PART I

The Social Construction of Face

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Identity and Facework

A Theoretical Perspective

Seventy years ago, the great sociologist George Herbert Mead (1934) taught that mind, self, and society are outcomes of symbolic interaction. How we think about the world, including our views of ourselves, is always created in everyday talk. Identity is never pre-formed, but is constantly being made in human interaction in a process that our colleague Barnett Pearce (1994) refers to as *making social worlds.*

We once went to a graduation party, where we met a relative of the graduate. This man, intoxicated, told us that he was carrying a gun; that he needed it to defend his friends; that several people he knew had been shot; and that when it was time for him to die, he hoped it would be in a gunfight. To say that we made a hasty departure would be an understatement, but this incident did give us reason to think about the social worlds in which people live and the kinds of identities they create within these worlds. Here was a world in which dignity and honor was established by loyalty, where the group itself gained position through prevailing in violent conflict, where the larger community was defined as a battleground, and where individuals were judged, at least in part, by how well they defended a certain code of honor, even their willingness to die for it. How do such identities arise?

❖ ACCOMPLISHING IDENTITY

As we make judgments and decisions in the actual situations of life, we have a sense of agency or purpose, and we act to meet our goals. As we talked to the man at the party, we understood what he said in a certain way. We assigned meaning to his statement, made a judgment about its implications, and responded in a very particular way. At this moment, we were acting within what Pearce (1994) calls the *first-person perspective,* viewing the situation through our own eyes. In this perspective, we experienced ourselves as actors within the situation, but other times we experience ourselves not just as actors, but also as objects. Let's see how that happens.

When we interact with other people, we see ourselves reflected back to us in their reactions—like a "looking glass self" (Cooley, 1902). In other words, people's reactions over time create a generalized meaning that we come to recognize. Interaction leaves an impression that builds up to provide a sense of personal identity. When we become conscious of our identity, we are taking what Pearce (1994) calls the *third-person perspective,* looking at ourselves as an object. Thus, there are two senses of self, which Mead calls the "I" and the "me." When we are in the first-person perspective (the "I"), we are busy deciding what to do; when we are in the third-person perspective, we step back to reflect on ourselves from some distance (the "me"). Who I am from a third-person perspective certainly influences what I think and do within the first-person perspective; and, reciprocally, what I think and do influences who I am from a third-person perspective.

Robyn Penman (1994) writes:

> The nature of our self-identity and the constancy of it are a function of the communicative practices in which we are situated. If, for example, our practices are constant, then so too will the self-identity we avow. And if our practices are varied and complex then so too will be our self-identity. (p. 21)

The identities you co-construct with your mother, your best friend, and your rabbi are not the same, because these relational contexts are different. You are always re-making yourself in interaction with others. In other words, identity is a social accomplishment, always re-negotiated in the discourse of everyday life (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Your identities have implications beyond specific relationships, however, as relationships connect to one another within larger communities.

SIDEBAR 1.1 Who Am I?

On a piece of paper or computer, make a list of 20 answers to the question, "Who am I?" Work quickly, making the list as fast as you can.

After you have completed the list, look back at what you wrote. These first thoughts are good indicators of some of the things that are most important to you. You can tell a lot about yourself by the kinds of things you include in the list. You might, for example, put down a lot of affiliations, like "I am a Baptist . . . student . . . union member . . . American," and so forth. Or perhaps you wrote qualities like, "I am smart . . . hard worker . . . sometimes depressed." Another possibility are roles such as, "I am a mother . . . manager . . . designer . . . city council member." You may have written down a mix of things.

Now identify the relationships and communities that seem to be reflected in your list and write these down. For example, if you wrote "student," you might find that the college is an important social group. If you wrote "Christian," you might find that your church is important. Someone who listed "mother" might say that family is important.

Ask now, "In what groups do I show these qualities? Who sees me this way? How do I show this when I am with others?" As you work through this exercise, become conscious of your identities—personal, relational, and community.

Source: Adapted from Kuhn & McPartland (1954).

Perhaps Rom Harré (1984) was the first to make a distinction between the social construction of the *person* and that of the *self.* Personhood is the concept of the human being shared widely within a community, while the self is one individual's personal view of how he or she fits into that ideal. Another way of saying this is that the group has a "theory" of personhood, and you have a "theory" of what kind of person you are. The social construction of identity, then, consists of both shared and personal images—an idea of *persons-in-general* and *I myself as a person.* You cannot separate your self-identity from your relationships and the larger communities of which you are a part.

Take body and dress as a case in point. How do you dress? How do you dress in different situations? When would an outfit that is quite comfortable in one situation be embarrassing in another? What parts of your body are you shy about exposing? What parts don't matter? Are you always comfortable exposing the top of your head in public? Are you never comfortable doing so? Are you usually comfortable exposing

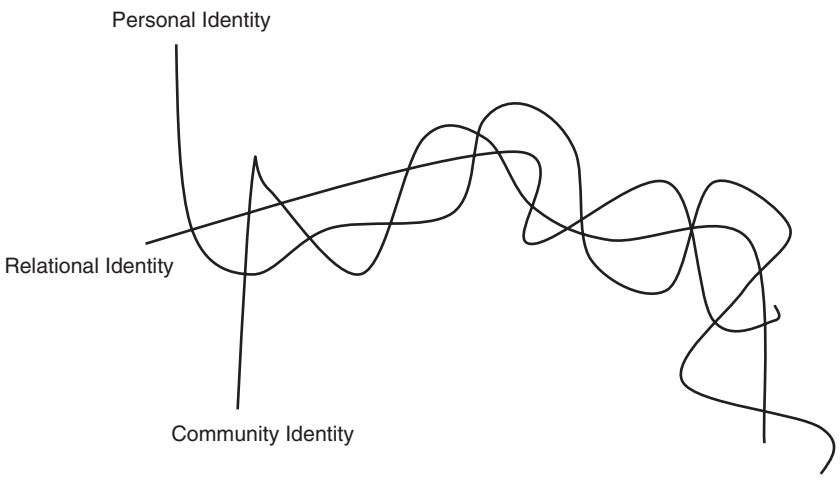
your legs? Your feet? The bottom of your feet? These are all issues for some persons in certain cultures. Body issues are only one of many aspects of identity that are defined and governed through socially constructed categories of personhood, and your sense of *self* is always framed by some larger relational or community context.

People can have a continuum of identities, but we want to make this concept easier to talk about by focusing on three points, or "ranges," on this continuum. These we will call personal identity, relational identity, and community identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Jung & Hecht, 2004). *Personal identity* involves the individual—self and other (Who am I, and who are you?). *Relational identity* consists of expectations negotiated within a very small group, usually two individuals (Who are we together?). *Community identity* is something larger—groups, organizations, cultures, and systems of all types (Who are we all?). These are not discrete points, but are woven together, as illustrated by Figure 1.1. Our intent is just to introduce these three levels here, as we will return to them in much more detail later in this chapter and throughout the book.

Identity and the Lifescript

Each of us possesses a dynamic and changing lifescript that guides our personal, relational, and community identities. The lifescript is a

Figure 1.1 Identities



roadmap for how to live a life and how to respond to the constantly changing landscapes in which we exist. We like to use the term *moral order* to capture the assumptions that drive the lifescript (Pearce, 1989, p. 104). The moral order is a socially constructed set of understandings we carry with us from situation to situation. It is *moral* because it guides our sense of right and wrong, good and bad. It is an *order* because it is reflected in a patterned set of personal actions. The moral order is a tradition of thought worked out over time within a community. It is normally implicit and sub-conscious, but it is powerful in driving human action. The moral order guides our sense of how the world is divided up into categories; it establishes the place of humanity in the larger scheme of the universe; it delineates individual rights, roles, and responsibilities; it provides a set of values for characterizing the worlds of people and of things; it creates a logic of relations among things, or a sense of how things work together; and the moral order provides notions of how groups and individuals should act or respond to the conditions of life (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

If you believe that human life is intricately connected to a larger ecology or spirituality of nature, your lifescript will take a different shape than if you believe that humans are separate and have dominion over the earth. Your lifescript will present a certain narrative if you believe that God has a plan for each person and a different narrative if you believe that people control their own destiny. You will tend to respond one way if you think that earthly life is only a stage in ongoing eternal life, and you will behave another way if you think that human beings are merely biological animals that exist only between birth and death.

We do not mean to imply here that one's lifescript is constant and consistent. If the individual is the unique merger of his or her social worlds, each of those worlds contributes to this sense of reality. Most people today do experience paradox and contradiction. We live in many social worlds, so the lifescript may contain numerous avenues for meaning and action. At any given time, a relatively coherent order may prevail, but as we live through life, our lifescript will shift, and we will not always know clearly how to act because of the inevitable contradictions we face.

Therefore, we do have moments of confusion, times when we are unsure about how to interpret events, how to act in those events, and how to respond to the messages of others. Other times, we may feel quite sure about what is going on and show a strong sense of how to behave. In general, however, individuals work out a way to feel that they are living in a coherent life. They tell stories that will demonstrate to others (and to themselves) that they are not reduced to a string of random acts, but that they are guided by a relatively coherent sense of identity.

SIDEBAR 1.2 Your Moral Order

Pick up a copy of a recent newspaper and scan the various headlines. Pick out three or four of the current controversial issues explored in these articles and read them. For each issue, ask yourself:

1. What do I believe about this issue?
2. What am I unsure about in considering this issue?
3. How have my beliefs changed over time about this issue?
4. If I had a chance to act on this issue in some way, what would I do?
5. What do the answers to Items 1–4 above tell me about my moral order?

The Coherent Identity

The sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) was firm in the belief that no one has a single, unified self. People often think that if they are honest, they will come in touch with who they "really" are. We agree with Goffman that this is a mistake. Because your sense of self-identity is always being constructed in relationship to others, you have many "selves" (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Because you are a member of many communities, you are influenced by numerous ideas of personhood. We also believe with Goffman that your identity is always made in how you present yourself, how you act within the situations in which you live and work.

Sometimes, you may experience a contradiction, or gap, among various identities. This can happen, for example, when your preferred personal identity conflicts with an important relational identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004). For example, you may pride yourself on your personal independence while finding yourself quite dependent on another person in a relationship that is very important to you.

Although moments of contradiction are challenging, you do organize your many portrayals into a picture or idea of your identity at any given time in your life. You may not "perform" all aspects of this coherent self at all times, but it lies there in your consciousness as an overall context or picture of who you think you are. Others also see patterns in your behavior that make it possible for them to identify you as a coherent being. This is what Mead meant by the "generalized other," or the "me." Indeed, a coherent sense of self is vital to mental health, as it gives our

lives meaning. Identity confusion, which we all experience from time to time, can be a problem; when it persists, such confusion can become a mental health issue as well.

Coherence does not necessarily imply consistency. We often have a complex sense of identity. You might, for example, define yourself as a "complicated, adaptable, growing person." With this definition, you would eschew consistency and value diversity in your own behavior. You might pride yourself on thinking through each situation. Others, who tell you that you are amazingly complex and unpredictable, would actually reinforce this view. In this scenario, behavioral diversity is not a source of confusion, but achieves clarity.

Sarah Tracy and Angela Trethewey (2005) refer to one's coherent identity as a *crystallized self.* It focuses a diversity of resources that we can use in answering questions of identity. Like a crystal, the self

> is multidimensional—the more facets, the more beautiful and complex. Certainly crystals may feel solid, stable, and fixed, but just as crystals have differing forms depending upon whether they grow rapidly or slowly, under constant or fluctuating conditions, or from highly variable or remarkably uniform fluids or gasses, crystallized selves have different shapes depending on the various discourses through which they are constructed and constrained. (p. 186)

The coherent self—whether simple or complex—serves as a foundation or anchor for making decisions about how to act with other people, a standard with which to evaluate one's own behavior, and a baseline from which to grow and change. Over time, of course, self-identity shifts as we encounter new situations, new conversation partners, and new challenges. You probably would not want to be the same person when you are 60 that you were when you were 20, though there may be aspects of identity that you would like to retain. Reflect on the question: How am I different now than I was 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago? No matter how you change, however, you usually want to present yourself to others as a person worthy of respect.

Dignity, Honor, and Respect

All of us want to believe that we are fulfilling the values of those communities and cultures most important to us. Achieving this affords dignity. We want to believe that other people see our positive role in society and share this value. Achieving this affords honor. We all want

to believe that others admire us in some way for our individual and/or collective contributions, which affords respect. All mentally healthy people want to present themselves in these ways. No matter what else we may wish to convey, we also want to enact positive values, and we want others to recognize that we are doing so.

Honor depends upon the community and relationship in which the judgment is made. Pressed to justify their actions, even the most nefarious characters will frame their behavior in terms of some moral order in which the behavior is viewed as honorable:

> "He may be a thief, but at least he is honest about it."
>
> "They may have killed millions of people, but they were doing it in the name of progress."
>
> "Some collateral damage is to be expected when evil-doers must be defeated."

Most of us are not evil and just want to do the right thing every day, even when it is not always clear what the right thing is. We want to be treated by others with respect, and we want to treat other people the same way. We often fail at this, but the ideal is there.

❖ THE METAPHOR OF FACE

The human face is so important in personal expression that it has become a symbol of close personal interaction. We use expressions such as "face to face," "face time," "in your face," and "saving face." In other words, the metaphor of face is powerful in bringing many aspects of personal communication to the fore. Within the metaphor, face is equated to your public identity—the "you" presented to others.

We use the metaphor of face to designate the universal desire to present oneself with dignity and honor. The idea of face probably originated in China, where it referred to respectability in terms of character and success (Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944). It involved a kind of reciprocated respect or deference. Erving Goffman (1967), who wrote extensively about the presentation of self, popularized the concept of face in the United States. Goffman showed how face can be "lost," "maintained," "protected," or "enhanced." These outcomes are accomplished through the work of communication, or facework. We define *facework* as *a set of coordinated practices in which communicators build, maintain, protect, or*

threaten personal dignity, honor, and respect. Constructive facework is a vital aspect of all interpersonal communication. If we do it well, we build relationships, we reinforce our own competence as communicators, and we make interaction more rewarding and less distressing (Cupach & Metts, 1994, pp. 15–16). We teach our children how to do good facework from the time they can put a sentence together: Be polite, answer people when they talk to you, be respectful, present yourself well, and be kind. As fundamental as it is, facework remains one of the most challenging aspects of communication well into adulthood, especially in complex, systemic situations.

An important part of your lifescript, then, involves face—how you want to be seen by others, how you want others to treat you, and how you treat others. Indeed, facework itself is the never-ending process of presenting self to others and acting toward others in the ongoing narrative of life. How we do this is very much part and parcel of the moral order, which is why different communities, especially cultural communities, do facework differently.

SIDEBAR 1.3 In Your Face

As communication scholars, we have long been enthralled with all the nuances of sports activities and the "talk" on and off the court. Whether it is the grunts and groans of football (each with its unique meaning) or the deep conversations that long-distance running affords, many people enjoy special communication interactions while getting exercise. Of particular interest is the "language" of street basketball. Especially enjoyed on neighborhood courts, basketball on the street is played with a passion.

The team dynamics are intriguing, but the really pertinent communication trait we will look at here is the one-on-one challenge, when two players take on each other. In some communities, the players will challenge each other up the court, with the defender shadowing the offensive player's every step. When the offensive player goes up for a shot, even with the defensive player's hand in the face, the ball goes in the basket and the scorer looks in the eye of the defender and might say, "In your face!" or merely "Face!" The interpersonal challenges that occur in sports may be bittersweet. Positive facework can occur through respectful coaching, strong teamwork, and physical exertion that do not threaten the dignity of others. Negative face situations can be created when the sport loses its focus on the skill and motivational factors and becomes personal affronts to individual players.

Face and Identity

What is accomplished when we do facework? Lim and Bowers (1991) have identified three types of face that emerge in most interaction situations. These are autonomy face, fellowship face, and competence face. *Autonomy* is a sense of self apart from others. It involves a feeling of freedom to act and an ability to control one's life, an idea of privacy, and a sense of boundary between self and other. Whenever you act in a way to distinguish yourself from others, you are showing autonomy face. Autonomy is more important in individualistic cultures, such as northern European, as the rights and responsibilities of individuals within these cultures are very important. Even in more collectivist cultures, such as many in Asia or Africa, however, there is always a delineation of self from other. Harré (1984) writes that in all cultures individuals have a consciousness that distinguishes between self and other, a sense of agency that provides an awareness of goals, and an autobiography that provides a sense of one's own life story.

Fellowship involves the need to be included and a sense of connection between self and other. While autonomy face emphasizes separateness, fellowship face centers on connection and commonality. Trust and cooperation are examples of fellowship face, as are shared values, relationships, and a sense of togetherness. Whenever you act in a way that builds a bridge between yourself and another person, you are constructing fellowship face. Notice, however, that autonomy and fellowship are somewhat at odds. There is a tension here that must be managed. How do you promote a sense of separateness while also building connection?

Competence, the third type, is the attribution of ability, respect for position, and contribution to society. Competence face is a feeling that you are able to do something positive and constructive for the community and that you are recognized for this. Competence face involves both autonomy and fellowship; it recognizes that you as an individual have special abilities that are valued within the larger community and that the community somehow benefits from who you are. Whenever you act in a way that brings honor to yourself for what you have accomplished, you are building competence face.

Although face always includes these three dimensions, they are not always equal or balanced. Different forms of face become more or less important as the situation, group, relationship, or culture shifts. At different moments, you may have greater concerns for one of these over the others. Within different relationships, they assume different values, and various cultures value certain forms of face more than other forms.

For us, these three dimensions point to something larger that is made through facework, corresponding to three levels of identity important to human beings. These are personal identities, relational identities, and community identities. The plural is important here, as you are constantly co-constructing a number of identities on each of these levels.

Personal Identities. We present ourselves and respond to others as persons. This we do in ways that build, maintain, or erode our personal identities. For example, we may come to feel validated, rejected, approved, respected, or confirmed (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, pp. 42–43). We work to influence the face of ourselves and that of others in a way that affects both how we feel and how we think at the moment (Ting-Toomey, 1994, pp. 2–3).

Relational Identities. Part of what we seek in communication is social, or relational, identity (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Often called *mutual face,* this is an identity we want to build for the relationship itself, which entails "who we are" within this relationship (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p. 37). Thus, part of your own identity will help shape the nature of the relationship, just as relationship shapes your own identity. If you want a relationship of questioning, challenging, and arguing, then it behooves you to be seen as contentious. If you want to make a relationship of consensus and calmness, then within that relationship you must project an image of agreeability.

Community Identities. Community identities can be very large indeed. We are using the term *community* to mean a system of any type—family, neighborhood, organization, culture, nation, or any other human grouping that is important to us, important enough that our identity is both shaped by this community and contributes to it. Within a system, we perceive that we have a place, a role, and a set of connections with other members of the system. An important part of who we are within the system involves how well we believe we fulfill our place, our role, and our connections. This is really a question of competence. We want to know that we meet community expectations, live up to community values, fulfill our role, and contribute to community life. We also want to feel that the community itself has an identity of value to us as individuals and to our relationships within the community. In a business organization, for example, managers, employees, contractors, and others want to know that they fit in, that they are doing their jobs well, that others respect them, and that the organization itself is what they would like it to be.

An important part of competence is *general social competence,* which means communicating in ways that are consistent with cultural expectations within the community at hand (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003). Good facework—being polite, deferential, respectful, and appropriate—is important in building this identity of the socially competent person. In many parts of the world, this means asking people about their families, sharing tea, honoring people's position, and many other forms of basic social etiquette. It other parts of the world, it means being direct, not wasting time, getting to the point, and saying what you mean. One of the reasons that social violations are problematic is that they can harm one's image as a competent individual within a community of integrity, and they can threaten the identity of the community itself.

How Is Face Created?

We know that face is an accomplishment negotiated in communication. In other words, face results from a negotiated set of actions that build, maintain, or threaten our desired identities. But what does this process actually look like?

Presenting the Self and Responding to Others. There is always some image of self explicitly or implicitly embedded in what we say and how we say it (Goffman, 1959). Most of the time, we present ourselves in a favorable light or, more accurately, in the way we wish to be viewed within the situation. There are times when we threaten our own face because of some sense of shame or self-disappointment. Sometimes we put ourselves down in order to build others up. The point is that no matter what we do, an impression will be formed, and we usually act to influence that impression. Frequently, this is a major goal of the interaction.

SIDEBAR 1.4 Face Engagement

"A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location. . . . It is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented."

Source: E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* 1959, p. 252.

While we are presenting ourselves, we also respond to others in ways that affect their own sense of identity. We may show politeness, deference, and goodwill. We may compliment, praise, or show approval. We may also criticize, demean, or attack others in ways designed to erode or reduce their image within the situation. An important aspect of every conversation, then, includes actions that affect the identity of self and other. These two are connected, of course, as we build our own identity by showing honor to others, and we can damage our own identity by attacking other people.

At base, we operate in communication with what has been called the *cooperative principle* (Grice, 1975). This means only that people understand the need to join together in some sort of coordinated way in order to negotiate or co-construct an outcome. When someone greets you, you greet him or her back. When someone asks a question, you answer it. When someone makes a request, you either grant it or not. Understanding the need to manage the face of both self and others is, indeed, an extension of the cooperative principle. We normally share a set of rules for building or even attacking face, and we expect others to follow those rules cooperatively. People do violate the cooperative principle by ignoring, opposing, or even changing expected rules of interaction, but they do not do so without the consequence of confusion and loss of face. You might intentionally or unintentionally respond "off the wall," but you will probably offer an account or explanation in order to regain the face you would otherwise lose.

Interacting Directly and Indirectly. Our actions are frequently quite direct, as would be the case of boasting and praise. Often, however, we act indirectly to accomplish the same goals. You could say, "I have done a lot of research on this topic . . ." or you could pepper your conversation with all kinds of facts that show that you have done the research. You could remark, "You have such good taste in clothes . . ." or you could touch your friend's jacket, look at it, and smile.

We often make judgments about how direct or indirect to be. In both building and threatening face, there are times when we feel the need to be very direct, and other times when directness itself would be threatening to one's perceived competence as a communicator. Directness is appreciated in cultures that value clarity and individuality, where indirectness can be viewed as "slippery" or "weak." On the other hand, indirectness is more appreciated in cultures that value relationships and context, where directness is seen as intrusive and impolite (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, pp. 30–31). We may be more direct

when we are uncertain about how the other person will interpret an indirect message, and we are probably going to be more indirect with people who know us well and can "read" our subtle cues.

Enhancing and Threatening. We can use a variety of actions ranging from those that build face to those designed to tear it down. Messages that enhance identities are more common in highly coherent situations that are consensual and relatively free of conflict. On the other hand, in power struggles or disagreements we often move to demean other people and their ideas as a way of gaining personal influence (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). This is especially true in individualistic cultures. Ironically, face threats used to help one prevail in a conflict situation may actually make such conflicts harder to resolve, as the struggle becomes increasingly personal and contentious. You may have encountered a rather common pattern of facework that involves pumping oneself up and demeaning the other person in what John Oetzel and his colleagues call *dominating facework* (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, & Takai, 2000). This is an aggressive form of communication designed to defend one's own honor and competence, while demeaning that of the other. Whether face is enhanced or threatened, of course, depends not just on the intentions and meanings of the speaker but on the perceptions and meanings of the listener as well. What is intended may not be the actual effect. You may mean to compliment a new acquaintance only to discover that this person took your comment as a patronizing insult, or you may intend to reproach a co-worker, who merely thanks you for the constructive feedback! It always takes two to negotiate meaning, and the meaning for one person may or may not correspond with that of the other. Later in this book, we consider how facework is structured over time in the back-and-forth interaction of conversations and episodes.

Integrating. In contrast to dominating facework, Oetzel and his co-authors identify a broad category of cooperative behavior called *integration* (Oetzel et al., 2000). This is a complex form of interaction that honors self and other through good listening and exploration of a problem of mutual concern. Here two people of good faith attempt to work through differences constructively in a way that shows interpersonal respect and caring. This kind of facework does not depend so much on what people say about one another directly, but how they show respect through the manner in which they attend others' needs along with their own.

❖ CONSTRUCTING A FRAME

Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen (1980) created the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) to explain this relationship between meaning and action. This theory has evolved over the years through the contribution of a host of colleagues who have put it into practice and refined it through testing and application (e.g., Pearce, 2005; Pearce & Kearney, 2004). In CMM, parties coordinate communication to make sense of and mesh their respective actions into a coherent whole. Each communicator may understand what is happening very differently, but the parties feel successful to the extent that their actions are perceived as organized (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001). The way people communicate is often much more important than the content of what they say. Instead of focusing on pieces of the conversation, we can focus on the interaction as a whole process. The meaning that is worked out socially through interaction develops over time. Facework is an integral part of the process through which we coordinate our actions and construct meaning through communication. Largely based on CMM, the facework theory presented in this book offers many points to enter an interaction from a variety of vantage points. Each "entry" has implications for the meaning that is jointly created and the resulting social world within which communicators will move forward.

The continual creation of meaning has implications not just for the individuals in the immediate situation but for larger networks and entire systems as well. Robyn Penman (1994) writes that facework is always understood within a conceptual context, or frame. The nature of facework depends upon the frame in which you view communication. The following framework explores the facework process and its impact, by expanding the breadth and depth of the concept. This framework is situated in a matrix, which applies a *focus of attention* and *scope of action.* The framework is outlined and illustrated in Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

❖ FOCUS OF ATTENTION

The focus of attention identifies the parts of the system most salient to the communicator at the moment. Although communicators can address virtually any level of concern, we call out three as important:

- *The person:* Communicators frequently engage in facework with the primary aim of affecting perceptions of self or other. In other words,

Table 1.1 Facework Focus and Scope

Focus of Attention	*Scope of Action*			
	Act	*Conversation*	*Episode*	*Lifescript*
Person	An act that aims to affect self or other face.	A conversation affecting face of self or other.	An episode of conversations affecting self or other face.	A long-term series of episodes creating an orientation to self and other.
Relationship	An act of facework aiming to help define the relationship.	A conversation of facework shaping the relationship.	An episode of conversations defining the relationship.	A long-term series of episodes defining relationships.
System	An act of facework aiming to help define the system.	A conversation of facework shaping the system.	An episode of conversations shaping the system.	A long-term series of episodes shaping larger systems.

they try directly to build or threaten a person's face as the primary goal of the interaction. A simple compliment or an apology is an example.

- *The relationship:* Although facework is directed at persons, its goal is not always just to affect the individual. Indeed, much of the time the aim of facework goes beyond personal feelings and may be designed to affect the relationship in some way. For example, we might compliment a colleague because we want to build a positive working relationship with this individual.

- *The system:* Facework may also be aimed at broader levels of the system, including, for example, the family, organization, community, nation, or world. For example, a manager may criticize a supervisor in the hope that improvement will bring about a higher feeling of achievement among all employees in the department. Alternatively, the manager may be trying to affect the whole company by positioning it as a company with high standards and a compelling vision.

Interaction, then, can impact face at several levels. When you respond to another person, you are not just targeting that other person

Table 1.2 Simple Examples of Facework

Focus of Attention	*Scope of Action*			
	Act	*Conversation*	*Episode*	*Lifescript*
Person	Praising a child for doing well in a sports game so that he will feel good about himself.	Having a positive conversation with a child about her sports game, resulting in the child's feeling confident.	Attending all of a child's sports games for an entire season to show that he is worthy and loved.	Showing a long-term attitude of interest and joy in children and their activities to help them become happy adults.
Relationship	Praising a child for doing well in a sports game to continue building a supportive relationship.	Having a positive conversation with a child about her sports game, contributing to a supportive relationship.	Attending all of a child's sports games for an entire season, which contributes to a strong bond between parent and child.	Showing a long-term attitude of interest and joy in children and their activities, which creates many positive relationships with children.
System	Praising a child for doing well in a sports game to help build the strength of the community sports league.	Having a positive conversation with the child about her sports game, contributing to a greater support for the community sports league.	Attending all of a child's sports games for an entire season, which contributes to increasing strength for the community sports league.	Showing a long-term attitude of interest and joy in children and their activities, which contributes to an increase in healthy activities for children in the community.

or even your relationship with him or her. Your actions may have profound implications for other people in a network of relationships well beyond the immediate situation, and often you will be aware of this fact and act accordingly.

In a basic sense, then, we can see these focus areas as "choices." When you enter a communication interaction, you will have choices as to where to focus your attention. If you are dedicated to managing face in the situation, you will engage in an interaction that may fall into one or more of the above. This choice could answer the following questions:

- *For the person:* What do I hope will happen for you? What do I hope will happen for me?
- *For the relationship:* What do I hope will happen for us?
- *For the system:* What do I hope will happen for us all?

Weighing or balancing the facework we do on one level with that on other levels is challenging and requires us to be aware of tradeoffs. Perhaps you have known a person who, no matter what is going on, will help others feel good about themselves and elicit a positive response for self. This may have positive face implications in the short run, but may come to be perceived over time in the group as placating and lead to a loss of trust. Or perhaps you have known a person who is generally face threatening in the interest of getting a "good group result," and in the process erodes the personal goodwill and positive relationships necessary to achieve those good results.

The most skilled communicators are able to integrate facework on all three of these levels. The focus of attention becomes intriguing when we consider that communicators work on multiple levels simultaneously. Facework is rarely isolated to one of the above levels. Indeed, the levels of person, relationship, and system cannot be separated in reality, as each provides a context for the other.

In street basketball, players challenge each other's face at the *personal* level. One player thinks, "I hope that I can prove myself in spite of the difficult situation my opponent offers me," while the other thinks, "I will try to stop my opponent, but I will have a chance to regain my face, even if my opponent scores." On the *relationship* level, one-on-one basketball emphasizes two players challenging each other to their physical limit. The "face" focus says to each other, "We know that together, we will push ourselves to a new level by challenging each other's face and skills, creating some kind of bond in the process." Of course, the choice could be one of damaging face, as one player may be attempting to demoralize the other player, knowing that many instances of "in your face!" create an uneven playing field, even though

the rules of the game enable the player who just got scored on to take the ball in from out of bounds and get a chance to regain face. Of course, the entire game usually happens with and in front of others, who take turns challenging one another, and facework always extends to the larger *system* of players as well.

SIDEBAR 1.5 Move-In Day

Consider: It is "move-in day" at the dormitories. One roommate (out of four) is already at the two-bedroom dorm room, and has started unpacking. You are the second one to arrive, and see this situation. She has taken the choice spot, with the sunny window and ledge to sit on or use for storage. You can now begin to unpack and decide where you will stay.

You may want to demonstrate facework at these levels:

- *Person:* I want the next best choice, and want to make sure I can be comfortable. I do not want this new roommate to think I am selfish or assuming, so I will say to her, "Wow, what a nice bedroom this is. I am anxious to get unpacked and am willing to put my stuff in this side of the room. Would you mind if I shared with you?" With this focus on the person, you are creating a social world where you act quickly, but do inquire about the "other" and his or her preferences.

- *Relationship:* You know that this is a person you will be living with all year, and want to establish a respectful relationship with her and the other future roommates. You may say, "I wonder when the others will be arriving. I am thinking about waiting until they get here to discuss where we should all sleep. Would that be OK? Or do you have a preference for where I should put my stuff?" With this focus on the relationship level, you are trying to create a social world where you act and communicate deliberately with the "other" in mind.

- *System:* Maybe you are one of those rare creatures that think carefully about decision-making methods and setting precedent for future decisions. You may decide to sit and gab for a while with the first roommate, and then maybe talk to your Resident Advisor about the process this person suggests that roommates use to decide how to divide up space. If there is no precedent set, you may ask all your roommates, "Hey, it looks like we have an opportunity here to make our first important decision. Before we rush into putting all our stuff away, I wonder if we could talk for a moment about 'how' to make that decision, and maybe it will help us later on when we continue to face tough choices." You are focusing at the system level, and trying to create a social world where people make clear appropriate decisions using a method all agree on.

❖ CONTEXTS OF ACTION

Although facework is usually thought of as a single act, it rarely is limited to one message or behavior. Face is an accomplishment of interaction as communicators work together over time to negotiate face issues. Four broad contexts are offered here to identify the scope of action within which facework happens (Pearce & Cronen, 1980).

- *The act:* Single messages and actions do have implications for face, and communicators frequently make a statement designed to threaten or build face. A parent might compliment his or her child on a good report card.

- *The conversation:* More often, facework is accomplished across a series of acts and becomes an important part of the conversation. For example, a couple may build one another's parenting confidence as they discuss their child's report card.

- *The episode:* More profound than simple acts of facework are the broader face implications that occur over time through a series of interactions. Rarely are conversations isolated. Instead, they are connected to other conversations in thematic and organized sets of conversations. An *episode* is an event or series of connected events with a common theme. For example, many times over the years the child picks up his or her report card and gives it to the parent. Parents study it, think about it, talk together about it, discuss it with the child, write a note back to the teacher or have a teacher conference—all connected conversations over time.

- *The lifescript:* As discussed earlier in this chapter, the lifescript is a guiding set of principles, an idea of who we are and how we live, that governs interaction over many episodes. Managers have a style, parents have a philosophy, and activists have a cause. Our identities as persons and communities affect and are shaped by communication patterns of facework. What you say to your child about his or her report card, the conversations and episodes about report cards, student progress, and childhood responsibility are guided by the larger lifescript.

As communicators who make choices about how to act in a situation, we can look at these contexts for action and determine the point from which we want to act and communicate. We could consider the following questions.

- *The act:* What should I do or say?
- *The conversation:* What is happening here? How should we continue?

- *The episode:* Where are we going?
- *The lifescript:* Who am I?

Consider a manager trying to decide how to address an employee discipline problem. A first choice, and probably the most narrow-minded, is to communicate at the *act* level of facework. As the manager, you could place a letter in the employee's file and have a session to reprimand that person.

What would happen if you first considered communicating at the *lifescript* level to respond according to a set of commitments that you have made well beyond any single interaction or situation? For example, you may remember that you are committed to respectful communication that models the dignity with which you would like to be treated yourself. You hope that you can set a precedent with your communication, so that interactions throughout the organization may model this effectiveness and constructive interaction. This context may give you the place to act and you may create a training initiative called "ethics in the workplace."

You may also decide to put yourself into the *episode* context. From this viewpoint, you could ask yourself, "Where are we going, either as a department or an organization?" You could revisit the organization's rules of conduct and procedures for addressing violations. In a private meeting, you may share these rules and give your perspective on the matter at hand. These rules point to the organization's vision, and you can point out the connection between ethical behavior and the achievement of the vision.

Finally, you may enter the communication context at the *conversation* level. You look carefully at what is occurring in this person's life, consider the workplace and home life situation, and design a meeting to discuss the consequences for the behavior. Your message will be framed from the perspective of a manager whose duty it is to carry out discipline, while recognizing the personal and professional pressures and challenges in each employee's life.

Using a system's perspective, these four contexts for action are integrally connected, as depicted in Figures 1.2 and 1.3.

Human action is characterized by difference, and how we act in a situation will vary, depending on our life experience and cultures that form our lifescripts, the episodes that give meaning to our lives, the forms of conversation that comprise our social life, and the manners of speech and action we have learned in the many communities of which we have been a part. Differences can run deep, and the management of difference can involve the intricate coordination of meaning and action.

Figure 1.2 Focus of Attention

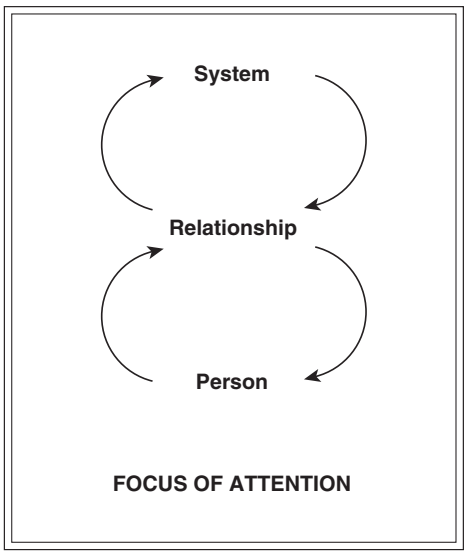
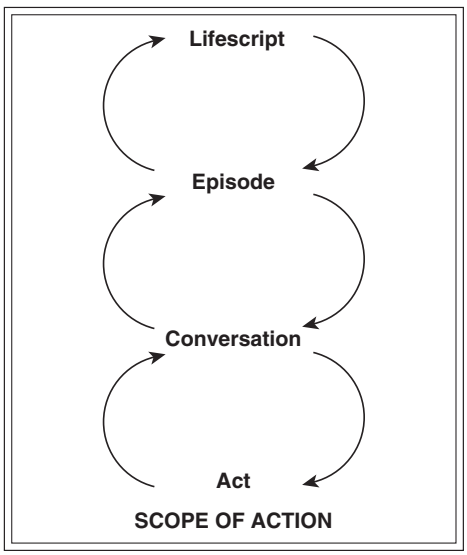


Figure 1.3 Scope of Action



❖ PRINCIPLES FOR PRACTICE

We end Chapters 1 through 6 of this book with a small set of principles, or learnings, from the chapter that can be used as a guide for interpretation and action. As we use the term, a *principle* is a high-level guide that helps us understand complex and diverse situations and make decisions about how to act in the various settings of our lives. A principle is not a law; it does not state a universal causal relationship or dictate a particular outcome or way of behaving. Rather, we see principles as flexible benchmarks for moving forward in a coherent way. In this chapter we offer four principles:

The way you communicate will affect your identity and that of others close to you. Identity is socially constructed, and the manner in which individuals interact with one another affects their sense of self. You can think consciously about how to respond to others, always keeping in mind the kind of person you want to be, the kind of relationship you want to have, and the kind of community you want to make.

Show the most appropriate aspect of your complex identity to others in each situation, but also aim for a coherent lifescript. Your identity is multifaceted. It is dynamic and grows as you experience more of life. You do not need to worry about acting consistently, because the situations you face and the people with whom you communicate are not consistent. You can, however, find coherence in your lifescript at any given time in your life. Act in ways that reflect the kind of person you want to be.

Your relationships and communities are part of who you are. Nurture the connections that are most important to you. Even if your culture teaches you that you are independent and autonomous, you are not. Your sense of personhood and self are always socially constructed. Know your roots and branches and think actively about the relationships and communities that shape your life.

Treat others with the same dignity, honor, and respect you want for yourself. The golden rule lives. This does not mean that you act toward every person in an identical way, but that you use your best face judgment for that individual within the situation you are facing together.