process a complex set of three different and interrelated activities intended to result in shared meaning

groups, leadership, problem-solving, conflict, and group presentations.

Public communication is delivered to audiences of more than 20 people. Examples include public speeches, presentations, and forums we may experience in person or via mediated or technology-driven

communication uses these same channels, though nonverbal cues such as movements, touch, and gestures are represented by visual symbols like **emoticons** (textual images that symbolize the sender's mood, emotion, or facial expressions), **emojis** (small digital images or icons used to convey an idea or emotion), **acronyms** (abbreviations that stand in for common phrases), and **GIFs** (digitally stored images and short animations). For example, in a face-to-face interaction, Barry might express his frustration about a poor grade verbally by noting why he thought the grade was unfair, visually by showing the assignment along with the grading criteria for it, and nonverbally by raising his voice and shaking his fist. In an online interaction, however, he might need to insert a frowning-face emoticon (☹), the acronym "POed," or a GIF of an angry man shaking their fist to represent those nonverbal behaviors.

Think Pair Share: Which symbols do you use to express emotions virtually and why? Are there some that you refuse to use and, if so, why? Discuss with a classmate.

With so many technology-driven channels available for communicating, we must thoughtfully select the best channel for our purpose, audience, and situation. We can do so by considering media richness and synchronicity.

Media richness refers to how much and what kinds of information can be transmitted via a particular channel. Face-to-face is the richest channel because we can hear the verbal message content and observe the nonverbal cues to interpret its meaning. Sometimes, however, communicating face-to-face is either impossible or not a good use of time. The less information offered via a given channel, the leaner it is. The leaner the channel, the greater the chances are for misunderstanding. For example, texts and Twitter messages are lean because they use as few characters as possible whereas videoconferencing

Messages are not always interpreted as the sender expects, which can be clarified by feedback. When have you misinterpreted a text sent to you, and how did you resolve the misunderstanding?

Interaction coordination consists of the behavioral adjustments each participant makes in an attempt to create shared meaning (Burgoon et al., 2002).

Shared meaning occurs when the receiver's interpretation is similar to what the speaker intended. We can usually gauge the extent to which shared meaning is achieved by the sender's response to the feedback message. For example, Miriam says to Huan, "I dropped my phone and it broke." Huan replies, "Cool, now you can upgrade to the new model." Miriam responds, "No, you don't understand, I can't afford to buy a new phone." Miriam's response to Huan's feedback message lets Huan know he misunderstood her. The extent to which we achieve shared meaning can be affected by the channels we use and by the interference/noise that competes with our messages.

1-2a Channels

Channels are both the route traveled by the message and the means of transportation. Face-to-face communication has three basic channels: verbal symbols, nonverbal cues, and visual images. Technologically mediated

message production the steps taken to encode a message

message interpretation the steps taken to decode a message

interaction coordination the behavioral adjustments each participant makes in an attempt to create shared meaning

channel the route traveled by the message and the means of transportation

emoticon a textual image that symbolizes the sender's mood, emotion, or facial expressions

emoji a small digital image or icon used to convey an idea or emotion

acronym an abbreviation that stands in for a common phrase

GIF digitally stored images and short animations (place above media richness)

media richness the amount and kinds of information transmitted via a particular channel

FIGURE 1.1 CONTINUUM OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

ASYNCHRONOUS					SYNCHRONOUS	

Bulk letters
Posters
Email spam
	Posted letters
	Email
	Text
	  messages
		Facebook
		Twitter
		Instagram
		SnapChat
		Other social
		  media websites
			Interactive
			chat
				Telephone	Skype
					iChat
					FaceTime
					Zoom
					WhatsApp
					Other video
					  conferencing
						Face-to-Face

LEAN						RICH
LOW SOCIAL PRESENCE					HIGH SOCIAL PRESENCE	

channels such as Skype, FaceTime, and Zoom are richer because we can observe nonverbal cues almost as much as in a face-to-face setting.

Synchronicity is the extent to which a channel allows for immediate feedback. Synchronous channels allow communication to occur in "real time" and asynchronous channels allow for "lag time." Synchronous channels allow for immediate feedback to clarify potential misunderstandings whereas asynchronous channels provide time to carefully craft and revise our messages (Condon & Cech, 2010). Use a rich synchronous channel if your message is complicated, difficult, or controversial. You might choose an asynchronous channel, however, if you could benefit from having extra time to carefully organize and word your message. On the other hand, use a lean channel when you merely want to convey simple and emotionally neutral information. For example, Arjun might text "on my way" to let his friend Gina know he will be there soon. Figure 1.1 illustrates the continuum of communication channels available today.

1-2b Interference/Noise

Interference or **noise** is any stimulus that interferes with the process of achieving shared meaning. Noise can be physical or psychological. **Physical noise** is any external sight or sound that distracts us from the message. For example, when someone enters the room, a cell phone rings, or someone near us is texting while a speaker is talking, we might be distracted from the speaker's message. Or, when communicating online, we might be distracted when we get a Facebook or Twitter notification. **Psychological noise** refers to the thoughts and feelings we experience that compete with the sender's message for our attention. So when we daydream about what we have to do at work or feel offended when a speaker uses foul language, we are being distracted by psychological noise. That's why it is a good practice to close social media and other Internet sites and power off smart phones while engaged in important face-to-face or online conferences, meetings, or classroom discussions.

1-2c A Model of the Communication Process

In summary, let's look at a graphic model of a message exchange between two people presented in Figure 1.2. The process begins when one person, who we will call Andy, is motivated to share his thoughts with another person, Taylor. Andy reviews the communication situation, including the communication context, and sorts through the scripts in his canned plan library to find one he thinks will be appropriate. Based on this script, he encodes a customized message and shares it with Taylor.

Taylor decodes the message using her understanding of the situation and matching it to scripts in her canned plan library. She might misinterpret Andy's intended meaning because she is distracted by physical or psychological interference/noise, or because her scripts don't match Andy's. Taylor encodes a feedback message using a script from her canned plan library as a guide. She then shares her feedback message, and Andy decodes it. If Taylor understands what Andy was saying, he will extend the conversation. If, on the other hand, Andy believes Taylor misunderstood his meaning, he will try to clarify what he meant before extending the conversation.

Finally, the communication process is not linear. In other words, both Andy and Taylor simultaneously

synchronicity the extent to which a channel allows for immediate feedback

interference (noise) any stimulus that interferes with the process of sharing meaning

physical noise any external sight or sound that detracts from a message

psychological noise thoughts and feelings that compete with a sender's message for our attention

FIGURE 1.2 MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

Context

Messages through multiple channels
(verbal and nonverbal)

Participant
Simultaneously sends and receives verbal and nonverbal messages.

(Psychological Interference)

Participant
Simultaneously sends and receives verbal and nonverbal messages.

(Psychological Interference)

Physical Interference

Physical Interference

Physical Interference

encode and decode verbal and nonverbal messages throughout the message exchange.

1-3 CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATION

Because communication is learned, there is always room for improvement. This section focuses on eight communication characteristics to consider as we practice and improve our skills.

1-3a Communication Has Purpose

Whenever we communicate, we have a purpose for doing so. The purpose may be serious or trivial, and we may or may not be aware of it at the time. Here we list five basic purposes for communication.

1. We communicate to develop and maintain our sense of self. Through our interactions, we learn who we are and what we are good at.

2. We communicate to meet our social needs. Just as we need food, water, and shelter, we also need contact with other people.

3. We communicate to develop and maintain relationships. We communicate not only to meet simple social needs but also to develop and maintain positive relationships. These relationships may be personal as with a close friend or family member or professional as with colleagues in the workplace.

4. We communicate to exchange information. We exchange information through observation, reading, and direct communication with others, both face-to-face and virtually.

Modern Mourning

Mourning is a universal human communication process of celebrating the life of someone while grieving his or her death. Mourning rituals and traditions vary by culture and religion and change over time. So it is not surprising that mourning in the United States in the 21st century is adapting past practices to modern life.

Websites such as Legacy.com, MyDeathSpace.com, and Memory-Of.com facilitate the creation of these interactive online memorials. Users can create slide shows to "talk" about their deceased loved one and mourners can "visit" with the departed and connect with other mourners. T-shirts have become a new type of mourning clothes, often featuring pictures of the deceased. This is particularly common when commemorating the death of a young person or a violent death. Another sign of mourning in the 21st century is the use of decals on cars and bikes. Decals are visual markers that can not only memorialize a loved one who died but can also connect mourners to others who have suffered a similar loss. How did you/do you mourn when someone you care about dies? How do you share messages with others in the process?

Jeff Lueders/Shutterstock.com

TABLE 1.1 WHAT EMPLOYERS FIND OUT ABOUT CANDIDATES ONLINE

Top Reasons Not to Hire	Top Reasons to Hire
1. Provocative or Inappropriate Photographs	Background Supported Job Qualifications
2. Excessive Drinking/Partying or Using Drugs	Site Conveyed a Professional Image
3. Discriminatory Comments (e.g., race, sex)	Personality Appeared to be a Good "Fit"
4. Bad-Mouthing Previous Employer or Co-worker	Seemed Well-Rounded with a Wide Range of Interests
5. Poor Communication Skills	Great Communication Skills

Grasz, 2016

5. We communicate to influence others. We may try to convince friends to go to a particular restaurant or to see a certain movie, encourage a supervisor to alter the work schedule, convince a customer to purchase a product, or talk an instructor into changing a grade.

1-3b Communication Is Continuous

We are always encoding and decoding messages. Even silence communicates if another person infers meaning from it. Why? Because our nonverbal behavior represents reactions to our environment and to the people around us. If we are cold, we might shiver; if we are hot or nervous, we might perspire; if we are bored, happy, or confused, our facial expressions and body language will probably show it.

1-3c Communication Is Irreversible

Once an exchange takes place, we can never go back in time and erase the communication. We might be able to repair damage done, but the message has been communicated. When you participate in an online discussion or leave a post on a blog, you are leaving an electronic "footprint" that others can follow and read. Emails, social media posts, and text messages are not always completely private either. Once you push the "send" button, you have little control over who the receiver might forward your message to or how it might be used publicly. That's why Eun Jung decided not to post a picture of herself with friends at a local pub. Even though she could limit which "friends" could see it, she also knew that any of them could also share it with others. She didn't want a photo like this to hurt her professional image. Did you know that the number of employers that use social media to screen job candidates has increased 500 percent over the last decade? In fact, more than 60 percent of employers do so today (Grasz, 2016). Table 1.1 shows what employers find that causes them to hire and not to hire potential candidates.

1-3d Communication Is Situated

When we say that communication is *situated* we mean that it occurs within a specific communication setting that affects how the messages are produced, interpreted, and coordinated (Burleson, 2009). The interpretation of the statement "I love you" varies depending on the setting. During a candlelit anniversary dinner, it may be interpreted as a statement of romantic feelings. If a mother says it as she greets her daughter, it may be interpreted as motherly love. If it is made in response to a joke delivered by someone in a group of friends gathered to watch a football game, it may be interpreted as a compliment for being clever. So what is said and what is meant depends on the situation.

Vlad Teodor/Shutterstock.com

What does this couple's position suggest about the level of trust and intimacy in their relationship? Explain.

1-3e Communication Is Indexical

How we communicate is also an **index** or measure of the emotional temperature of our relationship at the time. For instance, when they are getting into the car to leave for a holiday, Kenton says to Darryl, "I remembered to bring the map." Kenton is not just reporting information. Through his tone of voice and other nonverbal cues, he is also communicating something about the relationship, such as, "You can always depend on me" or "You never remember to think of these things."

A message exchange can also signal the level of trust, control, and intimacy in a relationship (Millar & Rogers, 1987).

Trust is the extent to which partners rely on, depend on, and have faith that their partners will not intentionally do anything to harm them. For instance, Mark says, "I'll do the final edits and turn in the paper." Sandy replies, "Never mind, I'll do it so that it won't be late." Sandy's response may signal that she doesn't trust Mark to get the group's paper in on time.

Control is the degree to which partners believe themselves to be "in charge" in the relationship. When Louis says to Nadia, "I know you're concerned about the budget, but I'll see to it that we have enough money to cover everything," through his words, tone of voice, and nonverbal behavior, he is signaling that he is "in charge" of the finances. In turn, Nadia may respond by either verbally responding or nonverbally showing that she agrees with him or by challenging him and asserting her desire to control the budget. In other words, control is communicated with either complementary or symmetrical feedback. **Complementary feedback** signals agreement about who is in control, whereas **symmetrical feedback** signals disagreement. If Nadia says, "Great, I'm glad you're looking after it," her feedback complements his message. But if Nadia responds, "Wait a minute, you're the one who overdrew our checking account last month," she is challenging his control with a symmetrical response. Relational control is not negotiated in a single exchange, but through many message exchanges over time. The point, however, is that control is negotiated through communication.

Intimacy is the degree of emotional closeness in a relationship. It is managed through what and how much each partner is willing to disclose to the other. When Ahmad asks Jana what she is thinking about and Jana begins to pour out her problems, she is revealing the degree of intimacy she feels in the relationship. Or, if she replies, "Oh I'm not really thinking about anything important. Did you hear the news this morning about . . . ," her subject change signals that the relationship is not intimate enough to share her problems.

1-3f Communication Messages Vary in Conscious Thought

Recall that creating shared meaning involves encoding and decoding verbal messages, nonverbal cues, and even visual images. Our messages may (1) occur spontaneously, (2) be based on a "script," or (3) be carefully constructed.

Many messages are **spontaneous expressions**, spoken without much conscious thought. For example, when you burn your finger, you may blurt out, "Ouch!" When something goes right, you may break into a broad smile. Some messages are *scripted* and drawn from our canned plan libraries. Finally, some are **constructed messages** that are formed carefully and thoughtfully when our known scripts are inadequate for the situation.

1-3g Communication Is Guided by Cultural Norms

Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, symbols, and behaviors. How messages are formed and interpreted depends on the cultural background of the participants.

The United States has become more culturally diverse than ever before. In fact, 2010 U.S. Census Bureau statistics revealed that nearly 49 percent of the total U.S. population reported themselves as non-white or multiracial (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). More recently, Pew Research Center statistics reported that in 2018 nearly half (48 percent) of post-millennials (6- to 21-year-olds) reported themselves to be racial or ethnic minorities (Fry & Parker, 2018). Non-Hispanic whites are the only racial group with declining population numbers. The cultural influences of all these groups will continue to influence the ways in which we communicate in the United States.

According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2013), "minorities are

index a measure of the emotional temperature of our relationship at the time

trust the extent to which partners rely on, depend on, and have faith that their partners will not intentionally do anything to harm them

control the degree to which partners believe themselves to be "in charge" in the relationship

complementary feedback a message that signals agreement about who is in control

symmetrical feedback a message that signals disagreement about who is in control

intimacy the degree of emotional closeness in a relationship

spontaneous expressions messages spoken without much conscious thought

constructed messages messages that are formed carefully and thoughtfully when our known scripts are inadequate for the situation

culture a system of shared beliefs, values, symbols, and behaviors

projected to constitute the majority of all U.S. children under the age of 18" by the year 2023 (p. 4). Because cultural concerns permeate all of communication, each chapter of this book points out when certain concepts and skills may be viewed differently by members of various cultural groups.

1-4 COMMUNICATION AND ETHICS

Can people depend on you to tell the truth? Do you do what you say you will do? Can people count on you to be respectful? In any encounter, we choose whether to behave in a way others view as ethical. **Ethics** is a set of moral principles held by a society, a group, or an individual. An ethical standard does not tell us exactly what to do in any given situation, but it can tell us what general principles to consider when deciding how to behave.

1-4a Ethical Principles

Every field of study—from psychology and biology to sociology and history—has a set of ethical principles designed to guide the practice of that field.

Communication is no exception. Every time we communicate, we make choices with ethical implications. The general principles that guide ethical communication include:

1. Ethical communicators are honest. In most cases, we should not intentionally try to deceive others. As we will discuss in this book, however, sometimes strategic ambiguity can help save face and preserve a relationship.

2. Ethical communicators act with integrity. Integrity is maintaining consistency between what we say we believe and what we do. In other words, ethical communicators "practice what they preach." The person who says "Do what I say, not what I do" lacks integrity. We often refer to such people as hypocrites.

ethics a set of moral principles held by a society, a group, or an individual

3. Ethical communicators behave fairly. A fair person attempts to be impartial. To be fair to someone is to gather all of the relevant facts, consider only circumstances relevant to the situation at hand, and not be swayed by prejudice. For example, if two siblings are fighting, their mother exercises fairness if she allows both children to explain "their side" before she decides what to do.

4. Ethical communicators demonstrate respect. Communicating respectfully means showing positive regard for others, including their point of view, their rights, and their feelings, even when they differ from our own. That's where the common saying "we agree to disagree" comes from.

5. Ethical communicators are responsible. Responsible communicators recognize the power of words. Our messages can hurt others and their reputations. So we act responsibly when we refrain from gossiping, spreading rumors, bullying, and so forth. Did you know that research suggests that many mass shooters have cited being ostracized and bullied by others as a rationale for committing these horrendous acts of violence (Sommer, Leuschener, & Scheithauer, 2014)?

1-4b Bright Side and Dark Side Messages

Interpersonal communication scholars Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) came up with metaphors to characterize the differences between ethical/appropriate and unethical/inappropriate communication. They label messages that are both ethical and appropriate as **bright side messages**. In contrast, **dark side messages** are unethical and/or inappropriate. "Hard dark side" messages are somewhat ethical and unethical because they are honest, but also potentially damaging to the relationship. "Easy dark side" messages are somewhat ethical and unethical because they are dishonest in order to maintain a good relationship. Finally, "evil dark

> "AN HONEST PERSON IS WIDELY REGARDED AS A MORAL PERSON, AND HONESTY IS A CENTRAL CONCEPT TO ETHICS AS THE FOUNDATION FOR A MORAL LIFE . . ." TERKEL & DUVAL, 1999.

FIGURE 1.3 UNDERSTANDING DARK SIDE MESSAGES

Ethical

Bright side response:

"Liz, it doesn't matter what I think. I can see that you really like how it looks and that makes me happy."

(*This response is ethical and appropriate. It is both honest and respectful.*)

Hard dark side response:

"Wow Liz, it's a dramatic change. I liked your hair long and I'd always admired the red highlights you had. But I'm sure it will grow on me."

(*This response is honest but could hurt Liz's feelings and damage the relationship.*)

Appropriate | **Inappropriate**

Easy dark side response:

"It looks great."

(*This response is dishonest but doesn't hurt Liz's feelings.*)

Evil dark side response:

"It doesn't matter what you do to your hair, you're still fat and ugly."

(*This response is unethical and inappropriate. It is hurtful and damaging to Liz's feelings and the relationship*)

Unethical

side" messages are both disrespectful and damaging to the relationship (see Figure 1.3).

Let's use Liz as an example. She just spent a fortune having her hair cut and colored and asks her good friend, Pat, "Do you like my new hairstyle?" Pat, who doesn't really like the new look, could respond to Liz in one of the ways shown in Figure 1.3, above.

As you can see, relationships may benefit from bright, hard, and easy side responses depending on the situation. But evil dark side responses damage people and relationships.

Think Pair Share: Imagine that you've spent several hours working on an assignment that you just submitted for a class. When your instructor reviews your work, they must provide feedback that indicates you didn't correctly follow the instructions. Use the four quadrants of bright side and dark side messages in Figure 1.3 to create examples of each of the four types of messages your instructor could use. Discuss with a classmate.

1-5 COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

When we communicate effectively and ethically, it feels good. And when we experience the opposite, we may get frustrated and even angry. So let's look at what it means to be a competent communicator.

Communication competence is the impression that communicative behavior is both appropriate and effective in a given situation (Spitzberg, 2000). Communication is *effective* when it achieves its goals and *appropriate* when it conforms to what is expected in a situation. Competence is a judgment people make about others. Our goal is to communicate in ways that increase the likelihood that others will judge us as competent.

Communication competence is achieved through personal motivation, knowledge acquisition, and skills practice (Spitzberg, 2000). First, we have to be *motivated*—that is, we must want to improve. Second, we must know what to do. Third, we must practice the communication skills we learn.

In addition to motivation, knowledge, and skills, credibility and social ease also influence whether others perceive us to be competent communicators. **Credibility** is a perception of a speaker's knowledge, trustworthiness, and warmth. Listeners are more likely to be attentive to and influenced by speakers they perceive as credible. **Social ease** means managing communication apprehension so we do not appear nervous or anxious. To be perceived as a competent communicator, we must speak in ways that convey confidence and poise. Communicators who appear apprehensive are not likely to be regarded as competent, despite their motivation or knowledge.

1-5a Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension is "the fear or anxiety associated with real

bright side messages messages that are ethical and appropriate

dark side messages messages that are not ethical and/or appropriate

communication competence the impression that communicative behavior is both appropriate and effective in a given situation

credibility a perception of a speaker's knowledge, trustworthiness, and warmth

social ease communicating without appearing to be anxious or nervous

communication apprehension the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others

Many people may experience trait-based apprehension and feel nervous when faced with making small talk in social situations. Do you think the young man pictured here feels comfortable speaking in this situation? Why or why not?

or anticipated communication with others" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). Although most people think of public speaking anxiety when they hear the term *communication apprehension* (CA), there are actually four different types of CA. These are traitlike CA, audience-based CA, situational CA, and context-based CA.

People who experience *traitlike communication apprehension* feel anxious in most speaking situations. About 20 percent of all people experience traitlike CA (Richmond & McCroskey, 1997). People who experience *audience-based communication apprehension* feel anxious about speaking only with a certain person or group of people. *Situational communication apprehension* is a short-lived feeling of anxiety that occurs during a specific encounter—for example, during a job interview. Finally, *context-based communication apprehension* is anxiety only in a particular situation—for example, when speaking to a large group of people. All these forms of communication apprehension can be managed effectively in ways that help convey social ease. Throughout this book, we offer strategies for managing communication apprehension in various settings.

The combination of motivation, knowledge, skills, perceived credibility, and social ease make up competent communication. The goal of this book is to help you become a competent

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?

communicator in interpersonal, group, and public speaking situations.

1-5b Communication Improvement Plans

A communication improvement plan consists of setting a new goal to resolve a communication problem, identifying procedures to reach the goal, and determining a way to measure progress.

Before you can write a goal statement, you must first analyze your current communication skills repertoire. After you read each chapter and practice the skills described, select one or two skills to work on. Then write down your plan in four steps.

1. Identify the problem. For example: *"Problem: Even though some of the members of my class project group have not produced the work they promised, I haven't spoken up because I'm not very good at describing my feelings."*

2. State the specific goal. A specific goal identifies a measurable outcome. For example, to deal with the problem just identified, you might write: *"Goal: To describe my disappointment to other group members about their failure to meet deadlines."*

3. Outline a specific procedure for reaching the goal. To develop a plan for reaching your goal, first consult the chapter that covers the skill you wish to hone. Then translate the general steps recommended in the chapter to your specific situation. For example: *"Procedure: I will practice the steps of describing feelings. (1) I will identify the specific feeling I am experiencing. (2) I will encode the emotion I am feeling accurately. (3) I will include what has triggered the feeling. (4) I will own the feeling as mine. (5) I will then put that procedure into operation when I am talking with my group members."*

4. Devise a method for measuring progress. For example: *"Test for Making Progress Toward Goal Achievement: I will have made progress each time I describe my feelings to my group members about missed deadlines."*

Figure 1.4 provides another example of a communication improvement plan, this one relating to a public speaking problem.

FIGURE 1.4   SAMPLE COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Problem: When I speak in class or in the student senate, I often find myself burying my head in my notes or looking at the ceiling or walls.

Goal: To look at people more directly when I'm giving a speech.

Procedure: I will take the time to practice oral presentations aloud in my room.

(1) I will stand up just as I do in class.

(2) I will pretend various objects in the room are people, and I will consciously attempt to look at those objects as I am talking.

(3) When giving a speech, I will try to be aware of when I am looking at my audience and when I am not.

Test for Measuring Progress Toward Goal Achievement: I will have made positive progress when I am maintaining eye contact with my audience most of the time.

? QUICK QUIZ

T F 1. The sender encodes a message and receiver decodes it.

T F 2. Interpersonal communication refers to the internal conversations that we have in our minds as we "talk to ourselves" so to speak.

T F 3. Meaning shared in a communication interaction can be affected by the physical context in which the message is delivered.

T F 4. The extent to which a channel allows for immediate feedback is known as media richness.

T F 5. When you show regard or consideration for others and their ideas, even if you don't agree with them, you are demonstrating the ethical standard of fairness.

6. What are the three sub-processes that must be performed to achieve shared meaning?

a. message production, message interpretation, and interaction coordination

b. nonverbal coding, acronym depiction, and feeling coordination

c. canned plan access, spontaneous construction, and symmetrical feedback

d. recipient selection, message production, interaction method

e. channel selection, feedback decoding, response construction

7. An example of intrapersonal communication is

a. chatting around the dinner table with your family and friends.

b. recounting a past experience during a speech to an audience.

c. thinking about what you are going to make for dinner that evening.

d. texting a message to a friend.

e. entering into a discussion in a chatroom.

8. Why do we communicate?

a. to meet our social needs

b. to develop and maintain our sense of self

c. to develop relationships

d. to exchange information and influence others

e. All of these answers are correct.

9. Which of the following is NOT one of the guidelines for ethical communication?

a. Ethical communicators are truthful and honest.

b. Ethical communicators act spontaneously.

c. Ethical communicators behave fairly.

d. Ethical communicators demonstrate respect.

e. Ethical communicators are responsible.

10. If you feel anxious about speaking with a certain person or group of people, you are experiencing

a. situational communication apprehension.

b. audience-based communication apprehension.

c. traitlike communication apprehension.

d. general communication apprehension.

e. context-based communication apprehension.

PERCEPTION OF SELF AND OTHERS
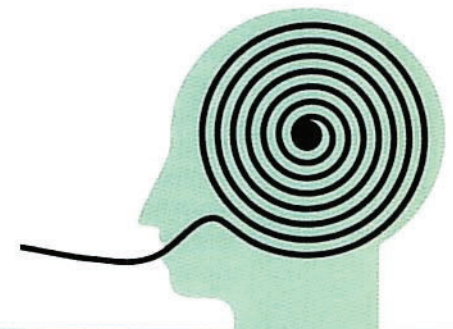
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to . . .

2-1 Describe the fundamental principles of the perception process

2-2 Explain how self-perception is formed and maintained

2-3 Identify how self-perception influences communication

2-4 Describe three ways we form perceptions of others

2-5 List five communication strategies to improve perceptions of others

2-1 THE PERCEPTION PROCESS

Perception is the process of selectively attending and assigning meaning to information (Gibson, 1966). At times, our perceptions of the world, other people, and ourselves agree with the perceptions of others. At other times, our perceptions are significantly different from the perceptions of other people. For each of us, however, our perception becomes our reality. What one person sees, hears, and interprets is real and considered true to that person. Others may see, hear, and interpret something entirely different from the same situation and also regard their different perception as real and true. When our perceptions differ from those with whom we interact, sharing meaning becomes more challenging. So how does perception work? Essentially, the brain selects some of the information it receives from the senses (sensory stimuli), organizes the information, and then interprets it.

2-1a Attention and Selection

Although we are constantly exposed to a barrage of sensory stimuli, we focus our attention on relatively little of it. Just think about how many different programs you watch regularly compared to the number of channels offered. Or consider how many hundreds of thousands of "hits" come up when you do an Internet search. Can you imagine visiting all of them? Some research even suggests that adults in the United States spend over 12 hours a day consuming media (US Adults, 2017). If this is true, there is very little time left to attend to other things, is there? Because we cannot focus on everything we see and hear all the time, we choose which stimuli to concentrate on based on our needs, interests, and expectations.

NEEDS We choose to pay attention to information that meets our biological and psychological needs. When you go to class, for example, how well you pay attention usually depends on whether you believe the information is relevant. Our brains communicate intrapersonally by
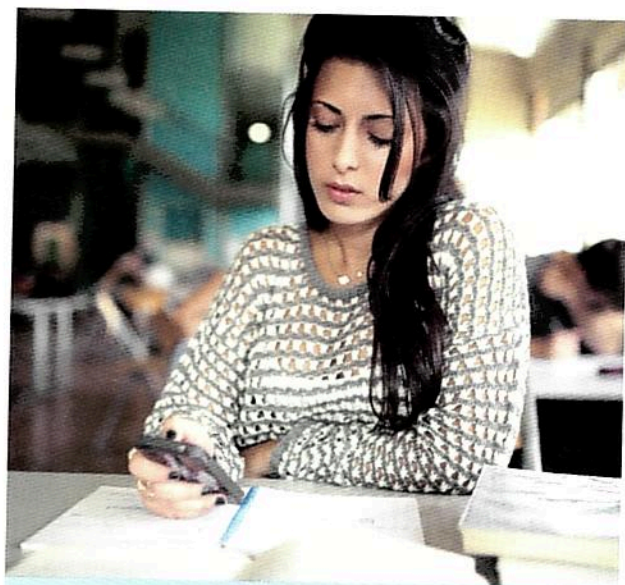
How many emails do you actually read compared to the number you immediately dump into the trash? Consider how your decisions about which items to read reflect your own needs, interests, or expectations.

asking such questions as "Will what I learn here help me in school, in the work world, or in my personal life?"

INTERESTS We are also likely to pay attention to information that piques our interest. For instance, when we hear or see a news story about a crisis event or natural disaster, we are more likely to pay attention when it is happening in our local community (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2014).

EXPECTATIONS Finally, we are likely to see what we expect to see and miss what violates our expectations. Take a quick look at the phrases in the triangles in Figure 2.1. If you have never seen these triangles, you probably read "Paris in the springtime," "Once in a lifetime," and "Bird in the hand." But if

social perception who we believe ourselves and others to be

perception the process of selectively attending and assigning meaning to information

FIGURE 2.1 EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTION

Paris
in the
the springtime

Once
in a
a lifetime

Bird
in the
the hand
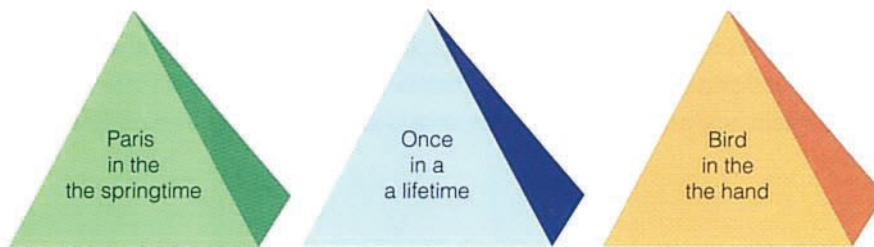
you reexamine the words, you will see that what you perceived was not exactly what is written. Do you now see the repeated words? They are easy to miss because we don't *expect* to see the words repeated.

Think Pair Share: Take a minute to write down the various media you visit and how much time you spend daily on each. How does it compare with research? Talk to your neighbor about the media you consume and why. Do you think you spend too much time consuming media? Why or why not?

2-1b Organization

Through the process of attention and selection, we reduce the number of stimuli our brains must process. Still, the number of stimuli we attend to at any moment is substantial. So our brains organize these stimuli using the principles of simplicity and pattern.

SIMPLICITY If the stimuli we attend to are complex, the brain simplifies them into some commonly recognized form. Based on a quick look at what someone is wearing, how she is standing, and the expression on her face, we may perceive her as a business executive, a doctor, or a soccer mom. Similarly, after Tony's boss described four of Tony's strengths and two areas for improvement during a performance review, Tony simplified the message to hear only the negative comments by saying to his coworker, "Well, I'd better shape up or I'm going to get fired!"

automatic processing
a subconscious approach that draws on previous experience to make sense of what we are encountering

heuristics short-cut rules of thumb for understanding how to perceive something based on past experience with similar stimuli

conscious processing
a slow, deliberative approach to perceiving in which we examine and reflect about stimuli

PATTERN The brain also makes sense of complex stimuli by relating them to things it already recognizes.

For example, when we see a crowd of people, instead of perceiving each individual, we may focus on sex and "see" men and women or on age and "see" children, teens, and adults.

2-1c Interpretation

As the brain selects and organizes information, it also assigns meaning to it. Look at these three sets of numbers. What are they?

A. 213 631 7348

B. 285 37 5632

C. 4632 7364 2596 2174

If you are used to seeing similar sets of numbers every day, you might interpret A as a telephone number, B as a Social Security number, and C as a credit card number. But your ability to interpret these numbers depends on your familiarity with the patterns. A French person may not recognize 213 631 7348 as a phone number, for instance, since the pattern for phone numbers in France is: *0x xx xx xx xx*.

2-1d Dual Processing

You may be thinking, "Hey, I don't go through all of these steps. I just automatically 'understand' what's going on." If so, you are right. Most of the perceptual processing we do happens subconsciously (Baumeister, 2005). This **automatic processing** is a subconscious approach of making sense of what we are encountering. In other words, we use **heuristics**, which are short-cut rules of thumb for understanding how to perceive something based on past experience with similar stimuli. Consider, for example, sitting at a red light. When it turns green, you probably don't consciously think about taking your foot off the brake and applying it to the gas pedal.

But what happens when we encounter things that are out of the realm of our normal experiences or expectations? Then we must exert conscious effort to make sense of what is going on. **Conscious processing** is a slow, deliberative approach in which we examine and reflect about stimuli. Consider, for instance, when you first learned a new computer program. It probably took a lot of concentration to use the program. Now that you're comfortable with it, however, you probably use it without really thinking about which key serves each purpose.

Whether we engage in automatic or conscious processing, perception influences and is influenced by communication in a number of ways. The rest of this chapter is devoted to how we form our perceptions of self and others and the role communication plays in each.

2-2 PERCEPTION OF SELF

Self-perception is the overall view we have of ourselves, which includes both self-concept and self-esteem. **Self-concept** is the perception we have of our skills, abilities, knowledge, competencies, and personality traits (Weiten, Dunn, & Hammer, 2012). **Self-esteem** is the evaluation we make about our personal worthiness based on our self-concept (Hewitt, 2009).

2-2a Self-Concept

We decide what our skills, abilities, competencies, and personality traits are based on the interpretations we make about our personal experiences and how others react and respond to us. These experiences can occur in both face-to-face and online settings (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014).

Regarding personal experiences, we cannot know if we are competent at something until we've tried doing it, and we cannot discover our personality traits until we uncover them through experience. When we have a positive first experience with a particular phenomenon, we are likely to believe we possess the competencies and personality traits associated with that experience (Bee & Boyd, 2011). So if Sonya discovers at an early age that she does well on math problems and exams, she is likely to incorporate "competent mathematician" into her self-concept. If Sonya continues to excel at math throughout her life, that part of her self-concept will be reinforced and maintained.

Similarly, when our first experience is negative, we are likely to conclude we do not possess that particular skill or trait (Hattie, 2014). For instance, if you get anxious and draw a blank while giving a speech for the first time, you might conclude that you are a poor public speaker. Even when a negative first experience is not repeated, however, it is likely to take more than one contradictory additional experience to change our original perception. So even if you succeed the second time you give a speech, it will probably take several more positive public speaking experiences for you to change your original conclusion about not being a good public speaker.

Our self-concept is also shaped by how others react and respond to us in two important ways (Weiten, Dunn, & Hammer, 2012). First, we use other people's

Alanna perceives herself to be strong (self-concept) and evaluates that strength as positive, giving her high self-esteem. What do you perceive yourself to be good at and how does that affect your self-esteem?

comments to validate, reinforce, or alter our perceptions of who we think we are. For example, if during a brainstorming session, one of your coworkers says, "You're really a creative thinker," you may decide this comment fits your image of who you are, thus reinforcing your self-concept as someone who can think "outside the box."

Second, the feedback we receive from others may reveal abilities and personality characteristics we had never before associated with ourselves. For example, after Michael receives several compliments about being good with children, he decides to pursue a career in early childhood education. The feedback (compliments) helped him recognize his natural ability to connect with preschoolers.

Reactions and responses coming from someone we respect or someone we are close to tend to be more powerful than those coming from someone we don't respect or feel close to (Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004; Rayner, 2001). This is especially important in families. Since self-concept begins to form early in life, information we receive from our family deeply shapes our self-concept (Bee & Boyd, 2011). Thus, one major ethical responsibility of family members is to notice and comment on traits and abilities that

self-perception the overall view we have of ourselves, which includes both our self-concept and self-esteem

self-concept the perception we have of our skills, abilities, knowledge, competencies, and personality traits

self-esteem the evaluation we make about our personal worthiness based on our self-concept

help develop accurate and positive self-concepts in other family members. When Jeff's dad compliments him for keeping his bedroom clean because he is "so organized" or Carla's sister tells her she did a great job on her science project because she is "really smart," they are encouraging positive self-concepts.

As we interact with others, we also form an **ideal self-concept**, which is what we would like to be. For example, although Vijay may know he is not naturally athletic, in his ideal self-concept he wants to be. So he plays on an intramural basketball team, works out at the gym daily, and regularly runs in local 5k and 10k races.

2-2b Self-Esteem

Self-concept and self-esteem are two different but related components of self-perception. Whereas self-concept is our perception of our competencies and personality traits, self-esteem is the positive or negative evaluation we attach to them. So self-esteem is not just our perception of how well or poorly we do things (self-concept), but also the importance we place on what we do well or poorly (Mruk, 2006). For instance, Eduardo believes he is an excellent piano player, a faithful friend, and good with kids. But if he doesn't value these competencies and traits, then he will have low self-esteem. It takes both the perception of having a competency or personality trait and a belief that it is valuable to produce high self-esteem.

As is the case with self-concept, self-esteem depends not only on what each individual views as worthwhile but also on the ideas, morals, and values of the family and cultural group(s) to which the individual belongs (Falk & Heine, 2015). So if Eduardo comes from a family where athletic success is valued but artistic talents are not, if he hangs out with friends who don't appreciate his piano playing, and if he lives in a society where rock

ideal self-concept what we would like to be

guitarists (not piano players) are the superstars, then his piano-playing ability may not raise his self-esteem.

We've already noted that families are critically important to developing one's self-concept, but they are even more central to developing positive self-esteem. For example, when Jeff's dad pointed out that Jeff's room is always tidy, he also said he was proud of Jeff, which raised Jeff's self-esteem about being organized. And when Carla's sister said she did a great job on her science project, she reinforced the value their family places on being smart, which raised Carla's self-esteem about that attribute of her self-concept. Unfortunately, in some families, negative messages repeatedly sent can create an inaccurate self-concept and damage self-esteem.
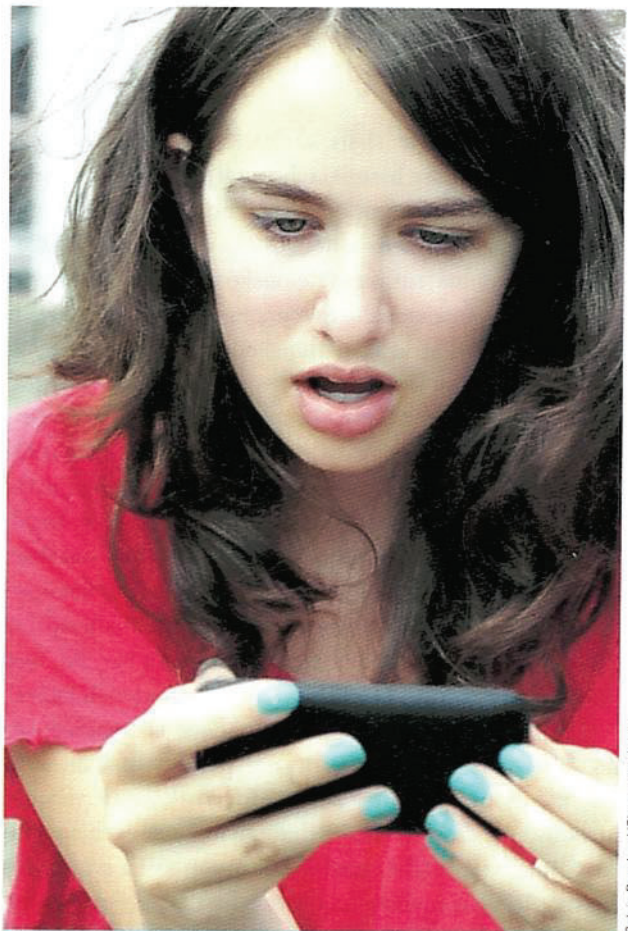
Sylvie Bouchard/Shutterstock.com

Media attention on cyberbullying has increased awareness about the serious effects it can have on children, such as dropping out of school and even suicide. Have you or someone you know been a victim of cyberbullying? If so, how did it affect you/them?

Communicating blame, name-calling, and constantly pointing out shortcomings are particularly damaging to self-esteem, and some people never fully overcome the damage done to them by members of their families.

Our self-esteem can affect the types of relationships we form and with whom. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to form relationships with others who reinforce their positive self-perception; similarly, individuals with low self-esteem tend to form relationships with those who reinforce their negative self-perception (Fiore, 2010). This phenomenon plays out in unfortunate ways when a person perpetually goes from one abusive relationship to another (Engel, 2005).

Bullying also damages self-esteem. Children who are just forming their self-concepts and self-esteem, and adolescents whose self-concepts and self-esteem are in transition, are particularly sensitive to bullying messages. Unfortunately, cyberbullying—the use of technology and particularly social media to harass others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner—is becoming increasingly common especially among teenagers (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Bullying can have long-lasting negative effects on self-esteem. In fact, many years after childhood bullying incidents, victims may still have inaccurate self-perceptions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

> **Think Pair Share:** Take a minute to write down 3–4 things you believe you are good at and why. Then, write down 2–3 things you don't believe yourself to be good at and why. Discuss your answers with a classmate. Do these aspects of your self-concept influence your self-esteem? Why or why not?

2-2c Cultural Norms and Self-Perceptions

Cultural norms play a critical role in shaping both self-concept and self-esteem (Becker et al., 2014). Two important ways they do so are via independence/interdependence and masculinity/femininity.

In individualist cultures, such as Western Europe and the United States, people tend to form and value independent self-perceptions. In collectivist cultures, such as Japan and China, people form and value interdependent self-perceptions (Becker et al., 2014). **Independent self-perceptions** are based on the belief that traits and abilities are internal to the person and are universally applicable to all situations. The goal for people with independent self-perceptions is to demonstrate their abilities, competencies, characteristics, and

> **"WANTING TO BE SOMEONE ELSE IS A WASTE OF THE PERSON YOU ARE."**
> MARILYN MONROE

personalities during interactions with others. For example, if you have an independent self-concept and believe that one of your competencies is your ability to persuade others, you gain self-esteem by demonstrating your skill, convincing others, and having others praise you for it.

Interdependent self-perceptions are based on the belief that traits and abilities are specific to a particular context or relationship. The goal of people with interdependent self-perceptions is to maintain or enhance the relationship by demonstrating the appropriate abilities and personality characteristics for the situation. People with interdependent self-perceptions don't think, "I'm really persuasive," but rather, "When I am with my friends I am able to convince them to do what is good for all of us. When I am with my father I do what he believes is best for the good of our family." High self-esteem comes from knowing when to be persuasive and when to be compliant.

Cultural norms also play a role in shaping self-perception around masculinity and femininity. In the dominant culture of the United States, for instance, many people expect boys to behave in "masculine" ways and girls to behave in "feminine" ways (Wood, 2007). In the past, boys in the United States were taught to base their self-esteem on their achievements, status, and income, and girls learned that their culture valued their appearance and their relationship skills. So boys and girls developed high or low self-esteem based on how well they met these criteria (Wood, 2007).

Today these cultural norms about "appropriate" characteristics and behaviors for males and females are becoming less rigid, but they do still exist and are promoted incessantly in popular culture and entertainment media. Consider just about any television sitcom. Most of them continue to portray women as the "natural" caregivers and when men attempt to perform a care-giver behavior, they often make a mess of the situation. These norms are changing, though, and that

> **independent self-perceptions** based on the belief that traits and abilities are internal to the person and are universally applicable to all situations
>
> **interdependent self-perceptions** based on the belief that traits and abilities are specific to a particular context or relationship