

Laura K. Guerrero | Bree McEwan

Interpersonal ENCOUNTERS

Connecting Through Communication





Interpersonal Encounters

In loving memory of Carol Anne Knarr, Robert Knarr, Nilah Farmer, and Catherine Farmer

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Interpersonal Encounters

Connecting Through Communication

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PREFACE

We are excited and honored to release the first edition of *Interpersonal Encounters: Connecting Through Communication*. This book is a collaboration designed to be relevant to today's students while being true to the current core research in interpersonal communication and related fields. The structure and content in this book are also designed to meet a need for an introductory book on interpersonal communication that focuses uniquely on interaction in interpersonal encounters from a functional perspective, as we explain next. We strongly believe that being an effective communicator is a key skill in both personal and professional contexts. People who have better social and personal relationships also report being more physically and mentally healthy. Students in business-related fields learn that developing their "soft" skills is critically important for success in the workplace with clients and co-workers. Indeed, interpersonal skills are frequently cited as one of the most valued sets of skills within organizations. Being able to make good impressions, manage conversations, influence others, and deal effectively with conflict and transgressions, along with other topics covered in this book, translates into skills that cut across various contexts. In fact, we challenge students and instructors to think about how some of the issues discussed in this book work across contexts as well as how they might differ. We also challenge students to try to think outside of their own perspective to better understand their own biases and tendencies related to communication.

APPROACH

This book takes a functional approach to the study of interpersonal communication. By “functional” we mean that we focus on what communication *does* or, in other words, some of the functions it fulfills, within interpersonal interaction. At many universities and colleges, students learn about general concepts related to nonverbal communication, verbal communication, and listening in an introduction to communication course and/or public speaking course. There are also courses at most universities in context areas such as family, workplace, or relational communication. Students have told us that much of what they learn in their introductory interpersonal classes is redundant to what they have learned in these other courses. Thus, to provide a unique look at introductory concepts, this book does not include stand-alone chapters on topics such as nonverbal communication, listening, language, family communication, and so forth. Instead, we focus our efforts on showing students what communication—both verbal and nonverbal—*does* in their lives.

After the introductory chapter, the remaining chapters delve into topics such as how people perform identities, manage impressions, communicate across cultures, manage conversations, express emotions, influence others, develop relationships, maintain quality relationships, manage conflict, cope with transgressions, and, finally, end relationships. Of course, communication functions to do more than what we cover in this book. Our choice for chapters was guided by the research on interpersonal communication to date. Indeed, one of the primary goals for this book was that it be both research based and practical. Within each chapter, our goal is to provide students with research-based knowledge that will help them understand themselves and others better as communicators. When appropriate, we also give students information that will help them build their level of interpersonal skill. To that end, we strived to provide students with both the seminal and current research on each topic and to flesh out some of the practical applications that research has for their lives. We also recognize that interpersonal encounters are deeply influenced by factors related to our identities, including race, gender, sexual orientation, and culture. Within this text, we do not bracket these influences into specific chapters or box features. Rather, we have attempted to weave scholarship representing diverse authors and study participants throughout the text in the same manner that identity and context are woven through our interpersonal interactions. We also call on ourselves and our fellow interpersonal scholars to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in future interpersonal scholarship to create even greater knowledge and understanding of interpersonal communication processes. The special features within the book are also designed to help students think more deeply about interpersonal communication and develop their skills.

ORGANIZATION

Between an introductory chapter and a capstone chapter, *Interpersonal Encounters* is organized in a format that moves from looking at the self to looking at how people communicate in social and personal relationships. We believe that the breakdown of chapters reflects the research in the field of interpersonal communication. Following the introductory chapter, Chapters 2 and 3 take an in-depth look at how people communicate their identities, form impressions of others, and manage their own first impressions. The next chapter (Chapter 4, “Communicating Interpersonally Across Cultures”) focuses on broadening students’ perspectives so they think outside of their self-concept and experiences to communicate better in intercultural interactions. The next three chapters (Chapters 5–7) focus on three essential functions of communication—conversation,

emotion, and social influence. These three areas have received considerable attention from researchers, given their centrality to what communication is used to do in people's everyday lives. The next five chapters (Chapters 8–12) center on social and personal relationships—from their development and maintenance, to coping with conflict and transgressions, and finally, to ending relationships. Finally, the book ends with a capstone chapter (Chapter 13). The goal of this concluding chapter is to provide students with some overall principles to take away from the course. These take-home messages come from looking across all the previous chapters to summarize major principles that are central to being more effective communicators in interpersonal interactions. Each of the previous chapters also ends with principles, so this is a way to give students an overarching set of final principles that will help them pull everything they have learned together.

FEATURES

When planning the features for this book, we kept our pedagogical goals in mind. Specifically, our primary goal was to provide students with a book that was both research based and practical. We also talked to our students to get ideas of the kind of features they find useful in textbooks. This led us to create the following features for this book.

Opening Scenarios: Each chapter begins with a vignette that provides an example of some of the concepts that will be discussed. The example is referred to multiple times within the chapter as a kind of mini case study. Students appreciate these types of scenarios when they are relatable and put concepts in context, which was our goal in creating them.

Skill Builders: Most chapters include at least one Skill Builder box that describes various interpersonal skills, often with recommendations for ways to develop or refine those skills. Many of these boxes end with questions that students can use to think about their skills and ways to improve them.

“I Didn't Know That!”: These boxes highlight something that students might not know or expect to be true. An important part of critical thinking is for students to be able to evaluate the various messages they are bombarded with about interpersonal interactions, both from social media and the popular press. While some of this information is valid, some is also questionable. These boxes not only point out some information students might not know or expect, but they also teach them the importance of researching before believing everything they read as fact.

“What Would You Do?”: These boxes present students with different situations or scenarios and ask them what they would do in those situations. Most of these boxes include an ethical dimension as well as practical concerns. For example, these boxes deal with issues such as when it is appropriate to fake emotion or engage in deception, and how to break up with someone in a kind but firm manner.

Principles: Each chapter ends with principles that tie together some of the ideas and concepts students learned. Students find these kinds of summarizing principles helpful in developing a “big picture” understanding of interpersonal communication.

Key Terms and Glossary: Each chapter includes a key term list. Each term also appears in the glossary at the end of the book. While the principles help give students a “big picture”

understanding of ideas, being able to define concepts gives them the specifics they need to pull everything together.

Reflection Questions: There is a set of reflection questions at the end of each chapter. These questions ask students to think about their own communication and/or reflect on key issues in the chapter. The reflection questions would also be appropriate for discussion boards or as prompts for short reflection papers.

TEACHING RESOURCES

This text includes an array of instructor teaching materials designed to save you time and to help you keep students engaged. To learn more, visit sagepub.com or contact your SAGE representative at sagepub.com/findmyrep.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No matter how passionate you are about a topic like interpersonal communication, it is still a challenge to find the time to work on a new book when you are busy with many professional and family activities. This book has been a product of patience, collaboration, and a strong desire to write the kind of introductory book that would get our undergraduates as excited about interpersonal communication as we were when we first discovered it and still are today. This book became a reality because of the hard work, dedication, and support of many people.

First, from both of us: We would like to thank the team at SAGE for all their hard work, patience, and creativity: Lily Norton, Acquisitions Editor; Jennifer Jovin-Bernstein, Senior Content Development Editor; Kathryn Abbott, Development Editor; Sarah Wilson and Sam Diaz, Editorial Assistants; and Rebecca Lee, Production Editor.

Second, from Laura: I would first and foremost like to thank Bree. When I was first asked to write an introductory-level interpersonal book in the tradition of my upper-division book (*Close Encounters*), I was crazy enough to think that I could write it on my own. It quickly became apparent that if I did that, the book wouldn't be published until 2030. (Well, maybe it wouldn't have been that bad... but still.) When I considered who to ask to co-author the new book with me, Bree came to mind because of her knowledge, writing skills, and our shared teaching philosophy. I'm so glad she accepted the invitation. This book has truly been an equal partnership and I value all of Bree's contributions more than I can say. I would also like to acknowledge my daughters, Gabrielle and Kristiana, who were instrumental in two ways. First, they were always available to read excerpts to make sure they really did reflect how Gen Z communicates, and, second, they helped with some of the photos. On that note, I would like to also thank them and their friends who appear in some of the book's photos: Natalie Greenberg, Noor Fahim, Avery Duane, and Ally Nash. Last but not least, I would like to give a huge shout-out to my PhD advisor, Judee Burgoon, whose use of the functional approach as a way to conceptualize nonverbal communication was influential in my thinking about how to structure this book.

Third, from Bree: When Laura called me to ask if I was interested in being her co-author, I knew I would have a supportive co-author in Laura and that we had a clear and shared vision about the type of textbook we wished was available for the interpersonal course. I am so thrilled that she asked me to come along on this journey with her. I would also like to thank my undergraduate interpersonal students from my time at DePaul University, who readily accepted the role of reading in-process chapters and providing excellent feedback that improved the overall feel and accessibility of the book. In addition, I would also like to acknowledge my family—my husband, Colin, who among many talents also keeps the small McEwans occupied when I need to research and write, and the small McEwans themselves (Branwen, Oriana, and Cael) who provide me with a unique perspective on how people learn and develop interpersonal behaviors.

Finally, from both of us again: We would like to thank many of our colleagues, both in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication and in the College of Communication at DePaul University, for their support and for sometimes letting us float ideas or ask them about their understanding of concepts. We would also like to acknowledge the book's reviewers:

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Phyllis S. Zrzavy, Franklin Pierce University **And last, but definitely not least, we would like to thank our students!** This includes both our undergraduate and graduate students over the years. The undergraduate students we have taught give us suggestions, help us determine what is helpful and important to them, and keep us enthusiastic about teaching interpersonal communication. Many of the graduate students we work with teach the introductory interpersonal communication course. Their feedback about what works and does not work in their

classes has been invaluable while writing this book. It is our hope that this book makes a difference for the next generation of students.

—L. K. G.

—B. L. M.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Laura K. Guerrero (PhD, University of Arizona, 1994) is a professor in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University, where she teaches courses in relational communication, nonverbal communication, conflict, emotional communication, research methods, and data analysis. She has also taught at the Pennsylvania State University and San Diego State University. Her research focuses on communication in close relationships, such as those between romantic partners, friends, and family members. Her research has examined both the “bright side” of personal relationships, including nonverbal intimacy, forgiveness, relational maintenance, and communication skill, and the “dark side” of personal relationships, including jealousy, hurtful events, conflict, and anger. Dr. Guerrero has published more than 100 journal articles and chapters related to these topics. In addition to *Close Encounters*, her book credits include *Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships* (co-authored with K. Floyd), *Nonverbal Communication* (co-authored with J. Burgoon & V. Manusov), *The Handbook of Communication and Emotion* (co-edited with P. Andersen), and *The Nonverbal Communication Reader* (co-edited with M. Hecht). She has received several research awards, including the Early Career Achievement Award from the International Association for Relationship Research, the Dickens Research Award from the Western States Communication Association, and the Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award from the Interpersonal Communication Division of The International Communication Association. Dr. Guerrero serves on editorial boards for several top journals in communication and relationships. She enjoys traveling and exploring new places (especially with her daughters), writing fiction (when not writing nonfiction), and taking long walks in the mountains or on the beach.

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husband (Colin) and her children (Branwen, Oriana, and Cael), leads two Girl Scout troops, and loves reading and her daily yoga practice.

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UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN...

When you have finished the chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 1.1** Define interpersonal communication.
- 1.2** Describe the various components within a transactional model of communication.
- 1.3** Describe the different codes/elements of nonverbal and verbal communication.
- 1.4** Be able to describe different types of communication and behavior and how they vary in terms of intent and reception.
- 1.5** Explain what it means to be a competent communicator.

Sydney is nervous and excited as she waits to be checked into her dorm room at her new university. She looks around at the other new students in line. Are they as nervous as she is? Some of them are quiet and look a little anxious, but others are already chatting and getting to know one another. Sydney doesn't want anyone to think she is nervous, so she tries to look calm. At one point she pulls her cell phone out and sends a couple of messages to friends from high school so that she isn't just standing there looking around. When Sydney gets to the front of the line, a friendly looking young woman smiles and asks for her name. "Sydney Coleman," she replies. The woman introduces herself as Hannah and tells her that she is one of the residence hall assistants. Hannah looks Sydney's name up, hands her a small envelope with a key, and then starts giving her directions to her room. There is so much noise behind them, however, that Sydney can't hear the directions. Seeing the confusion on Sydney's face, Hannah pauses, leans forward, and repeats the directions a little more loudly. Sydney thanks Hannah and heads off to find her room, excited to start a new adventure in her life.

Humans are social creatures. Indeed, one of the primary ways humans differ from the rest of the animal kingdom is that people can communicate with one another in highly sophisticated ways, such as being able to provide one another with detailed directions or flash someone a meaningful look. The ability to communicate effectively is a highly developed skill that improves people's lives by affording them more opportunities and better relationships. For Sydney, her new life as a college student is likely to be a more positive experience if she has the communication skills necessary to meet new people, get along with her dormmates, and develop new friendships. Ironically, however, the average person receives very little, if any, formal training on how to communicate verbally and nonverbally. Think of all the time you have spent in classrooms learning to read and write. In comparison, you have probably had little, if any, education regarding how to communicate verbally and nonverbally during interactions with others. Yet most people spend as much time communicating with others as they do reading and writing, and much of people's writing is done in the context of communicating via sources such as text messaging or email.

In the 21st century, communication has, in some ways, become even more complicated because of all the technology people have at their disposal. Being a good communicator not only entails being able to converse with others in face-to-face contexts, but it also requires being able to understand the art of communicating via channels such as text messaging, social media, and email. Various means of communication are literally at people's fingertips. The prevalence and availability of different forms of communication can lead people to take their skills for

granted and to see communication as simple and intuitive rather than complicated and in need of practice.

Whether people are interacting face-to-face or through technology, communication makes things happen. If you want to meet someone, start a relationship, join a group, persuade someone to do something, obtain a new job, understand someone from a different culture, or change something you don't like in a relationship, you need communication to reach your goal. Sydney will need communication to navigate through her new environment, make new friends, and succeed as a student. This is why this book takes a functional approach to interpersonal communication. A functional approach is grounded in the idea that communication makes things happen; this approach focuses on how people use communication to fulfill goals and accomplish everyday tasks. The functional approach also examines what nonverbal and verbal messages mean in a given context (Burgoon et al., 2013; Patterson, 1983).

The remaining chapters in this book focus on different functions of interpersonal communication, such as how communication helps people display identity, make positive impressions, develop relationships, maintain relationships, express and manage emotion, and engage in constructive conflict management, among other topics. To provide a foundation for these topics, this chapter describes the general process of communication.

WHAT IS INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION?

At a basic level, **interpersonal communication** involves the exchange of nonverbal and verbal messages between people who have some level of personal or social connection with one another. There are three key ideas embodied in this definition. First, messages are at the heart of the communication process. **Messages** are the information that is being exchanged. Messages can be verbal or nonverbal. In fact, people can use verbal and nonverbal communication at the same time or in sequences to send particular messages. For example, imagine that upon meeting her dormmate, Sydney smiles shyly and glances downward before looking up at her and saying, "Hi. It's nice to finally meet you in person." How would you interpret Sydney's communication? You might surmise she is a little shy or anxious but also excited to meet her new dormmate. Notice that it is the package of verbal and nonverbal messages that creates meaning in situations such as this.

Second, the term **exchange** is critical within this definition. For communication to occur, some scholars believe that the minimum requirement is that a sender must intentionally direct a message toward a receiver (Motley, 1990). Other scholars argue that the minimum requirement is that a receiver must attend to or interpret a message (Andersen, 1991). The idea of exchange captures this. For interpersonal communication to occur, there must be some level of exchange that includes a sender and a receiver. Either a sender must direct a message toward a receiver, or a receiver must attend to something another person says or does and interpret that message. Many behaviors go unnoticed by others or, even if they are noticed, no meaning is attached to them. Think about all the behaviors you engage in while sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture. You probably take notes, get restless and fidget, rearrange your legs under your desk, or stretch at some point. If no one notices any of these behaviors or attaches meaning to them, you are not communicating with anyone.

Third, not all communication between people qualifies as interpersonal communication; interpersonal communication occurs between those who have (or would like to have) some type of social or personal connection with each other. So, hitting the chat button on Amazon's website and asking a customer service representative about the process for exchanging a defective

item would not be classified as interpersonal communication in most situations. Instead, this is a business transaction where you would simply be exchanging basic and impersonal information with no intention of ever interacting again or building any type of real connection with the representative.

As this example illustrates, interpersonal communication involves exchanging information that is personal rather than impersonal. This is what helps distinguish interpersonal communication from more generic forms of communication. For instance, when you buy groceries, you interact with the cashier. Pleasantries such as, “Did you find everything you needed?” and “Yes, thank you,” might be exchanged, but the interaction is likely to follow a typical script for how people act when checking out at a grocery store. Now imagine instead that you know something personal about the cashier. The last time you were in her line you saw a bunch of kids excitedly waving at her and calling out, “Hi, Miss Jada!” This prompted a short conversation where you learned that in addition to being a cashier, Jada babysits a group of kids after school for a couple of hours every day and also takes a couple of night classes at the university. The next time Jada rings up your purchases, you ask her if she is still babysitting and how her classes are going. Then you both disclose that you are struggling to balance everything in your lives. When she hands you your receipt, she says “Good luck with everything.” You reply “You too,” and then you take your bags and go. Most people would agree that there is a qualitative difference between this interaction and the typical way most people communicate with a cashier at a grocery store—it is more interpersonal and less scripted.

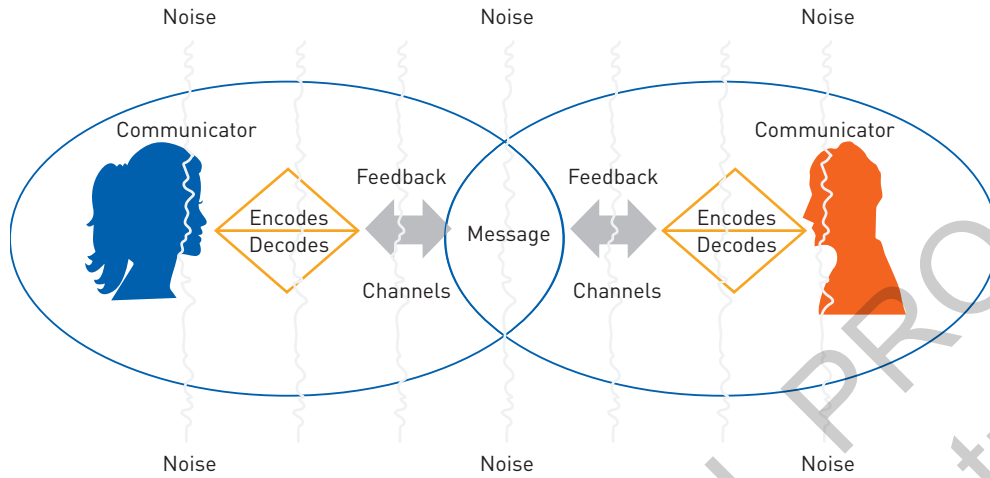
As this scenario shows, communication is more personal when it involves going outside of the traditional script for a given interaction, usually because people have gained personal knowledge of one another. This makes the communication unique. When people have a unique relational history, including shared experiences, inside jokes, or knowledge of private information, their history shapes how they communicate with each other, much as in the example with Jada.

Another way that personal communication differs from impersonal communication is the type of influence people have on one another. The more people influence one another’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, the more personal the interaction is. Think about the interactions in the



Your unshared thoughts are considered intrapersonal rather than interpersonal communication. Intrapersonal communication is communication that is directed at a receiver. If no receiver is present, interpersonal communication is not occurring.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ The Process of Communication



checkout line described earlier. In the first interaction, only behavior would be affected. The cashier would greet you, you would respond, they would eventually hand you the receipt, and you would probably say “thanks” and leave. In the second interaction, you might feel anxious when talking about trying to balance everything in your life but then feel a sense of comfort knowing that Jada is in a similar situation. Indeed, you might think that Jada is even busier than you are, which could motivate you to do better. This second interaction is clearly more personal than the first.

The definition of interpersonal communication as “an exchange of messages between people” still leaves some room for interpretation. Traditionally, communication with oneself, such as Sydney thinking, “I’m nervous but I’ll get through this,” has been defined as **intrapersonal communication**. There is little disagreement regarding this definition. There is, however, some disagreement about *how many people* are involved in interpersonal communication. Some communication researchers believe interpersonal communication involves two people, group communication involves three or more people, and public communication involves one person talking to many. While this might be an easy way to classify different levels of communication, using the number of people involved in the interaction misses what truly distinguishes interpersonal communication from other types of communication—the personal nature of the communication. Think about this: If you are having a personal conversation with a close friend and another close friend walks over and joins you, how does the situation change? Rather than communicating within a dyad, you are now communicating within a small group. Does this mean that the conversation among these three friends is no longer considered interpersonal communication? We would suggest that it is still interpersonal communication because of the types of messages being exchanged, but it is interpersonal communication within a small group rather than within a dyad. From this perspective, communication within a family, friend group, or broader social network can be considered interpersonal communication.

A MODEL OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

When interpersonal communication was first studied in college classrooms, most students were introduced to a linear model of communication that included a sender, a receiver, and a message that is delivered through a specific channel, such as through written or spoken words (Berlo, 1960; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). While these elements of the communication process are still important, they are no longer considered separate from one another. Communicators are both sender and receiver in most interactions, and the message one person sends may provide feedback to another person. Thus, communication is best viewed as a dynamic process that involves a series of moves and countermoves between people who are (sometimes simultaneously) sending and receiving multiple messages. The **transactional model of communication** (Barnlund, 2008; Watzlawick et al., 1967) is based on these ideas. This model (see Figure 1.1) includes the following elements: communicators, encoding and decoding, message, feedback, channel, field of experience, and noise.

Communicators: Encoding and Decoding

During the communication process, **communicators** are actively involved in sending and receiving messages. Being a sender involves **encoding** messages. To encode a message, you need to take an idea or information and translate it into a code that you can use to communicate that message. Codes include words as well as nonverbal behaviors, such as smiling, gesturing, or using a sarcastic tone of voice. Some messages are encoded strategically. In these cases, you may carefully plan what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Other messages are encoded



In this instance, who appears to be in the sending role and who appears to be in the receiving role? How might this change throughout the interaction?

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spontaneously, as a natural reaction to something. You might laugh at a friend's funny remark or yell out an obscenity when you stub your toe.

Being a receiver involves **decoding** messages. To decode a message, you attend to and interpret the words or behaviors of another person. Put another way, you make sense of and attach meaning to the messages produced by someone. When a message has a clear meaning within a given context, the decoding process can be straightforward. For example, messages such as telling someone to turn left at a stop sign, smiling when receiving an especially nice gift, and speaking in a nervous-sounding voice are likely to be interpreted similarly by most receivers. Other messages are more ambiguous and difficult to interpret correctly. Extended eye contact can be intended to show affection or to intimidate someone. Asking an acquaintance "Are you talking to anyone right now?" could be interpreted as a simple question, an attempt at small talk, or a sign of romantic interest. During the communication process, decoding is hit and miss. You are likely to interpret a lot of messages correctly, but you are also likely to misinterpret some messages. A classic study by Noller (1980) helps illustrate this point. In this study, husbands tended to interpret their wives' vocal tones as unpleasant or hostile when the wives actually considered their tones to be neutral. When husbands overestimated the amount of negativity in their wives' voices, both husbands and wives reported being less satisfied in their relationships.

Sometimes the roles of sender and receiver, and the activities of encoding and decoding, are distinguishable, but more often they overlap. Think about what the communication process would look like if you could freeze it by taking a photo. In the photo, would one person be encoding and the other person be decoding? Sometimes, but not always. You can probably think of a time when these roles were, at least temporarily, distinct. For example, one friend might be listening carefully as the other friend is talking about something distressing. But even in a case like this, the friend who is in the listening (or receiving) role may also be sending nonverbal messages by trying to look empathetic and concerned. The sending and receiving roles are most distinct when communication is delayed. Snapchatting and texting are examples of this. When you send



People can communicate through multiple channels simultaneously. This mother and daughter are using their faces, hands, webcam, and laptop to video chat with someone.

iStock/fizkes

a snap or compose a text, you are in the sender role; when you look at a snap or read a text, you are in the receiver role. However, during most communication transactions, these roles overlap; people send and receive messages at the same time. For example, when Sydney walks into her new dormitory, she smiles so that she appears friendly and relaxed rather than nervous (encoding) while looking around at others to see how they are acting and reacting to her (decoding). This is why the transactional model uses the more general term "communicators" to refer to the people in the model rather than classifying one person as a sender and the other as a receiver, as the linear model did. The transitional model emphasizes that most interpersonal communication involves simultaneous sending and receiving.

Messages

Messages are at the heart of the communication process because they contain the information that people exchange during an interaction. Multiple messages are often exchanged during an interaction. In her brief interaction with Sydney, Hannah sent messages related to friendliness (by smiling), authority (by saying she was a residence hall assistant), and competence (by adjusting her message so Sydney would understand the directions).

Notice that messages can be either verbal or nonverbal. The information people exchange through verbal and nonverbal messages allows people to share thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Of course, not all messages are exchanged in ways that produce shared meaning between communicators. For example, directions may not be fully comprehended or a friendly smile may be interpreted as condescending. This is one reason why people commonly give and look for feedback from others. **Feedback** refers to the messages you receive from others in response to your communication as well as the messages you send to others in response to their communication. In the interaction between Sydney and Hannah, feedback plays a critical role in creating shared meaning. Hannah sees that Sydney looks confused and adjusts her communication by leaning forward and repeating the directions. The confusion on Sydney's face provided valuable feedback that Hannah used to communicate more effectively. Sydney then responds by thanking her, which provides further feedback that Hannah has accomplished her goal of helping Sydney. Many of the messages people send provide this type of feedback.

The other essential component related to messages is the **channel** of communication. The channel is the means by which a message is sent from sender to receiver. When most people think about interpersonal communication, they envision face-to-face communication between people. However, communication can occur in many other channels, including writing, talking on the phone, texting, Snapchatting, emailing, Facetiming, and posting messages on social media, just to name a few channels. When technology is part of the channel, the communication is referred to as **mediated communication**.

The channel of communication matters. Think about how you might wish a friend a happy birthday. Do you post a message on your friend's Facebook or Twitter page? Is this different than sending your friend a card or calling your friend on the phone to say happy birthday? Or perhaps you decide to post something on Instagram or to Facetime your friend. Most people would agree that you would choose the channel based on a number of different factors, including convenience, how close you are to the friend, and what you wanted to communicate beyond just saying "Happy Birthday." Indeed, the channel can shape the kind of message you send. For a friend's birthday, you might post a collage of photos showcasing some of your memories together on your Instagram story. Or you could post a video on your Twitter account with a song in the background and a happy birthday message. These types of messages are public and show others that you are close. On the other hand, you could send a direct message to your friend, keeping it

private. Or you could Facetime and have an extended private conversation that could get highly personal. The choices people make about the channels they use are influenced by the type of messages they wish to exchange.

It is important to recognize that verbal and nonverbal messages are embedded within broader channels of communication. For example, in face-to-face interaction and some mediated forms of communication, such as Facetime, people say words and display facial expressions. When communicating via other forms of mediated communication, such as email and text messaging, people type words and use emoticons (such as winking or smiling faces). Thus, both verbal and nonverbal channels are present whether communication is face-to-face or through technology.

The difference is not as much about the distinction between face-to-face and mediated communication as it is about the degree to which people see one another while interacting and the degree to which messages are synchronous. During face-to-face communication and when communicating using technologies that allow partners to see one another, a wider variety of nonverbal cues are available for both encoding and decoding. Communication is also more synchronous when people can see and/or hear one another, meaning that it occurs in real time with the possibility of continuous feedback. Face-to-face communication where people are physically present, live interactions using media (such as Facetime, Zoom, or Skype), and voice-to-voice conversations on the telephone are all examples of synchronous communication. On the other hand, when people communicate using computer-mediated channels such as email, text messaging, and Snapchatting, as well as social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, they have more control over the interaction. They can carefully compose and revise a message before sending it, they can decide what photos (if any) to post, and they can delay responding to someone if they are not sure what to write or what picture to send.

Field of Experience and Noise

Finally, two other components of the transactional model are field of experience and noise. Every person brings a unique set of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences to the communication table, which is sometimes referred to as a **field of experience**. This helps explain why two people might interpret the same message differently. Imagine that when Hannah paused, leaned forward, and repeated the directions, Sydney took this behavior as an indication that Hannah thought she was stupid and needed to hear the directions twice. Based on her experiences, this interpretation may make sense. Perhaps Sydney had a parent who always repeated everything because she thought Sydney would not get the message the first time. As a result, Sydney would be prone to misinterpret Hannah's message that way, whereas another person with a different set of experiences would be grateful that Hannah repeated the message.

Field of experience also includes (1) your cultural background and history of interactions with specific people and (2) your interactional partner's culture and history of interactions with you. Imagine going to the airport to pick up a business associate who is from a different country. When you extend your hand to shake hers, there is an awkward pause, after which she smiles awkwardly and shakes your hand. If she is from a culture where people bow rather than shake hands, she may have interpreted your handshake as overly forward. On the other hand, if she is from a culture where people commonly hug or kiss cheeks upon greeting, she may have regarded your handshake as too formal. Either way, her field of experience impacts how she interprets and responds to your handshake.

Words can also be interpreted very differently depending on culture. To illustrate this, Agar (2012) gave an example of a conversation he had with a friend from Austria. She asked him what a "date" was. It became clear that she understood how people in the United States used the

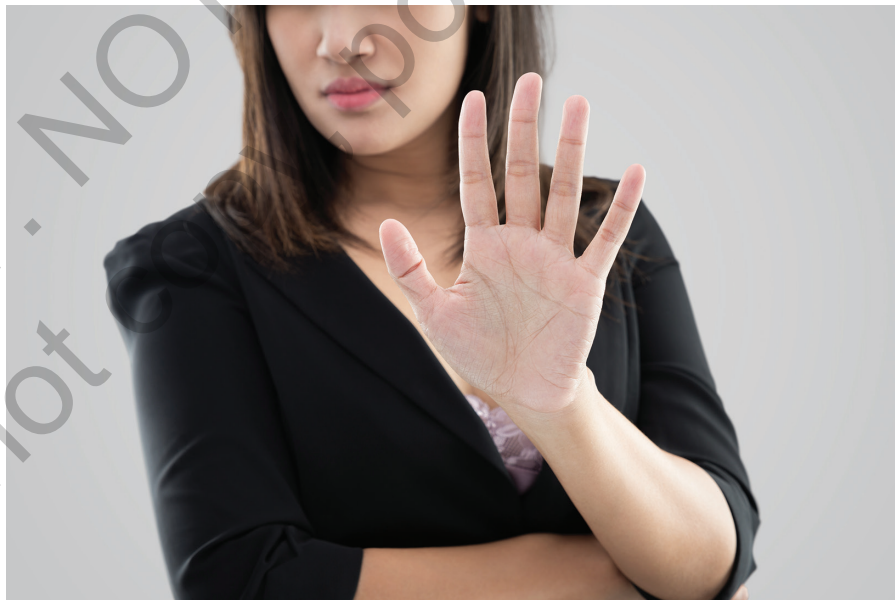
word in sentences, such as saying they were going on date, and that she also understood that the word "date" could refer to a day or a piece of fruit, but she still did not grasp the full meaning of the word as used by people from the United States. Agar (2012) explained that despite his best efforts, it was challenging to explain the US concept of a date to her. As he put it:

I started to answer, and the more I talked the more lost I became in how Americans see men and women, how they see relationships, intimacy—a host of connected assumptions that I'd never put into words before. And I was only trying to handle straight dates. It was quite different from her Austrian understanding of men and women and what they are to each other. For a while she looked at me as if I'd just stepped out of a flying saucer, until she finally decided I was serious. (p. 15)

Even within the United States, the words "date" and "dating" differ in meaning depending on a person's background. For example, there are generational differences in what it means to be "dating." For younger generations, this can mean that you are in a relationship; for older generations, it can mean that you are casually going out with someone and seeing where things go. The point is that people's backgrounds heavily influence how verbal and nonverbal messages are decoded.

Similarly, your history of interactions influences how you interpret messages. If one of your friends is acting shy and not talking much at a party, you might think nothing of it because this is how your friend normally acts. With a different friend, however, you might correctly assume that he is upset or depressed since he is usually outgoing at parties. Sometimes, field of experience helps people interpret messages more accurately; other times, it leads to messages being misinterpreted.

Noise can lead people to either misinterpret or completely miss messages. **Noise** occurs when something interferes with the sending or receiving of messages, often reducing the degree to



The same kinesic behavior can be classified in different ways. For example, this hand gesture is an emblem that means "stop," but the woman in the picture is also using it as a regulator to stop an interaction and an affect display to show her negative emotion.

iStock/Tharakorn



These two women are communicating within the intimate zone and might easily touch. What assumptions might you make about their relationship based on this? What other nonverbal cues are they displaying that affect how you would perceive their relationship?

iStock/Drazen Zigic



These shoppers in Peru are following social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 by standing within Hall's social zone, at around 6 feet apart. How do you think this spacing affects the shopping experience? How different would spacing have looked if this was taken prior to the pandemic?

Sebastian Enriquez/AFP via Getty Images

which there is shared meaning between communicators. Noise can be external, such as when fans are cheering at a football game and you cannot hear what your friends are saying, or when you get distracted and cannot concentrate on the lecture after seeing people walking outside from your classroom window. Noise can also be internal, such as when you have trouble listening or comprehending messages because you have a headache, are preoccupied with something

(such as a speech you have to give), or are daydreaming about a loved one. In sum, anything that distracts you from the messages you are sending or receiving is a form of noise that can reduce shared meaning during an interaction.

TYPES OF MESSAGES

As you already learned, communication is composed of both nonverbal and verbal messages. But you may not know that nonverbal messages often constitute more of the meaning in a given interaction than do verbal messages. One reason for this is that nonverbal communication is **multimodal**. This means that we can communicate through more than one nonverbal mode or channel simultaneously. For example, you can wave, smile, and move toward someone all at the same time. In contrast, we can only say one word at a time. Next, we define nonverbal communication and review the various channels or “codes” that make up nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Messages

Nonverbal communication has been defined various ways (Burgoon et al., 2022). When people hear the term “nonverbal communication,” they typically think of body language. However, nonverbal communication includes much more than this. **Nonverbal communication** comprises nonlinguistic behaviors that are sent or received during the communication process. The key concept here is “nonlinguistic.” While it might be tempting to think that nonverbal communication includes all messages that are not spoken, this is too simplistic. Instead, it is more accurate to think of nonverbal messages as behaviors that are not directly related to words, whether spoken or unspoken. For instance, American Sign Language is an unspoken language, but it is based on words. Therefore, many people consider it language rather than nonverbal communication.



People sometimes read a lot into time. If someone is not answering your messages, you might wonder what it means to the point of continually looking at your phone to see if a new message is there or even checking someone’s Snapchat score to see if they have been on the phone.

iStock/Prostock-Studio

Language is a method of human communication that uses words. Nonverbal communication, in contrast, uses nonlinguistic forms of communication.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT! THE ROLE NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR PLAYS IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

As we grow up, we spend a considerable portion of our time in school learning the rules for speaking and writing language. In contrast, most people never get any formal training in how to communicate effectively nonverbally. Therefore, it might surprise you to learn that in many interactions, nonverbal communication carries more meaning than verbal communication. If this fact does not surprise you, you may have heard the estimate that 93 percent of all meaning in communication is derived from nonverbal cues, leaving only 7 percent of the meaning residing in verbal cues. A more conservative estimate is that around 66 percent (or two-thirds) of the meaning in most interactions is gleaned from nonverbal as opposed to verbal cues (Burgoon et al., 2022).

So which estimate is right? The answer is that it depends on the context. When people are trying to figure out a person's emotions, they are much more likely to look at nonverbal cues such as facial expressions than verbal statements. Similarly, when people are making first impressions, verbal communication is often scripted and superficial, so impressions are formed largely based on nonverbal cues such as appearance and facial expression. However, there are also times when verbal communication is dominant. For example, when you are listening to a lecture in class, you key in on what the professor is saying so that you understand the information. Regardless, nonverbal messages play a vital role in creating meaning across interactions. So, the next time you hear someone say that nonverbal communication is trivial, you can tell that person that nonverbal cues actually communicate as much or more than words do in many situations.

Another way to define nonverbal communication is to look at the codes that constitute it. A **code** is a set of signals that is transmitted through a particular medium or channel. Nonverbal communication consists of the following codes: kinesics, vocalics, proxemics, haptics, appearance and adornment, artifacts and environmental cues, and chronemic cues. Next, we define each of these codes and discuss some of the key research related to them.

Kinesics

This code is similar to what people commonly refer to as body language. **Kinesics** includes facial expressions, body movements, and eye behavior, such as smiling, posture, and pupil dilation. Researchers have classified kinesic behavior into five categories: emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adaptors (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). **Emblems** are behaviors that substitute for words. Examples include waving to say “hello” and crossing one's fingers to say “good luck.” **Illustrators** are kinesic behaviors that describe or emphasize something. You might pretend to swing a bat, point left while giving directions, or indicate how tall something is by reaching into the air. **Affect displays** show emotion. Smiling to show happiness, slumping when depressed, and clenching your fist when angry are all examples. **Regulators** help manage interaction and include behavior such as raising your hand when you want to speak, avoiding eye contact when you want someone else to speak, and leaning backward when you are content to let someone else do the talking. Finally, **adaptors** are idiosyncratic behaviors that people engage in, often by habit, when they are nervous or restless. Tapping a pencil on a desk, playing with one's hair or jewelry, and shaking one's leg nervously are all adaptors.



Slang and acronyms, which are abbreviations such as GOAT in this photo, tend to be understood by certain groups and not others. Identify the slang in this text message exchange. What are some of the common terms you and your friends use that are unique to your group or generation?

Courtesy of Laura Guerrero

Vocalics

The **vocalics** code includes the way words are spoken, along with pauses and silences that occur during an interaction. Vocalic behaviors such as vocal pitch, loudness, accent, tone, and speed have all been studied, as have vocalizations such as crying and sighing. Researchers have studied baby talk as a form of flirtation and have shown that softer, higher-pitched voices communicate affection and intimacy (Burgoon et al., 2022). Vocalized pauses, such as saying “um” when nervous, are also part of the vocalic code. Research has shown that vocalic behaviors are difficult to control and, therefore, might provide useful information when trying to determine how a person feels.

Proxemics

The **proxemics** code revolves around the use of space, including conversational distances and territory. People have been shown to guard and defend their territories, especially their personal belongings and private spaces, such as their bedrooms. You might mark your territory with a “do not disturb” sign or put your backpack on your desk to reserve it. These are territorial markers that help you regulate your privacy. People also use different conversational distances depending on the type of interaction they are having (Hall, 1990). In the United States, the **intimate zone** stretches from 0 to 18 inches. This close distancing is typically reserved for interactions with close friends and loved ones or conversations about very personal issues. The edge of the intimate zone also demarcates your **personal space bubble**, which is an invisible, adjustable bubble of space that you carry around with you. People usually respect this space and do not enter it unless they are invited to or have a particularly close relationship with you. The **personal zone** in the United States ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. This is where most of our social interactions with casual friends, acquaintances, and sometimes co-workers occur. The **social zone** runs from 4 to 12 feet and is the distance at which many impersonal conversations take place. The idea of social distance took on a new meaning in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic when people were asked to keep a distance of at least 6 feet between themselves and others in public places. The social zone became the “new norm” in many ways. Finally, the **public zone** starts at 12 feet and expands out from there. This zone is where public forms of communication, such as a professor lecturing or a boss giving a presentation, frequently occur. Keep in mind that these conversational zones are specific to the United States. In other parts of the world, these zones can either be larger or smaller, so it is important not to assume that proxemic norms within one given culture translate to another culture.

Haptics

The **haptics** code references touch as a form of communication. Touch and proxemics are related to each other; the distancing between people helps define whether touch will or should occur. Considerable research has shown that touch is an essential ingredient for healthy social and physical development. Early work demonstrated that children in orphanages tended to get sicker and engage in more antisocial behavior if they were not touched (Montagu, 1978). Recent work has shown that affectionate touch, such as hugging and kissing, is related to a number of health benefits, such as decreases in stress hormones, increases in oxytocin (a hormone that promotes a positive mood), and decreases in blood pressure and blood sugar (Floyd, 2006; Floyd et al.,

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Types of Communication and Behavior

	<i>Message Not Interpreted</i>	<i>Message Interpreted Inaccurately</i>	<i>Message Interpreted Accurately</i>
<i>Message Sent With Intent</i>	Attempted communication	Miscommunication	Successful communication
<i>Message Sent Without Intent</i>	Unattended behavior	Misinterpretation	Accidental communication

2005, 2009). Touch is a particularly powerful nonverbal code. On the one hand, touch can communicate messages related to intimacy, affection, and support; on the other hand, touch can be violent.

Appearance and Adornment

Physical attributes such as height, weight, and attractiveness, as well as adornments such as clothing, perfume, and tattoos, all fall under the appearance and adornment code. Research has shown that people make judgments based on appearance cues. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, when people are especially good-looking, others tend to attribute all sorts of positive internal characteristics to them (outgoing, fun, intelligent) but also some negative characteristics (superficial, conceited). Fortunately, how people communicate also makes a difference (Albada et al., 2002). If you have a fun, positive interaction with someone, you are likely to rate that person as more attractive than you would if your interaction with them had been awkward or boring. Additionally, other aspects of our appearance, such as the clothing we choose to wear, can communicate messages about the type of person we are.

Artifacts and Environmental Cues

The environment and objects in the environment, such as furniture and pictures, can set the tone for certain times of interaction. Think about the difference between going to a football game with friends versus a play. The game is likely noisy and crowded, so you and your friends are more likely to talk loudly. Whether your team is winning or losing will also affect your moods and therefore your communication. At the play, you will likely be focused on the stage. You and your friends might exchange looks or whisper a comment or two. Sometimes, we intentionally manipulate the environment to create a particular atmosphere for interaction, such as lighting a fire in the fireplace and playing soft music to make a date more romantic.

Chronemic Cues

The use of time to communicate messages, or **chronemics**, is one of the less obvious nonverbal codes. Nonetheless, time can send powerful interpersonal messages. Think about how you feel if someone shows up really early to the party you are hosting or really late for a date. What if someone starts taking longer than usual to reply to your Snapchat messages or leaves you on “read” for a while before answering your text? Such behavior can cause uncertainty or conflict within relationships. Other chronemic behaviors, such as spending extra time with someone or cutting a visit short, also send strong messages about the type of relationship we have with someone.

Verbal Messages

Verbal communication comprises spoken or written words that are sent or received during the communication process. Language organizes words so that they represent things, thoughts, emotions, and abstract ideas. Specifically, **language** is a system of words that is made up of letters or symbols that work together in a structured way to convey meaning. Several types of rules govern the way language is structured and understood. **Constitutive rules** tell us what words represent (Searle, 1969). For example, a tree could be called an “oogley” but in the English language, a tree (or a thing with a trunk, branches, and leaves) is called a “tree.” This also illustrates the arbitrary nature of most words. There is no reason why a tree is called “tree” instead of “oogley.” Over time, the word “tree” emerged. Notice also that the words used to describe a tree—such as “trunk,” “branches,” and “leaves”—are also arbitrary. **Phonological rules** tell people how to pronounce words within a given language. The word “branch” is pronounced differently in the United States versus Scotland, for example.

Syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic rules also govern language. **Syntax** involves the way words are arranged to form sentences. Different languages have different syntactic rules. In English, for example, adjectives come before nouns. So English speakers say “the green tree.” But in some languages, such as Spanish and French, the adjective follows the noun, so speakers would say “el árbol verde” or “l'arbre vert,” which translates to “the tree green.” This is just one example of many syntactic differences among languages.

Semantics refers to the way people interpret and attach meaning to words and sentences. Importantly, when applying semantic rules, meaning is determined by looking at the other words and phrases within a conversation. Some words can have multiple meanings, such as a branch referring to the branch of a tree or a bank branch, or the idea that a person needs to “branch” out. The other words in a sentence help people know the correct interpretation. Connotation and denotation are also related to semantics. The **denotative meaning** of a word is its basic dictionary definition. For example, words like mansion, castle, and hovel could all be defined as dwellings where people live. The **connotative meaning** of a word is more subjective and contextual, and it includes feelings and states that we associate with a particular word. A mansion might be associated with wealth, a castle with royalty, and a hovel with poverty.

Finally, **pragmatics** is also associated with meaning, but in this case, meaning is gleaned through context, such as the situation or place where the interaction is occurring, the person who is speaking, or the relationship between the communicators. So if Su Lin tells James, “You seem cold,” she could be referring to his body temperature or his attitude toward her. Based on the situation, James may be able to interpret Su Lin’s comment correctly. If the room is cold and James is shivering, he might say “yeah” and then get himself a blanket. If he and Su Lin had an argument and he has been giving her the cold shoulder, he should know that she is talking about his behavior toward her.

These rules govern all language. Some types of language, however, are specific to certain relationships. Personal idioms and slang are examples of this. These, and other types of language that reflect and define interpersonal interaction, are discussed next.

Personal Idioms

Idioms are words or groups of words that have a special meaning that is not readily deducible. For example, English phrases such as “in a New York minute” or “you can’t judge a book by its cover” have meaning beyond what the words themselves mean. When bilingual or multilingual speakers hear such phrases in English, they are often confused because the literal meaning does not make sense and they are not privy to the special meaning. **Personal idioms** are a



Spontaneous expressions may not be directed to anyone, yet these unintentional actions can still send very clear messages about how someone is feeling.

Alex Livesey/Getty Images

subcategory of idioms that have special meaning known only to those in certain relationships or social groups. Common examples are nicknames, expressions of affection, and special names for others (Hopper et al., 1981). For example, Sydney might call her boyfriend "Boo," tell her best friend that she looks especially good by simply saying "slay," or refer to a guy that she and another friend dislike as "the snake." Outsiders are unlikely to understand the meaning of these terms (or know who "the snake" is); therefore, the use of these types of personal idioms signifies that people have unique relationships.

Slang

Like personal idioms, **slang** encompasses informal words and phrases that are used more in speech than in writing and are only understood by certain people. However, while the meaning attached to personal idioms comes from within a relationship, circle of friends, or family members, the meaning attached to slang is understood by a broader group, such as those from the same generation or cultural group. Sydney and her college friends will likely understand what it means when one of them says, "I'm low-key down for that" or "That party was lit," but their parents or grandparents may not. Slang is typically temporary in nature and can change rapidly. Because of this, using and understanding slang indicates that people belong to a particular group, which can help create feelings of connectedness.

By the same token, slang can also create division and misunderstanding. Even people within the same generation sometimes define slang terms differently, as a perusal of *Urban Dictionary* will tell you. One study conducted at a high school found that slang reinforced some social and racial divisions between students. For example, many Black students said the term "jock" was a verb that meant to "hit on" or "flirt," whereas white students saw it as a noun to mean "athlete" (Bucholtz, 2012, p. 284). Black students also tended to interpret the term "notch" as something you would call someone who is attractive, making it a compliment, whereas white girls thought the term was derogatory. As you are reading these, you may or may not be familiar with these

slang terms because they change quickly. This is part of why adolescents and young adults see slang as part of being cool; you have to be current to understand it (Bucholtz, 2012).

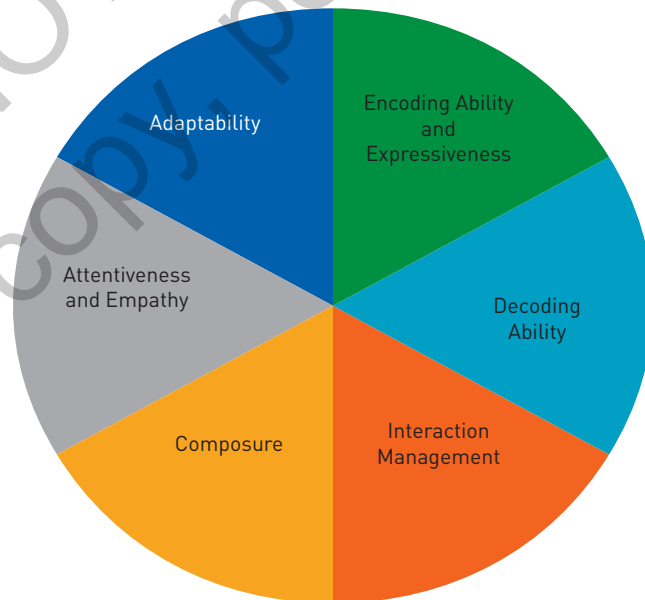
Storytelling

Verbal communication is also used to tell stories about people's relationships. These "stories are vehicles through which individuals link themselves as relational partners and characterize their joint relational identity" (Burlinson et al., 2000, p. 253). People tell stories about how they first met, endured hardships, went on vacation, broke up and got back together again, attended a special event, and so forth. Sharing these stories with others and referring to elements of these stories within conversations with one another creates a sense of uniqueness and relational history that helps people define their relationships.

Verbal Tense

Storytelling is one way to remember and honor the history of a relationship. The use of past, present, and future tense can also do so. Talking in the past tense about what "we used to do" can showcase the stability of a relationship. Using present tense indicates that people are currently connected. Even simple statements, such as "I'm having so much fun right now," can express positive sentiments about how a current interaction is going. Finally, using future tense can be a significant indicator that a relationship is moving in a positive trajectory or that two people are (or are moving toward being) committed to one another or being long-term friends. For example, if Sydney's new dormmate starts talking about going to a concert in November, this statement shows a commitment to keep their new friendship in good standing until then.

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Six Skills for Competent Communication





Listening attentively and providing support are cornerstones for being a competent communicator.

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Pronoun Use

Even the simple use of pronouns can reflect or affect the type of relationship that people share (Bartlett Ellis et al., 2016; Wiener & Mehrabjan, 1968). One distinction is between “you” and “I.” The context matters here. Using the “you” pronoun when making positive statements about another person makes the message personal. For example, Sydney might tell her new roommate, “You are really pretty,” which would be perceived more positively than “I think you are really pretty.” On the other hand, there are times when using the “I” pronoun allows people to take ownership of their statements rather than blaming the other person. Think about someone telling you that “you are so frustrating” versus “I feel so frustrated.” When people hear the first statement, they are likely to feel insulted and get defensive. By contrast, the second statement is less threatening and may even prompt empathy.

SKILL BUILDER

USING “I” VERSUS “YOU” PRONOUNS

Sometimes it is better to use “I” pronouns. This is especially the case when you are discussing negative feelings or behaviors. If you own the behavior, it comes across as less critical and threatening, plus you “own” your thoughts and feelings rather than blaming your partner for them. By using “I” pronouns in these cases, you may also prompt your partner to feel empathy for you. This could lead to a conversation about how to fix the issues that are causing your negative thoughts or feelings.

**“You” Statements That
Show Blame**

**“I” Statements That
Show Ownership**

You make me feel really bad.	I feel really bad.
You are always so judgmental.	I feel like I'm being judged.
You are so confusing.	I am confused.
You are ruining everything.	I feel like everything is ruined.

There are cases, however, when using “you” statements is more effective than using “I” statements. These situations generally involve giving compliments and validating the other person. Look at the following statements. When you compliment someone directly by using the “you” pronoun, the statement comes across as a fact. When you change it to an “I” statement, this qualifies it. In other words, the person may think, “Okay, you think I’m kind but that doesn’t mean others do, too.” “You” statements are also especially effective when they give a person credit for something positive, such as making you feel happy.

“You” Statements That Give Direct Credit	“I” Statements That Fail to Give Direct Credit
You are so kind.	I think you are really kind.
You are good at that.	I think you are good at that.
You make me happy.	I am happy.
You make me feel so much better.	I feel so much better.

“We” is another pronoun that is significant within interpersonal interaction. When friends, couples, and family members use the pronoun “we,” it not only symbolizes that they are a unit but also reflects that they are close and share a satisfying relationship (Dreyer et al., 1987; Honeycutt, 1999). In workplace relationships, “we” statements can create a sense of teamwork and community. Similarly, imagine one of your teachers saying, “We are going to talk about effective communication today” versus “I am going to talk about effective communication today.” The first statement implies that the class is a unit and encourages discussion. The second statement implies that the teacher is in charge and will be lecturing without as much input from the class. Think of times when it would be more appropriate to use the “I” pronoun and others when it would be more appropriate to use the “we” pronoun. Can you think of a time when using one of these pronouns made you feel blamed or left out?

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

As noted previously, encoding and decoding are important components within the communication process. Messages must either be encoded or decoded for communication to occur. In fact, researchers have debated what types of messages count as communication, in part by looking at issues related to encoding and decoding (Andersen, 1991; Motley, 1990). One of these issues is whether a message was encoded with intent. In other words, did someone send a message with the intent that someone would see and interpret it? The other issue is whether a message was actually received and interpreted by someone. When these two issues are considered, six possibilities emerge, as shown in Figure 1.2 (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006).

Note that although these forms of communication are presented in isolation as if only one message occurs between two people in sending and receiving roles, the process of communication is more complex than this, with multiple messages being exchanged and people occupying the dual roles of sender and receiver. Nonetheless, understanding these types of communication helps describe the different types of messages that constitute the communication process. This

model also suggests that there are things that people do and say that do not qualify as a message and instead are unattended behaviors.

Attempted Communication

Attempted communication occurs when a message that is sent with intent is not received. Sometimes this happens because the intended receiver simply misses the message. Have you ever tried to signal to someone that you wanted to end an interaction or leave a party, but the person didn't get the hint? Perhaps you used leave-taking behaviors such as looking at the time on your cell phone and saying something like "it's getting late" but the person just kept on talking. If the person was oblivious to the fact that you wanted to go, then your attempt at communication failed. Communication can fail for other reasons. You might call to your roommate and not get a response because he or she is listening to music with earphones on, or a room might be so noisy that you can't hear a message, as was the case when Hannah was trying to give Sydney directions.

Miscommunication

Miscommunication occurs when a message is sent with intent but is interpreted inaccurately. This form of communication occurs quite frequently. Perhaps a smile that you meant to be merely polite is interpreted as flirtatious, or a question that you posed out of interest is taken as a challenge. These are examples of miscommunication. Sometimes miscommunication occurs because people are too quick to jump to conclusions or because they think they know someone better than they do. Gottman (1994) discussed the concept of **mindreading** as a potential problem in relationships. Mindreading occurs when people assume they know how their partner is thinking or feeling. Oftentimes, these kinds of assumptions are wrong and can lead to miscommunication.

Successful Communication

Successful communication occurs when a person sends a message with intent and a receiver attends to and interprets that message correctly. This type of communication is often considered ideal because there is shared meaning. In other words, the sender and receiver agree regarding the meaning of a message. When Sydney thanks Hannah, both women interpret Sydney's words as a polite expression of gratitude. Since this is what Sydney meant to convey, the words have shared meaning and successful communication has occurred. Most interactions do not result in 100 percent shared meaning since communicators cannot get inside one another's heads, but people sometimes get close to that goal. Successful communication is the prototypical type of communication and is what most people think of as "good" communication.

Unattended Behavior

Unattended behavior is not considered important within the communication process because it does not involve encoding or decoding. With unattended behavior, people emit behaviors unintentionally, and no one notices or interprets those behaviors as meaningful. As you are reading this chapter, you are blinking but you probably didn't even realize that until now. Behaviors such as normal blinking are unintentional, automatic behaviors that neither senders nor receivers tend to notice. Similarly, behaviors that are not directed at anyone and go unnoticed, such as stretching your legs under your desk where no one can see them, are unattended behaviors that are not part of the communication process. At a minimum, then, verbal and nonverbal behaviors need

to be either encoded or decoded for them to count as communication. This is why the terms "behavior" and "communication" are not synonymous; many behaviors go unnoticed and do not constitute communication.

Misinterpretation

Misinterpretation occurs when a sender does not intentionally send a message, yet something the sender says or does is interpreted incorrectly by a receiver. If you are having a bad day and some of the negativity that you are feeling shows in your face, a friend might think you are mad at them when you are not. Similarly, if you are tired and having trouble paying attention to what others are saying, people might think that you are uninterested in the topic at hand when you would actually be excited about the topic if you weren't so tired. The key here is that the sender did not mean to send a message, but the receiver attached meaning to the sender's behavior anyway, and the meaning they attached was wrong.

Accidental Communication

Accidental communication occurs when a sender does not intend to send a message, yet a receiver still notices and correctly interprets the sender's behavior. In the scenario at the beginning of this chapter, Sydney tries to cover up her nervousness by looking calm and keeping herself busy by sending messages on her cell phone. Her intention is to send out the message that she is composed and confident. However, suppose that a few of the other students see the worry in her eyes and notice that she is a little fidgety before reaching for her cell phone. They correctly interpret her behavior as reflecting nervousness. In this case, Sydney did not intend to show people she was nervous, yet some people still interpreted her behavior that way. Such is the case with accidental communication.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Take another look at the boxes in Figure 1.2. Which type of communication is likely considered most competent? Most people would say successful communication because the message was decoded accurately and shared meaning was created. Shared meaning is often the primary goal of communication because people usually need to get their point across to reach other goals, including self-presentational goals, relational goals, and instrumental goals (Clark & Delia, 1979). **Self-presentational goals** revolve around presenting yourself in a positive way so people accept and like you. **Relational goals** involve being able to successfully navigate relationships, including being able to initiate, develop, maintain, and end relationships. Finally, **instrumental goals** involve being able to get tasks done, including getting someone to help you with something, changing someone's opinion, and resisting someone else's attempts to influence you. In many cases, reaching these goals requires at least some degree of shared meaning between sender and receiver.

Within the context of interpersonal interaction, **communication competence** refers to the degree to which a person successfully uses communication to meet goals. Moreover, competent communication is characterized as effective and appropriate. Communication is *effective* when it achieves the goal or task it is directed toward (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2012). Sometimes goals are simple, such as appearing friendly by saying "hi" to an acquaintance. Other times, goals are complex, such as managing conflict with a co-worker or telling someone you would rather stay friends than start a romantic relationship. Communication is *appropriate* when it tactful and

polite and does not violate social norms, rules, or expectations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2012). So, forcing someone to do something they do not want to do is effective but not appropriate. On the other hand, being too polite to stand up for yourself during a conflict situation may be appropriate, but it is not effective.

To better understand the process of communication competence, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) advanced the component model of competence. This model includes *motivation*, *knowledge*, and *skill*. Motivation and knowledge are precursors to being able to communicate competently (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989). To be competent communicators, people must be motivated to approach people and situations and then act. They must also have the knowledge to be competent communicators. Just being motivated to communicate is not enough; you have to know *how* to communicate. Having knowledge about social norms as well as personal knowledge about the person with whom you are communicating is part of this. Such knowledge helps a communicator make good decisions about how to act in effective and appropriate ways. Skill is then necessary to carry out those actions. People who have communication skills know how to adapt their communication so that they say and do the right things within a given situation.

Different skills are also relevant based on the situation. Thus, throughout this book, we will be discussing various skills related to particular topics. For example, we will discuss emotional intelligence in Chapter 6 on emotions and conflict management skills in Chapter 10 on conflict. For now, we review six fundamental skills that help communicators be more competent: encoding ability and expressiveness, decoding ability, interaction management, composure, attentiveness and empathy, and adaptability (see Figure 1.3).

Encoding Ability and Expressiveness

Some people are especially good at expressing themselves in ways that show their feelings and allow them to connect with others (Riggio, 1986). Good encoders also manage their expressions to hide feelings that might be seen as inappropriate. People who are high in encoding ability tend to be extroverted and expressive and have large social networks. They are also adept at monitoring their behavior and influencing others (Burgoon et al., 2022). Encoding ability is related to the broader skill of expressiveness, which includes being open, articulate, nonverbally dynamic, and likeable (Spitzberg, 2015).

Decoding Ability

People who are skilled in decoding are observant and able to interpret the behaviors of others correctly. They are good at sizing up people and making favorable first impressions, and they also tend to be highly sociable (Burgoon et al., 2022). Being able to decode communication accurately leads to less miscommunication and misinterpretation. Research suggests that encoding and decoding abilities are related and that, on average, women are better at encoding and decoding nonverbal behavior than are men (Burgoon et al., 2022). As you will learn later in this book, it is also important to recognize that messages have different meanings depending on culture and context. Good decoders try to look beyond their own field of experience when interpreting messages and check for understanding.

Interaction Management

Being able to manage or coordinate interaction is another critical communication skill (Backlund & Morreales, 2015; Capella, 1994). This includes engaging in smooth turn-taking, speaking when appropriate, and knowing when to listen to others. Individuals with this skill can

also direct the flow of an interaction by introducing new topics and shifting away from old ones, asking questions, interrupting when necessary, using an appropriate amount of talk time, and changing the intonation of one's voice (Spitzberg, 2015; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Being able to manage interaction in these ways helps people facilitate the type of communication that helps them reach their goals.

Composure

Most people have been in situations where it was difficult to stay composed. You can probably recall times when you were nervous, uncomfortable, or angry, and the people around you could readily see those feelings despite your efforts to look calm and composed. Although there are times when nervousness is endearing and anger is justifiable, there are also times when it is in people's best interest to look composed. Behaviors such as speaking in a calm and confident voice, having an open posture, speaking fluently, and using expressive rather than nervous gestures (such as fidgeting) give an impression of composure and confidence (Spitzberg, 2015). People who display such behaviors, especially when under stress or pressure, are rated as good leaders and seen as assertive and persuasive.

Attentiveness and Empathy

Competent communicators make other people feel valued. They act interested in what others are saying and are supportive and empathetic (Backlund & Morreales, 2015; Spitzberg, 2015). People show attentiveness through listening, nodding to show agreement, using backchanneling cues such as "Aha!" being expressive and animated, leaning forward, and giving eye contact (Coker & Burgoon, 1987; Spitzberg, 2015). These behaviors show that a person is an active participant in a conversation. They also validate the other communicator by making them feel like what they have to say is important. Empathy, which is a "social and emotional skill that helps us feel and understand the emotions, circumstances, intentions, thoughts, and needs of others, such that we can offer sensitive, perceptive, and appropriate communication and support" goes a step further (McLaren, 2013, p. 27). There are two specific components of empathy—**affective** and **cognitive** (Lawrence et al., 2004). **Affective empathy** involves feeling what others feel, whereas **cognitive empathy** involves being able to put oneself in another person's place to understand that person's perspective. When people experience empathy, they better understand others, which makes them better at decoding as well as crafting appropriate messages that lead to shared meaning.

Adaptability

Finally, being able to adapt one's communication based on context is a highly important communication skill. Context involves a number of factors, including (a) the situation, (b) the other communicator's personality, (c) the type of relationship you have with the other communicator, and (d) culture. The best communicators are flexible and mindful in how they communicate based on these factors (Backlund & Morreale, 2015; Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2015). They look for feedback from receivers so they can adjust their behavior as necessary. Having empathy and being skilled in decoding contribute to adaptability, which shows how the different aspects of communication competence work together.

PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

At the end of each chapter in this book, we provide principles that help tie together or expand on some of the key concepts within the chapter. The principles discussed next all focus on some aspect of the process of communication that highlights the nature of interpersonal interaction.

Principle 1. Communication is a dynamic process that is irreversible and unrepeatable.

Communication involves much more than a simple exchange of information. It is a complex process filled with moves and countermoves, with communicators simultaneously engaging in the sending and receiving of messages. Communication within a given interaction is constantly changing, as are people's interpretations of one another. Yet despite the dynamic nature of communication, once words have been spoken or behaviors have been displayed, they cannot be taken back. This shows the irreversible nature of communication. Everyone has encountered a situation where they wish they could take something they said or did back, but it cannot be done. Communication is also unrepeatable. The exact circumstances of any interaction, including people's thoughts, moods, and feelings, cannot be repeated. In addition, reactions will be different if something has been communicated previously. Therefore, it is impossible to completely recreate any communication situation.

Principle 2. The channel of communication affects communication.

In this chapter, we have emphasized that interpersonal communication is composed of both nonverbal and verbal messages that can be exchanged through face-to-face or mediated channels. Nonverbal and verbal messages can work together or separately to create meaning. Sometimes these messages are consistent, making it relatively easy to determine their meaning. Other times, nonverbal messages contradict one another or are at odds with verbal messages, making it more challenging to determine the meaning behind them. The distinction between face-to-face and mediated communication is also important, although the more important distinctions are based on the degree to which people see one another while interacting and the degree to which messages are synchronous.

Principle 3. Communication can be intentional or unintentional.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, some forms of message exchange—such as those classified as attempted communication, miscommunication, and successful communication—involve intentional encoding. In these cases, a message is directed toward a receiver. Other forms of message exchange—such as misinterpretation and accidental communication—occur when people attach meaning to behaviors that were emitted spontaneously, without any intention to direct them to a receiver. Ignoring any of these types of message exchange would paint an incomplete picture of the communication process. Attempted communication may lead to frustration, which could then lead to conflict. Miscommunication could lead people to be at cross-purposes. Misinterpretation could lead a receiver to engage in behavior that is unwanted by the sender. And accidental communication could increase understanding between people. Thus, both intentional and unintentional communication play important roles in the communication process.

Principle 4. Not all behavior is communication.

It may be tempting to think that since communication can be intentional or unintentional, all behavior is communication. Sometimes people misinterpret Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson's famous statement that "one cannot not communicate" as meaning exactly that (Watzlawick et al., 1967). However, the statement that "one cannot not communicate" actually refers to the

idea that if you are interacting with someone, that person is going to attach meaning to something you do or say, even if you do not intend to send a message. This is different from saying everything we do is communication. Indeed, take another look at Figure 1.2. Unattended behavior occurs when people engage in spontaneous behavior that no one notices or attaches meaning to. This is not communication. Communication involves either sending a message with intent by directing it toward a potential receiver or having a message interpreted by someone.

Principle 5. Communication varies in terms of competence.

As mentioned previously, competent communication is effective and appropriate. Effective communication helps people reach their goals. Appropriate communication is polite and conforms to norms. Creating shared meaning is often a prerequisite for competent communication to occur. Think again about the boxes in Figure 1.2. Both successful communication and accidental communication are high in shared meaning because the receiver interpreted the message correctly. In some cases, accidental communication may inadvertently help people reach goals. For example, if Sydney is nervous about meeting her new dormmates, she might have the goal of looking and feeling less nervous. Her new dormmates could pick up on her nervousness and try to make her feel more at home. As a result of their friendly interaction, Sydney then feels more comfortable.

CONCLUSION

Communication will help Sydney flourish in her new environment. Sydney will likely use a wide variety of communication channels to make new friends and maintain contact with her old ones. Face-to-face communication may be the typical form of communication with her dormmates, whereas snapping and texting may be common with other students she meets on campus as well as with old friends she does not want to lose touch with. For Sydney to maximize her communication competence in her new environment, she needs knowledge of the rules and rituals within her dormitory and her university. Having skills related to encoding, decoding, conversational management, conversational interest, empathy, and adaptability are all key ingredients in the recipe for Sydney to be a competent communicator.

CHAPTER 1 STUDY GUIDE

KEY TERMS

Identify and explain the meaning of each of the following key terms.

accidental communication	communication competence
adaptors	communicators
affect displays	connotative meaning
affective empathy	constitutive rules
attempted communication	decoding
channel	denotative meaning
chronemics	emblems
code	encoding
cognitive empathy	exchange

feedback	personal idioms
field of experience	personal space bubble
haptics	personal zone
illustrators	phonological rules
instrumental goals	pragmatics
interpersonal communication	proxemics
intimate zone	public zone
intrapersonal communication	regulators
kinesics	relational goals
language	self-presentational goals
mediated communication	semantics
messages	slang
mindreading	social zone
miscommunication	successful communication
misinterpretation	syntax
multimodal	transactional model of communication
noise	unattended behavior
nonverbal communication	vocalics

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think of all the ways you communicate on a daily basis, including face-to-face and on your phone. How does the channel of communication (for example, texting vs. face-to-face vs. social media) influence the communication process? Are certain channels better for some types of communication than others? Explain.
2. How powerful do you think nonverbal communication is in everyday interaction? Think about the interactions you have had over the past 24 hours. How did you use nonverbal communication in both your face-to-face and phone interactions?
3. Think about the forms of communication and behavior in Figure 1.2. Give an example of each of these. How often do you think communication would be classified as “successful” according to this figure? What are some common causes of miscommunication and misinterpretation?
4. Imagine that a friend finds out you are taking a communication class and wants some tips for how to be a better communicator. What would you tell your friend? Be specific.

2

PERFORMING THE SELF

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN...

When you have finished the chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 2.1 Identify the difference between self-concept and identity performances.
- 2.2 Explain how identities are performed.
- 2.3 Explain the influence of context and audience on identity.
- 2.4 Describe different cognitive biases related to our perception of our self and others.
- 2.5 Articulate the tenets of self-expansion theory.

Kara opened her eyes on a Saturday morning, happy to be back at home for the weekend. She had just turned in a major paper the day before. She worked very hard on it, as she hoped to get into her professor's selective senior seminar the following year. Today, she was looking forward to a lazy day at home, followed by her good friend Janna's birthday party. Kara spent the day having coffee with her mom and playing some competitive rounds of rummy with her little brother. Throughout the day, Kara sent some snaps to her best friend with possible outfits for the evening. After dinner, Kara started getting ready. After Kara did her makeup, she thought she looked pretty cute so she took a selfie and posted it on her Instagram story. Posting the picture reminded her that she needed to tweet a current event for her computer-mediated communication course. Kara found a New York Times article and posted it with her public account @KaraPWilliams. Then she switched to her private Twitter @KissesfromKara and tweeted, "It's gonna get lit 2night! #turnt #jannababy #21." As Kara left for the party, she stopped to scribble herself a note reminding her to pack her closed-toe shoes for her internship interview next week.

Kara's concerns and behaviors, as described above, all focus on how she understands herself and performs her understanding of self for others (identity). Our understanding of self is our **self-concept** and the way we perform that understanding of self is our **identity**. The questions "Who are we?" and "Who am I?" have been enduring and important philosophical inquiries for scholars. The answers to these questions are heavily intertwined with processes of communication. Perceptions of self-concept are grounded in communication. How others respond to us influences our sense of self. In addition, our identities are performances that are transmitted to our friends, family, and other social audience members through communication. As we learned in Chapter 1, a key characteristic of interpersonal communication is learning about others. Thus, understanding self-concept and identity performance is key to becoming a more competent interpersonal communicator.

SELF-CONCEPT

Self-concept is how people internally understand who they think they are (Oyserman & Markus, 1998). Self-concepts have multiple dimensions and are derived from the information we have about ourselves gleaned from experiences, relationships, social roles, beliefs, and abilities (Gore & Cross, 2014). Perhaps you volunteer for youth programs and have an award-winning cookie recipe. Or you might be a business student and have aspirations of playing professional golf. Perhaps you are all of these things. Your particular combination of traits and how you organize them internally is your self-concept. Your self-concept is your personal answer to the question: Who are you?

Interpersonal communication scholars generally believe that people build their self-concept through communication with others. Our relationships define us as a daughter, son, friend, employee, group member, or student. Our social roles emerge from the communication we have with others in our social networks. The social roles and categories we can and do enact are grounded in communication with other social network members (Pennington, 2000). Our abilities are even encouraged or hindered by the way that others around us communicate about those abilities. For example, your perception of your artistic abilities is likely based on the way people have responded to your artistic attempts.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a foundational concept for interpersonal communication scholarship on aspects of the self. Symbolic interactionists argue that people develop meaning for



Our interactions with others give objects meaning. We see this fork as an eating utensil, not a dinglehopper as Ariel was led to believe it was.

Courtesy of Laura Guerrero

objects, messages, and others through social interaction (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1922). These meanings then influence how people act toward those objects, messages, and other people. For example, we learn to use a fork based on how other people around us use a fork. We might have learned to hold a fork differently if we lived in a different part of the world or we might have learned to use a completely different eating utensil, like chopsticks. In the Disney movie, *The Little Mermaid*, we see Ariel learning about human objects from a seagull who makes up his own interpretations. When Scuttle tells Ariel that a fork is a dinglehopper and for brushing hair, she believes him and acts toward the object—brushing her hair—based on that interaction. The point here is that the way we act toward forks is based on what we have learned from others about forks. The same goes for other objects, language, and people, including ourselves. Just as we learn how to use a fork based on how other people around us use that fork, we learn who we are through how the people around us communicate with us.

Cooley (1902), an early symbolic interactionist, argued that our internal sense of self derives from how we imagine others experience us. This reflection is the **looking-glass self**. The looking-glass self concept suggests that we come to know our self through how we think others perceive us, considering how others might think of our appearance, actions,

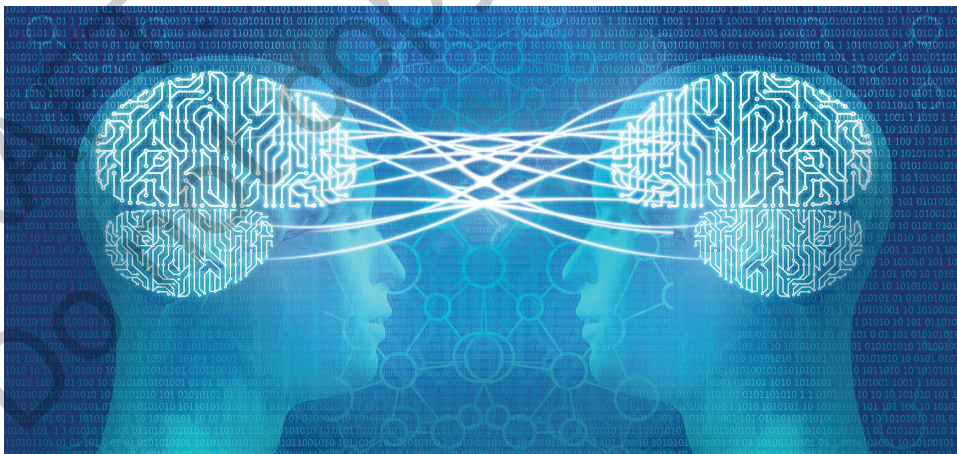
and place in the social world. These perceived mental perceptions serve as a mirror that allows us to perceive our self as a specific social entity.

Mead (1934) expanded on the looking-glass self by arguing that people create an internal representation of the presumed attitudes and perceptions of their social groups called the **generalized other**. The generalized other is our perception of how other members of our communities view the social world. Instead of trying to think of how our individual social connections might perceive us, we come up with a more general perception of how our social groups as a whole might perceive us. The concept is abstract in that there is no single person that we are imagining but rather the opinions that people in our social network might typically hold regarding who we are. People then consider these imagined general opinions in developing their own self-concept.

The ability to have separate conceptions of our self, others, and how others view our self and hold feelings and attitudes about our self is critical to the development of a social self. This process is also fundamental to the concept of **theory of mind** (Wellman, 1992). Individuals have a theory of mind when they are able to understand that

1. an individual or being has mental states,
2. others have mental states,
3. these mental states are different from each other, and
4. we can influence the mental states of others.

Our ability to have theory of mind allows us to understand that (a) others are separate individuals whom we hold representations of within our own mind and (b) other people have representations of us within *their* mind. Thus, your own self-concept is influenced by the communication of others, since their communication gives you insight into the representations people have of you. Theory of mind is essentially the idea that people understand that we have the ability to influence the minds of others through communication. Thus, theory of mind is an important concept for several interpersonal communication phenomena, including conflict management, persuasion, empathy, perspective-taking, and deception, all of which you will learn about in this book.



Having a theory of mind entails understanding that other people have different mental states than you do, and realizing that what you say and do affects other people's mental states.

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Although these foundational theories of self-concept were developed early in the twentieth century, there is more modern evidence that highlights the way these perceptions of self develop. Over time, children incorporate an understanding of how other people see them into their self-concept. Research suggests that as children develop, their sense of self is increasingly connected to how they are viewed by others around them (Cole et al., 2001; Wigfield et al., 1997). When children play, which often involves taking on the roles of others through fantasy play or imitating parents when playing with dolls or action figures, they are in the beginning stage of differentiating others and the self (Mead, 1922). Later, social games allow for further practice at socialization as children not only consider how others will behave but also learn to accept, play by, and discard various subjective, social-rule systems.

In line with Mead's theories, research has found that in the prekindergarten years of childhood, most children have highly positive and optimistic self-perceptions (Eccles et al., 1984). Upon questioning, young children are likely to tell you that they are the best in their class. This overestimation of self is unsurprising, given that up to this point most small children have experienced a social world primarily consisting of family and close family friends who constantly reiterate positive messages ("You're so smart! You can do it!") to young children. Over time, children begin to experience a wider audience of peers and schoolteachers. The assessments presented by peers and teachers are quite likely less adoring than those of children's parents. By the third grade, children usually develop a more realistic sense of self.

Research on racial identity has also shown that people are influenced both by how they see themselves as well as how they believe others see them. **Racial identity** is "the part of a person's self-concept that is related to their racial membership, including the significance someone puts on race in defining their self" as well their interpretation of what it means to be a member of their race (Minnear & Soliz, 2019, p. 329). Racial identities can be connected to a kind of *double consciousness*, where people are aware of who they really are versus who other people stereotype them to be. In one study, college students who identified themselves as Black discussed how they struggled with being proud of their race, not wanting race to define everything about them, and being aware that they could be discriminated against or stereotyped because of their race. Two women in the study gave an example of this type of struggle by explaining a situation where they had "wanted to express their opinions and beliefs about racism and discrimination, but they also did not want to be seen as 'angry Black women'" (Minnear & Soliz, 2019, p. 329). These types of identity struggles extend to other groups as well. The key point is that our identities and communication are shaped not only by how we see ourselves but also by how we believe other people see us.

Personality and Communication

Another way to consider the internal self is the idea of personality. Although there are many definitions of personality, it can be thought of as the way the self organizes its view of its characteristics and presents those characteristics to others (Eysenck, 1947).

One common way that personality is measured is by using the Big Five inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five consists of five different factors: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and intellectual openness. **Extraversion** refers to how talkative, assertive, and energetic a person is. **Agreeableness** is being good-natured, cooperative, and trustworthy. **Conscientiousness** is shown through being orderly, responsible, and dependable. People who score high on **neuroticism** are nervous, worry, and are easily upset. Intellectual **openness** is being intellectual, imaginative, and open-minded.

Although psychologists often classify these as internal traits, a close examination suggests that at least three of the five are communication styles (extroversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness). In addition, personality constructs change over time due to feedback and communication within our social world. A recent longitudinal study compared people's personality constructs measured in their adolescence (when they were 14 years old) and then 63 years later. The researchers found that there was very little correlation between the participants' personality traits in their adolescence and their golden years (Harris et al., 2016). These and other findings on personality constructs suggest support for the symbolic interactionism perspective, in that personality appears to be malleable over time and might largely depend on the communication that we have with others. For example, people who marry similar others find that their personality constructs change less over time than those who marry dissimilar others. The dissimilar partners find that their personality traits converge over time (Caspi & Herbener, 1990).



Individuals who have been happily married for a long time have often become more similar to each other.

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Nevertheless, the Big Five has been shown to correlate with a variety of communication variables (Correa et al., 2010; Hazel et al., 2014; Heisel et al., 2003; Hostetter & Potthoff, 2012; Itzhakov et al., 2014). For example, extraversion is negatively correlated with communication behaviors such as reticence (a hesitation to speak out) and verbal aggressiveness but positively correlated with social internet use. All Big Five characteristics except for neuroticism are correlated with preferring to communicate with people who have constructive listening styles. Extroverts and neurotics both produce more representational gestures (gestures that reinforce the verbal content of the message), but those with neurotic tendencies have difficulty getting others to like them and want to spend time with them, whereas extroversion is positively associated with this type of affinity seeking.

IDENTITY

While our self-concept is our internal consideration of who we are, our identities are the external communication of aspects of that self for a variety of social audiences. Jackson (2002) called identities codes of personhood with our identities constructed through interactions with others. The **dramaturgical perspective** proposes that our performance of aspects of ourselves is a key component of how other people learn who we are (Goffman, 1959). We represent ourselves through performative behaviors that influence others' opinions of ourselves. Throughout his explanation of the dramaturgical perspective, Goffman relies on explanatory metaphors of actors, performances, and theaters. The identity performances we give in social encounters are the "lines" or roles that people take, much like actors performing their lines in a play. We perform our self through verbal and nonverbal behaviors while taking into consideration the appropriate performance for a particular social audience and context.

Identity Performances

Two different types of social performances occur in everyday life—performances *given* and performances *given off* (Goffman, 1967). **Performances given** refers to the ways that people use verbal and nonverbal cues to portray their identity to others. **Performances given off** are the way that others receive our identity performances. Consider Kara at the beginning of this chapter. As Kara carefully chooses her outfit for the party, she is likely trying to show people particular aspects of herself. Perhaps Kara thinks her outfit shows that she is fun, on trend, and fits in with her particular group. Her outfit helps her give a specific type of performance. However, when Kara gets to the party, her outfit might not be perceived in the manner she intends—a bold choice in shoes is seen by her former classmates as trying too hard, or her makeup might

be considered too heavy for a casual get-together. The other partygoers' reactions to her appearance are the *performances given off* by Kara. At times, performances *given* and *given off* may match. For example, if Kara wears sensible shoes and a suit to her job interview to appear professional and polished and is, in fact, seen as polished and professional by her interviewer, her performance *given* and *given off* match. At other times, such as in our party example, the reception of our identity performance may not match the way that we intended to be perceived. In other words, the performance given is not actually the one given off.

In addition, social performances are often tailored for a specific audience (Altheide, 2000). Kara from our opening story, for example, is likely to consider a very different outfit for the audience at her friend's birthday party than she did for her internship interview that required formal closed-toe shoes. To follow Goffman's metaphor of the theater, different audiences and stages require different performances.



Like Shakespeare's idea that life is a stage, Goffman likened self-presentation to performing various roles based on what is appropriate for a particular audience and context.

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Face

Our **face** is a combination of the person who we believe ourselves to be and the identity performances that we believe would be supported and approved by social groups that are important to us (Goffman, 1967). Face depends on three intertwined streams of information related to our self:

1. Our understanding of our internal self;
2. Our perception of how the audience we are presenting our self to sees us; and
3. Any external information, such as having a college degree that is relevant to the particular face one is trying to portray.

If we again consider Kara's interview, the impression that she can make depends in part on her outfit, presentation, and answers to the interviewer's questions. Her "face" also depends on what the interviewer thinks she knows about Kara. The interviewer's perception could come from a previous interaction at a career fair or her general impression of the college-aged interns hired by the company. In addition, external evidence supports the image Kara is able to present. If the interviewer has Kara's transcripts showing low grades in political science classes, Kara will not be able to take the line that she's a whiz at understanding and implementing political theory. These external representations of self through the perceptions of others and evidence are particularly important to how Kara's *face* is perceived. Goffman argues that who we are is not lodged within our body but rather is a product of the events of interpersonal encounters and how the events of these encounters are experienced and perceived.

There are times when we may find ourselves *out of face*—acting in a way that is inconsistent with the image we generally portray to the world. When we are *out of face* due to our own behavior, this is **shameless**. Imagine Kara shows up for her interview smelling of alcohol or wearing an outfit that is more appropriate for a nightclub than a professional setting. This performance would be a shameless one because Kara herself has made performative choices that are not in line with the face she would like to take (being a desirable internship candidate). On the other hand, there are times when others may communicate in a way that does not support our chosen line. These others may "call us out," so to speak. Imagine again that Kara shows up at her interview and finds that a friend of hers is the receptionist. If her receptionist friend tells Kara's interviewer that Kara is irresponsible, then she is not supporting Kara's interview persona in a way that is **heartless**. In both cases, Kara finds herself in wrong-face. To be heartless in this manner is sometimes necessary; one can imagine issues of being a witness to a crime, needing to speak up regarding racism or sexism, or wanting to prevent a boss from hiring a truly irresponsible candidate. Often, we fall back on politeness norms to construct these interactions. At other times, society as a whole has constructed laws to protect whistleblowers and witnesses or developed a different set of norms for settings such as a courtroom. These processes allow one's face to be breached and yet at the same time reinforce the idea that to be heartless is not normative behavior.

Politeness and Face

Other scholars have argued that there may be specific ways that people communicate to protect each other's face. There are two types of face: positive and negative (Brown & Levinson, 1987). **Positive face** is the socially appropriate self-image people wish to present to others. Although negative face seems like it might include when you want to make a negative impression, that is not the definition. Rather **negative face** is the idea that we all would like to make autonomous

decisions regarding how we behave in the world. Of course, we are interdependent with others and cannot be fully autonomous.

Sometimes we make certain communication choices, called **politeness strategies**, to recognize the face needs of others (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness strategies are used when people need to communicate some act or intention that is face threatening. **Face threats** are communicative actions that might harm someone's positive or negative face. Positive face threats include actions such as needing to critique someone, perhaps a formal critique in reviewing someone's work, or something more casual such as telling a friend that a shade of lipstick doesn't quite work for her or the cologne he splashes on before a big date doesn't smell as good as he thinks it does. Positive face threats may also include engaging in disagreements, bringing up divisive or emotional topics, or blatant noncooperation in communicative interactions such as interrupting or ignoring someone. These are all face threatening because they are actions (or inactions) that do not support the positive line that the co-interactant is attempting to take.

Negative face threats are threatening because they request that someone behave how the speaker wishes them to behave rather than allowing full autonomy on the part of the hearer. However, to get along in our social world, we all have to navigate receiving and sending negative face threats. An order given by a superior may be face threatening, as might a request from a friend. You might feel some level of irritation when reminded by a roommate to put your dishes away, not necessarily because the roommate is wrong about the dishes but because the request is a face-threatening act in that the roommate is asking you to complete the task on their schedule rather than your own. Other types of negative face threats include communication behaviors such as offering advice or making an offer. Although these may be viewed as cooperative types of communication, advice can be face threatening if it suggests the advice receiver is not fully capable of making the best decision. An offer to help may be intended positively, but it also indicates that the receiver needs help and that they may feel obligated to return the help at some future date. (See Chapter 11 for suggestions on offering more effective social support.)

Not all face-threatening actions are equally severe. How a message is perceived is likely dependent on the power difference between the person communicating the face threat and the message recipient as well as the relationship between them. Your boss can tell you to perform some task in a way that would be inappropriate if you tried to tell your boss what to do. A close friend is likely to be viewed as more appropriate when telling you that your outfit isn't flattering than the same message delivered by a rival. In this way, the relationship frames our own and others' identity performances to affect how a message is perceived. Politeness strategies are the communication choices people make to minimize face threats and make messages more socially palatable.

In these cases, we can see how politeness strategies are useful for taking the edge off of the potential negative effects of face-threatening acts. Politeness strategies include a wide array of linguistic choices. Brown and Levinson (1987) called these choices redressive actions. **Redressive actions** are communicative choices that people use to form messages that are viewed as more appropriate or polite. Using politeness markers such as "please," "thank you," and "I'm sorry" helps people realize that you know your request may be face threatening and that you recognize that they are autonomous individuals who can say yes or no. A face-threatening action that does not include any redressive action is considered bald-on-record. **Bald-on-record** strategies typically involve simply stating something critical or making a demand. A bald-on-record, positive face threat might be "That cologne really stinks" or "You have way too much makeup on." Redressive actions for these statements might include attending to the hearer's desires. For example, instead of saying "that cologne really stinks," you might say, "I think you have another

cologne that smells better than that.” Examples of bald-on-record negative face threats might include a sibling saying “Give me that!” or a roommate telling you “Do the dishes.” These strategies can be considered quite rude for both positive and negative face threats. A redressive action for a negative face threat can be as simple as saying “please.” Other negative politeness strategies include noting that you are incurring a debt (“It would really help me out if you’d do the dishes”) or giving deference (“I know you’re really busy, but could you handle the dishes tonight?”).

Pointing out a role relationship such as supervisor-subordinate or professor-student may also make a negative face threat such as a critique or request feel less threatening. Other linguistic choices include hedging (“I know you’re busy but...”), attending to the hearer’s other face needs (“You should wear less makeup. You are so naturally pretty.”), or joking around (“Formal denim! Are you trying to bring back the 90s?”). Redressive action can also be communicated through nonverbal cues such as trying to appear friendly rather than threatening when making a request or using vocal tone to sound unsure while hedging (Trees & Manusov, 1998).

Another fairly sophisticated strategy to soften the blow of potentially face-threatening communication is to go off-record. **Off-record** strategies are messages formed in such a way that the face threat cannot be directly attributed to the speaker. Let’s think about what this strategy might sound like. Perhaps you would like a ride home from class and instead of demanding a ride (a bald-on-record strategy) from your classmate (“Give me a ride”) or using redressive action (“Please give me a ride”), you say to your friend, “It’s so cold outside. I’m really not looking forward to waiting for the bus.” Your friend might then choose to offer you a ride, but if they do not, you both have a face-saving out—you weren’t really asking, and they did not really have to say no. Of course, linguistic choices related to politeness are embedded within a particular culture. Different cultures may view different communication choices as more or less appropriate for performing politeness (Jenkins & Dragojevic, 2013).



Saying “please” can be a simple yet effective way to soften a request that might otherwise threaten someone’s negative face.

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Off-record strategies are common in the interpersonal phenomena of flirting. Stating bald-on-record utterances such as “I like you,” “I want to spend time with you,” and “I want to have sex with you” can all be face-threatening acts. Using off-record strategies allows potential partners to keep things lighthearted and fun while avoiding threatening the face of either party. Of course, as you may have noticed, this also makes it more difficult to decode the true intentions of a flirting partner (“Are they just being fun? Do they really like you?”). Research has found that both flirtatious communication and the rejecting of flirtation involve indirect, nonverbal, and off-record strategies (Goodboy & Brann, 2010; Hall et al., 2010).

People rarely choose to engage in bald-on-record strategies, and when they do, these strategies are often viewed negatively or as aggressive by their communication partners (Dillard et al., 1997; Trees & Manusov, 1998). At times, people may state that they value the bluntness or authenticity of bald-on-record statements and, in some cases, bald-on-record strategies are seen as more effective (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). However, in actual interactions, politeness strategies are often seen as a more appropriate way to achieve communication goals (Blum-Kulka, 1989). Indeed, the choice to use or not use politeness strategies serves as a specific type of identity choice.

At other times, people’s reaction to a face threat involves reassessing how they consider the social audience. For example, Bell and Hastings (2011) found that while members of interracial couples who experienced excessive staring or negative comments would sometimes respond by smiling or staring back, they also used noninteractive strategies to minimize their perception of the face threat. For example, partners reported ignoring the face threat, rationalizing the threat by telling themselves that the opinions of people other than their partner do not matter, or reframing the face threat by articulating that people who might view their relationship negatively did not matter to their perception of self and their relationship.

SKILL BUILDER POLITENESS

For many of us, our parents first teach us how to be polite. Parents dutifully train their toddlers to say “please” and “thank you,” they caution their teenagers to watch their tone, and they remind a 9-year-old to ask rather than demand. However, when asked the inevitable question *why* (Why should one be polite?), the answer is so ingrained in our language and culture that many parents may fall back on the old stand-by—“Because I said so!”

The idea of *face* helps explain why people use certain language markers. It can also help us better understand politeness and perhaps be more skilled communicators. In many cases, the less polite version of a request is the shorter, seemingly more effective version. Why say something like “Is that the salt?” when what you really mean is “Hand me the salt”? Why hedge a request to a co-worker by saying, “If you’re not busy, would you mind filling out this report?” when we mean “You have to fill out this report.” In these cases, people are trying to manage multiple face goals. Although we need the report, our co-worker is more likely to provide it if we recognize in our message that our co-worker is a busy person who likely has better things to do. Indirect questions, hedges, and other politeness markers indicate the respect we have for the other person’s autonomy and identity. In addition, people can react badly to others not treating them with the respect they feel they deserve. Your parents told you to ask rather than demand because it is irritating to be told what to do by a 9-year-old. Your co-workers react badly to demands because they signal you think of yourself as superior rather than equal.

We can also run into problems when we do not understand indirect requests and negotiations for what they really mean. If we are asking someone on a date or trying to get a job

interview and we are repeatedly told “maybe later” or they use some other way of indirectly saying no, we may not get the “hint.” Consider the following scenarios: What different ways might you phrase your message to appear polite? Do your strategies make your message less effective? What redressive actions do your messages employ?

1. After the end of the semester, you receive a text from a classmate that you suspected had a crush on you asking if you would like to see a movie. You are not really interested in dating this person but know that you will likely see them again in future classes.
2. You receive an unexpected parking ticket and realize that if you pay the parking ticket, you will be short on rent money. You decide to ask your sister if she might loan you some money. How do you frame your request? Do your strategies change if you are asking your parents for money? What about a friend?
3. Recently you were promoted to assistant manager of the retail store you work for. The promotion comes with more responsibility and more money. However, you have made friends with many of your co-workers and now you are in charge of assigning tasks to them. You come into work today and the back stockroom is a disaster. You need to ask two of your friend-colleagues to fix it and you know that no one likes this task.

THE MANY FACETS OF IDENTITY

Thus far we have been speaking of the self as if it were a single coherent entity that is in some way performed for others. However, careful consideration of the dramaturgical perspective illuminates that different identities and faces are likely performed for various audiences in different social contexts. Many scholars have considered the idea that the self might contain many facets. As far back as 1890, James argued that “Properly speaking, *a man has as many social selves as there are individuals to recognize him* and carry an image of him in their mind” (James, 1890, p. 294). (And, of course, we would argue the same is true regardless of one’s gender.) However, James also noticed that these image-carrying individuals can be considered as more coherent groups or audiences such as “friends,” “teachers,” or “employers.” Freud (1949) famously argued that people have an id, an ego, and a superego. Others have considered that we may perform particular selves for particular audiences (Altheide, 2000).

The Crystallized Self

More recently, some scholars (Altheide, 2000; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) have considered the self as not just containing different facets but also as selves growing and creating different facets in response to the social environment—much in the way that a crystal grows. This metaphor of the



Like a crystal, our identities are composed of many everchanging layers, facets, and dimensions, all of which look different depending on the angle from which they are viewed.

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crystallized self allows people to think of the different performances, or lines that we take, as different facets of self. In this view, the self does not have some authentic core and no one facet of self is more or less authentic than any other facet. For example, in some contexts, a person may perform the role of mother; in another context, that person takes a professional role; in yet another, perhaps they are a marathoner. None of these particular selves are more or less real than any of the others; they are all simply different performances. We are all made up of these collections of performances, but we are no less real or authentic when performing our job, spending time with family, or maintaining our friendships.

The metaphor of the crystallized self also helps us consider how different facets of self are privileged by different audiences. For example, in the US, people often put great weight on the importance of the corporate labor market and may be especially concerned with their identity performances as they relate to how they are viewed in the workplace. An example of privileging the workplace in regard to identity performances is messaging and campaigns devoted to persuading teenagers to be careful with what they communicate on social media. Often at the heart of these campaigns is a concern that performances that seem appropriate to youth based on their peer audiences will be seen as inappropriate to future employers.

The idea of the crystallized self encourages us to play with both the language that surrounds our sense of self as well as the actual experiences in which we engage. By exploring new avenues of self, people may be able to develop meaningfully and grow new facets of their crystallized self, allowing for a richer and deeper experience of one's self and society. Selves are able to reflect on their construction, accept or resist societal narratives related to the self, and choose particular performances of identity. The ability to seek out new experiences and audiences is ultimately a fairly privileged position—not everyone will have the resources to pursue self-growth in this way. For example, one's ability to engage in meaningful work may be enabled by people working in low-paid childcare positions (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 180). Thus, it is important to keep in mind the way that our own performances of self may restrict or be enabled by systems that restrict the performances of others.

The ability to claim particular identity performances or not be questioned regarding identity performances is also privileged. Drummond and Orbe (2009) found that Black and Hispanic focus groups discussed negotiating identity gaps in a way that white participants did not. The identity gaps were centered on questions that challenged people's perceptions of their personal identity and their identity in relation to others. For example, these participants reported experiencing the question "Where are you from?" This question highlights an identity gap where people perceived themselves as locals, but others assumed a foreign identity erroneously based on their physical appearance. White participants did not experience this type of identity gap.

Monitoring Identity Performances

Although all of us have multifaceted selves, people may be better or worse at creating identity performances that are seen as appropriate for different contexts. People may need to **self-monitor** or adapt the communication and emotional expressions to particular contexts. Self-monitoring may lead people to change their behavior in one of the following ways (Snyder, 1974):

1. Intensify their true emotions. For example, you might try to look more upset when a parent informs you of the passing of a distant relative because you know your parent is more deeply distraught.

2. Communicate emotions that an individual may not be actually feeling. An example of this might be the child who learns to appear contrite when caught with their hand in the cookie jar regardless of their actual feelings.
3. Conceal inappropriate emotional states. Perhaps you have been pleased when your partner's favorite (but very old and tattered) t-shirt is destroyed in the laundry but offered condolences and made overtures to empathize with their sadness.

Each of these examples illustrates attempts to monitor and adjust our emotional displays and show an appropriate face to a particular audience. (See Chapter 6 for more on ways that people manage emotions.)

Self-monitoring goes beyond just emotional displays. The concept has two additional factors. First, self-monitoring requires an ability and willingness to be other-directed in considering the production of interpersonal messages. The communication choices of high self-monitors reflect their concerns for behaving in a socially appropriate manner and addressing the face needs of others. The second factor is related to the idea of extraversion. High self-monitors tend to have an aptitude for crafting public performances of communication (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). The influence of these two factors—an appreciation of the social audience and the ability to perform appropriately—leads high self-monitors to perform better on a variety of communication tasks. High self-monitors are very responsive to the opinions of others and the norms of particular social situations (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). High self-monitors tend to be better conversationalists than low self-monitors. They are more active, more focused on their conversational partner, more likely to reciprocate self-disclosures, and more adept at pacing conversations (Dabbs et al., 1980; Ickes & Barnes, 1977; Schaffer et al., 1982). High self-monitors are also better at using humor (Turner, 1980).

The ability to self-monitor also influences performance in the workplace. High self-monitors are more likely than low self-monitors to be promoted to management (Kilduff & Day, 1994). High self-monitors are better able to build and actively leverage their professional social networks (Mehra et al., 2001). High self-monitors become more important in their work networks over time. In contrast, low self-monitors were found to have weaker connections to others in their workplace even after a lengthy period of employment.

Low self-monitors may also have difficulty adapting to different situational contexts. Their communication is driven primarily by their internal states rather than contextual norms or requirements (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). However, low self-monitors may engage in more intimacy and authenticity in their relationships (Rowatt, et al., 1998). Low self-monitors are less concerned with social comparison information. Thus, they are less likely than high self-monitors to focus on superficial aspects of relationships such as peer status or external attractiveness (Oyamot et al., 2010).

Identity Performances Online

Today, we do a considerable amount of our identity work online. Although many of the same principles of self and identity apply, mediation changes identity performances in ways that James, Goffman, and Mead likely never dreamed of. Online performances of self may be less like the stage performances that Goffman described and more like an exhibition of artifacts in our personal museum of the self (Hogan, 2010). People find themselves in the role of a curator, picking and choosing different identity artifacts to place online in order to showcase particular identity performances. Moreover, people often tailor their identity performances for various

social media. For example, the selfie Kara posted on Instagram might have to pass a different test (for example, be especially cute) than would something funny she would post on her Finsta (fake Instagram), just as the professional identity she projects on LinkedIn is likely to be very different than the side of herself she shows in videos with friends on TikTok.

Furthermore, different types of online spaces facilitate different processes related to identity development. Online spaces may be more fixed or flexible in relation to how identity performances and social audiences are structured in online channels (McEwan, 2015). The idea of fixed and flexible refers directly to how identity performances are structured in different online spaces.



This type of picture is more likely to appear on an Instagram or Snapchat story than on an Instagram feed. How might these women change the way they take photos throughout the day to present different identities on various social media platforms?

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Fixed Network Spaces

Identity performances that occur in **fixed network spaces** recognize a single consistent entity behind the identity performance. Often this performance is tied to an embodied, physical self. Sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn are examples of fixed identity spaces because people have to perform a self that is coherent and consistent. These identity performances have to be coherent in that all of the facets of self that are performed in this space make sense with each other. Identity performances have to be consistent in that they make sense to the various audiences that will see them. Otherwise, users may experience **context collapse**. Context collapse is what happens when social audience members that exist in different spaces offline and thus would receive different identity performances are lumped together in a single audience due to the structure of the social media platform (Marwick & boyd, 2011). For example, if you have friended co-workers on Facebook, you might need to be careful about not complaining about work on Facebook.

Many times, young people turn to fairly sophisticated communication strategies to manage context collapse (boyd, 2014). They might engage in **social steganography** by choosing

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words and phrases that are intentionally vague to people (such as parents or teachers) who lack the shared knowledge and context to fully understand the meaning of the messages (boyd & Marwick, 2011). Youth often tend to fragment their audiences, using Facebook more sparingly as a catch-all type of site and then saving more social messages for platforms where they have connected only with close friends such as Snapchat or Tumblr. In the opening vignette, notice that Kara had two Twitter accounts—a public account, @KaraPWilliams, and a private account, @KissesfromKara. She can present different facets of her identity on each of these accounts as a way to manage context collapse.

Flexible Network Spaces

Another way people may attempt to avoid context collapse is to choose **flexible network spaces**—online platforms that allow for anonymity or pseudonymity. People may interact with each other either anonymously or using a pseudonym or user handle. Flexible identities can be created, performed, and discarded easily. Online message boards or massive multiplayer online games are examples of spaces where people perform flexible identities. The flexibility allows people to interact with others using identity performances that are not tied to offline selves or the perception of others within a fixed social network. The infamous image chat boards of 4chan and its successor 8chan might be the most “pure” example of flexible network space. On these boards, everyone goes by the user handle “Anonymous” and thus each of their identity performances lasts no longer than a single post. More popular flexible networks would include spaces like reddit.com where users can choose one or several pseudonymous handles.

One concern for flexible identity spaces is that people might experience **online disinhibition**. The feeling of anonymity may encourage people to behave in ways that they would refrain from in offline communication contexts (Suler, 2004). Online disinhibition can be benign or toxic (Suler, 2004). A benign form of online disinhibition would be a space where people might feel more comfortable expressing emotions or engaging in self-disclosure online than offline. Teenagers might reach out in online communities to express or experiment with new identities (Valkenberg et al., 2005). People with serious illness might disclose in online support groups in order to not burden their families with their worries. Toxic online disinhibition occurs when people consider anonymity as a license to be rude, overly critical, or threatening. Toxic inhibition can lead to online spaces that close down online debate and relationship building.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

JOB SEEKERS (AND TRAVELERS) ASKED FOR SOCIAL MEDIA PASSWORDS

In 2011, the Associated Press (AP) ran a story about employers asking for Facebook passwords. Previously, employers may have performed Google searches or browsed the public portions of social media accounts. In this case, the Department of Corrections (DoC) for the State of Maryland asked correctional officer, Robert Collins, specifically for his password. The password allowed the DoC to search through all of Collins’s postings and his friendship network. Although it was unclear how many employers were engaging in the practice, the AP article was taken fairly seriously. By 2014, 30 state laws had been passed prohibiting employers from requesting access to social media passwords.

Reactions to password requests were mixed. A set of over 4,000 Yahoo! News comments provides some insight into public reaction (see McEwan & Flood, 2018). Some people argued that asking for social media passwords is fair game for employers. After all, they argued, if you’ve got nothing to hide, then why should you be worried? Some took this argument further,

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saying that they felt asking for passwords was fair because they would hate if someone who was on drugs or engaging in illicit behavior got a job instead of them. Others worried that handing over social media passwords gives employers too much power. There were concerns about private information but also that certain network connections (for example, someone who grew up in a bad neighborhood) might cause them problems. Some suggested resistance strategies, including walking out of an interview, trying to publicize companies who engaged in the strategy, and trying to get legislation passed against the practice.

Social media is a place where multiple facets of identity are performed. Should employers be able to access all aspects of a potential employee's identity? Would you feel comfortable working for a company that asked for Facebook passwords? How might you react in an interview if you were asked for your social media passwords? Would you engage in a resistance strategy? Would you be upset if someone with an unsavory social media profile was hired for a job over you?

PERCEPTION AND BIASES

As should be clear by now, the self and its identities are negotiations between our internal cognitions and our external social networks. Despite the multifaceted nature of our identity performances, there is evidence that people strive toward **cognitive consistency** in how they view the world around them. People generally want the world to make sense and for the people around them to behave in a predictable manner.

The human brain is structured to use heuristics to make sense of the world. Heuristics are simple decision rules that allow us to make decisions quickly (Chaiken, 1987). For example, you have internal decision rules that helped you decide what was appropriate to wear today. We develop heuristics for a diverse array of interpersonal processes, including deciding what to wear, but also how to greet someone, or what we think we like in a potential romantic partner. Once heuristics are developed, they are resistant to change (Van Overwalle & Siebler, 2005). Quickly changing heuristics would be maladaptive in an evolutionary sense. Consider an ancient ancestor who had determined that tigers are likely to eat people; it would be unwise to quickly change their mind that tigers are not likely to eat people on the basis of encountering one full and lazy tiger. Similarly, we may become uncomfortable when someone in our social circle acts in unpredictable ways. Many of the heuristics we use to understand both our self and others' selves are based on this concept of cognitive consistency.

Cognitive Dissonance

We also strive for cognitive consistency in the way that we view both our self and others. The concept of **cognitive dissonance** suggests that people are uncomfortable holding two opinions or ideas that are in contrast to each other (Festinger, 1957). To overcome this discomfort, when confronted with oppositional ideas, we strive to reconcile these discrepancies—often in self-serving ways. To explain cognitive dissonance, Wicklund and Brehm (1976) use an example of purchasing a house (i.e., making a commitment to the house and then later finding out that several things were wrong with the house). This creates dissonance between the idea that the house was worth purchasing and the idea that the house has problems. For many people, to resolve this dissonance, they would begin to convince themselves that they truly loved something about the house or the neighborhood to justify their commitment to the house despite the problems. We can apply the elements of this example to interpersonal relationships as well. Imagine that you have spent several years with your romantic partner and consider yourself committed to the relationship. Then you find out some troubling information about your romantic partner. Perhaps

your partner lied about something important or even committed an act of infidelity. Certainly, some people break up in such circumstances. For those who choose to stay together though, partners often convince themselves that there is something particularly amazing and unique about their partner and their relationship to justify staying. Essentially, partners mentally adjust for the dissonance between the idea that they have invested in the relationship and that the relationship has problems.

Self-Serving Bias

The **self-serving bias** considers the valence or direction of the information behaviors provide about the self. Due to the self-serving bias, people attribute their own failures and negative behaviors to situational factors (Malle, 2006; Zuckerman, 1979). A review of hundreds of studies on this effect found that people avoid attributing their own negative behaviors (such as relapses in drinking, being aggressive, or problems in school) to their internal selves (Malle, 2006). For example, if Kara (from the opening scenario in this chapter) fails to get the internship, she might attribute this to her school not properly preparing her or perhaps the interviewer was rushed. However, when considering successes, the self-serving bias leads us to consider those to be the result of internal traits. If Kara lands the internship, she may congratulate herself on her hard work and polished interview performance.

On the other hand, people tend to either not be concerned enough with the behavior of others to make an attribution about their behavior or they may find other's negative attributions to be the result of personal characteristics. In Kara's case, if the interviewer was late to the meeting, Kara might simply evaluate the interviewer as an unreliable person rather than considering that another interview might have run late or that the interviewer was held up in a meeting with a superior. (Read more about the fundamental attribution bias in Chapter 3.)



According to the self-serving bias, if you land a job you want, you are likely to attribute your success to personal characteristics such as being intelligent and personable. If you fail to land a job, you are likely to attribute it to external factors, such as the interview being rushed or the company not hiring the best people.

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The internal and external attributions made under the self-serving bias are *both* likely based on seeking consistency in the world around us (Malle, 2006). For example, if Kara has been generally successful in the past, earned good grades in school, was accepted into the university of her choice, and was hired for previous jobs, then an unsuccessful interview would contradict information Kara already has about herself. Thus, in Kara's mind, the external attributions for failure are the most consistent. However, when it comes to considering the behavior of other people, we have much less information on which to base our attributions. Thus, when we see someone fail or behave badly, it makes sense to attribute that to the most salient cue we have—that person. This attribution leads us to consider something inherent to that person, an internal attribution, to be the most likely cause of their behavior. For example, if we see a woman in the supermarket snap at her son, we might automatically assume she is impatient—and worse yet, a bad mother—instead of considering that she is tired and her son may have been testing her patience all day.

The self-serving bias can make it difficult for us to empathize with people who experience difficulty. If we consider their failures to be related to some internal shortcoming, it can be challenging to consider systemic problems that create problems in others' lives. Our heuristics may also give rise to false attributions and stereotypes. Stereotypes are mental models we hold about what we think the "typical" member of a social group is like (Allport, 1954; Lippmann, 1922; see Chapter 3 for more on stereotypes). Stereotypes often contain a substantial number of attributes, including perceptions of typical social roles, shared qualities, and anticipated behaviors (Dovidio et al., 2010). Competent and empathetic communication in interpersonal contexts often involves making a concerted mental effort to attempt to override these processes.

Competence Biases

Two other cognitive errors that affect our self-concept, albeit in different ways, are imposter syndrome and the Dunning-Krueger effect. People with **imposter syndrome** have objective evidence that they are talented, such as admissions to quality universities, high grades, or jobs in a highly skilled career field, yet still believe that they do not belong and will soon be discovered as an inept fraud (Clance, 1985; French et al., 2008). People with imposter syndrome may be more anxious and expect to perform poorly on tasks (Cozzarelli & Major, 1990; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991). They may also self-handicap, for example, by studying less for an exam, as a mechanism of providing themselves with external reasons for failure. Imposters may be more likely to feel they have failed when they have actually been reasonably successful (Cozzarelli & Major, 1990). Women have been found to have slightly higher scores on imposter syndrome scales than men (Cozzarelli & Major, 1990). Some scholars worry that young people raised in high-pressure scholastic environments with an emphasis on grades and test scores may also experience higher levels of imposter syndrome. Although these students may be academically qualified, they may also experience anxiety in regard to academic risk-taking to avoid any hint of failure (McAllum, 2016; Pedler, 2011).

Whereas those with imposter syndrome are qualified yet perceive they are inadequate, those who experience the **Dunning-Krueger effect** are inadequate in regard to some skill or cognitive ability yet think of themselves as quite highly qualified (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). For example, people who experience the Dunning-Krueger effect might perceive themselves as highly analytical yet have difficulties with a test of higher-level reasoning (Pennycook et al., 2017), or they may consider themselves a grammar expert and yet fail to recognize grammatical errors (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Simply having difficulty in these areas might be frustrating for an individual but wouldn't bias their sense of self. However, the twist with the Dunning-Krueger effect is that the lack of competence in a particular area makes it difficult for that person to understand that

they actually lack competence. These individuals are incredibly confident in a particular ability yet are lacking both in the area and their ability to recognize their deficiency. Essentially, they don't know what they don't know.

Anecdotally, we sometimes specifically encounter the Dunning-Kruger effect in the field of interpersonal communication when someone tells us that they are an excellent communicator, yet they have little understanding of mindfulness, tact, self-monitoring, or a myriad of other elements of communication that increase perceptions of being an appropriate communicator. Yet these individuals are not aware that these are elements of competent communication, so they are also unaware that there are better ways to encode their messages (also anecdotally, we find these communicators often mean that they are blunt, which is sometimes but not often the best communicative strategy).

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT IS FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION A FUNDAMENTAL ERROR?

Even if you are not familiar with the cognitive bias known as fundamental attribution error (FAE; also called the actor-observer hypothesis), you've probably heard the premise that we attribute our own behavior to external causes and others' behavior to internal causes. For example, if an acquaintance says something hurtful to you, you may assume that they are simply a mean or uncaring person. Yet if you say something hurtful to someone else, well, you may feel that you were misunderstood or that you were affected by having a bad day or being hungry. However, some research suggests that this cognitive bias may not be as strong as scholars once thought—and in some cases, it may not exist at all.

The fundamental attribution bias is rooted in the idea that “actors tend to attribute the causes of their behavior to stimuli inherent in the situation, while observers tend to attribute behavior to stable dispositions of the actor” (Jones & Nisbett, 1971, p. 93) This statement means that when considering our own behavior, we often think of contextual reasons for why we behave a certain way. For example, you get up early because you have an early class. You missed that traffic signal because you were tired after having to get up for that early class. You remembered your friend's birthday because you got a notification from Facebook. You went to your friend's party because other people you knew were going to be there. However, we often attribute other people's behavior to internal causes. They get up early because they are early risers. They missed the traffic signal because they are a bad driver. They remember their friend's birthday because they are conscientious. They go to parties because they are an extrovert.

Many scholars assert the existence of fundamental attribution error (e.g., Robins, Spranca & Mendelsohn, 1996; Watson, 1982) and many authors of communication textbooks assert that fundamental attribution error is an important perceptual bias that influences interaction. However, a 2006 meta-analysis found that fundamental attribution error may not be as prevalent as scholars thought. A meta-analysis is a statistical review of studies. Meta-analysts look at the results of many studies to determine the existence of effects across all of these studies. Malle (2006) examined 173 studies that had tested actor-observer hypotheses to see what the results were across all of these studies. Given how *fundamental* the fundamental attribution error has been to the way we understand cognitive biases, Malle was surprised to find that across all of the studies the effect of fundamental attribution error seems to be very small. Sixty-eight of the studies he included found no effect at all for fundamental attribution error. As Malle argued, “The actor-observer hypothesis appears to be a widely held yet false belief” (p. 907). People come up with internal and external attributions for both their own and others' behaviors.

Why would it take so long to realize this psychological effect is not nearly as fundamental as first thought? One explanation is that many of the studies have participants think about hypothetical scenarios. The effect seems to appear when people are thinking about

hypotheticals but not when they are trying to explain actual events. Another explanation is that studies that asked people for their explanations were more likely to find the effect than those that used rating scales. It may be that these attribution errors are part of a system of perceptions that people use to explain their own and others' behavior but do not appear when internal or external attributions are presented as the only choice of explanation for behavior.

Malle (2006) did, however, find some evidence of the self-serving bias. When people are explaining behavior that they view negatively, they seem more likely to attribute this to situational influences. You were short with your friend because you are hungry. You can't find your textbook because your roommates are messy. In contrast, people are more likely to attribute others' negative behavior to internal causes. They are snappy because they are impatient. They can't find their textbook because they don't take care of their things.

Malle's meta-analysis provides an important summary of studies examining fundamental attribution error. More research is likely needed to understand the way that people make attributions about their own and others' behavior. However, it seems that fundamental attribution error may not be as fundamental as we once assumed.

THE SELF IN RELATIONSHIPS

In keeping with the symbolic interactionist perspective, neither the self nor our identity performances occur in a social vacuum. Our selves and identities are intertwined with a network of others, including parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, and romantic partners. One way of considering how people view their self as overlapping with various network ties is **self-expansion theory**. Self-expansion theory is the idea that as we build relationships with others, we come to see these others as becoming an interdependent part of our own self (Aron & Aron, 1996; Aron et al., 2013). Furthermore, we are motivated to expand our selves in order to increase our available resources and opportunities (Aron & Aron, 1996). Being in relationships also exposes us to new



Going new places and trying new things with someone are two of many ways that relationships can promote self-expansion.

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experiences that can lead us to grow and change, similar to the idea of the crystallized self that was presented earlier in this chapter.

As our relationships develop, we take on similar interests, common friends, and even some of the characteristics of our relational partner (Agnew et al., 2004). People might also be willing to put more work into maintaining relationships with partners that they see as included in the self, although this finding holds more strongly for men than women (Ledbetter et al., 2013). Self-expansion occurs in different types of relationships, including romantic relationships and friendships (Ledbetter et al., 2011; McEwan & Guerrero, 2012).

Self-expansion theory may also help explain some nuances in how people conduct social comparisons. When you view a relational partner or a close friend as an extension of yourself, you are more likely to gain esteem when they outperform you (whereas generally, we might lose esteem when someone outperforms us). This likely occurs because we take on the successes and failures of those with whom we are interdependent as if they are our own. In the case of close friendships, we may even avoid engaging in the self-serving bias and come to view our friends' failures as due to external causes and help shoulder responsibility for both their successes and failures (Campbell et al., 2000). This effect may be because self-expansion allows us to feel that our friend is a greater part of our self. In addition, the knowledge we gain through the self-expansion process allows us to have a greater amount of information regarding potential external causes for our friend's behavior.

PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SELF AND IDENTITY

Understanding how you see yourself and how others see you is important for many reasons, including personal growth and self-expansion. Knowing yourself and being self-reflective also help you be a better communicator in your personal and professional relationships. Next, we present four principles that tie together some of the main ideas from this chapter in ways that we hope will give you further insight into the many facets that make up the unique person you are.

Principle 1. The self and communicative processes are tightly intertwined.

The self is formed, reified, and reproduced through communicative processes. In many ways, you are who you surround yourself with. At least, you take on a role for that particular group. For this reason, it is important to consider the social groups that you join and the relationships that you form. Positive, affirming relationships will have a positive effect on your sense of self. People who provide invalidating messages, lead you into difficult situations, or pigeonhole you into negative roles can lead you to become a very different person.

Principle 2. The self changes.

“Be yourself” and “Be true to yourself” are common sentiments. Yet the self can change and is constantly changing. It can be helpful to understand that the self is a complex set of beliefs regarding who you think you are and who you wish to be. Furthermore, these beliefs are constantly changing. You may have an aspirational self that you hope to become someday. If you have just recently started college, you may feel you are a very different person than you were just months ago due to the new array of social and intellectual choices and experiences you have recently had. Even just finding yourself in a new social group can make you feel as though you have changed. While this may feel confusing, it is also normal. Such changes are related to the concepts of the crystallized self and self-expansion. Take time to remember what is important to you but also enjoy seeking out new opportunities for growth and personal development.

Principle 3. Different contexts require different faces.

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When choosing how we are going to communicate, it's important to remember the context of the communicative situation (office, social event, family gathering) as well as the people who will be the audience of our identity performances. Considering the situation, audience, and social norms helps us choose which facets of our self will be viewed as the most competent to perform in that moment. It is also important to remember that those around us may choose different communication strategies based on the different contexts they operate in. You might consider carefully whether to share a message with a friend privately or post something to their public social media account.

Principle 4. Be mindful of your biases.

Self-serving bias makes it easy to think that our successes are due to our innate abilities and our failures are due to factors out of our control. In reality, neither of these are true all the time. It is important to remember that we all have support and a bit of luck on our side when we succeed and that we should take responsibility for our failures. We are not just a collection of successes and failures but considering these mindfully can help us have a better understanding of our strengths, weaknesses, and how to accomplish goals. It is also important to remember that although we know our self better than others, other people also experience success and failure partially due to internal traits and partially due to external causes. Keeping this in mind can help us have the compassion and empathy needed to form strong interpersonal and societal bonds.

CONCLUSION

Our internal self-concept and identity performances rely on a variety of communication processes that help us understand our self and others. Building this understanding is a key skill for developing interpersonal relationships, as truly interpersonal communication relies on building knowledge regarding each other. Like Kara in the opening vignette, we constantly move through different social contexts and adjust our identity performances accordingly. Our ability to do so in ways that are seen as consistent and coherent to our various social audiences helps us to be viewed as more appropriate communicators, which can lead to a variety of positive outcomes in our personal and professional lives.

CHAPTER 2 STUDY GUIDE

KEY TERMS

Identify and explain the meaning of each of the following key terms.

agreeableness	extraversion
bald-on-record	face
cognitive consistency	face threats
cognitive dissonance	fixed network space
conscientiousness	flexible network space
context collapse	generalized other
crystallized self	heartless
dramaturgical perspective	identity
Dunning-Kruger effect	imposter syndrome

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looking-glass self	racial identity
negative face	redressive action
neuroticism	self-concept
off-record	self-expansion theory
online disinhibition	self-monitor
openness	self-serving bias
performances given	shameless
performances given off	social steganography
politeness strategies	symbolic interactionism
positive face	theory of mind

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the facets of your identity? How do you know that these facets are a part of you? How do you perform these facets for different audiences? What facets do you share with other members of the class? Do you perform these in the same way or different ways?
2. In the age of social media, where people can edit and carefully consider the identity artifacts they place online, what does it mean to be “authentic”? Is authentic a useful term given what you now know about identity presentation? Can someone be more or less authentic? What types of identity presentation would you consider to be authentic or inauthentic?
3. It can be difficult to recognize our own cognitive biases; however, knowing that you have these biases, can you think of a time when the inclination for cognitive consistency may have clouded your perception of someone else? What was the context of that situation? What was the outcome? What might you try to do differently in the future?



ENDING RELATIONSHIPS

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN...

- 12.1 Describe general characteristics of relationships that help determine how resilient a relationship is to de-escalation or termination.
- 12.2 Describe general patterns that occur in declining relationships.
- 12.3 Explain how various ways of ending or de-escalating relationships are related to issues such as getting closure and being able to move on.
- 12.4 Describe specific breakup strategies and how they vary in terms of how hurtful and effective they are.
- 12.5 Understand the positive consequences associated with ending relationships.

Keiko and McKenna were close friends throughout college. They were even roommates their sophomore year. The two women were confidants who disclosed everything to each other. After graduating, however, they gradually started spending less and less time together. Keiko tried to keep in touch by Facetiming McKenna at least a couple of times a week and extending invitations to go to lunch or shopping together. At first, McKenna accepted Keiko's invitations, but then she became immersed in a demanding new job and started declining a lot of Keiko's invitations, saying she was too busy to go out. Since Keiko had also started her career, she was understanding. They continued their Snapchat streak, sent each other direct messages on Twitter to share funny or relatable Tweets, and texted once in a while. But over time the texting and direct messages stopped and their communication was limited to a few Snapchats each day. Then Keiko found a romantic partner, fell in love, and was so caught up in her new relationship and career that without even realizing it, she stopped communicating with McKenna altogether. When their Snapchat streak ended, McKenna Facetimed Keiko and asked her if everything was alright. The two women talked and decided they needed to put more effort into their friendship. They planned to go to lunch, get their nails done, and catch up on everything happening in each other's lives the next weekend.

Do you think Keiko and McKenna will get their friendship back on track, or will their friendship continue to become distant until eventually, they stop talking again? Getting together for lunch could be a major step toward restoring their friendship to its previous level of closeness, or it could represent a genuine last effort to rejuvenate a friendship that is heading toward demise. A lot will depend on the communication that occurs during and after their meeting.

In today's busy world, it is not uncommon for friendships and other relationships to fade out despite the ease with which people can stay connected at some level via social media. This chapter focuses on understanding relational de-escalation and termination. **Relational de-escalation** refers to the process of reducing the closeness of a relationship. In this case, the relationship does not end, but people are no longer as close as they once were. Some relationships that de-escalate never end, but instead are permanently or temporarily "downgraded." **Relational termination** refers to the process of ending a relationship altogether. To better understand both de-escalation and termination, this chapter examines general characteristics of relationships that influence their longevity, different pathways relationships take when they decline, and specific types of communication people engage in to end relationships.

RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS THAT PREDICT STABILITY

Some relationships are more resilient than others. Think about various relationships you have with friends, family members, and possibly co-workers and romantic partners. Why do some of those relationships survive through hard times and others fall apart? Research suggests that the likelihood of staying in relationships depends on a number of factors, including how voluntary the relationship is, how many investments and barriers characterize the relationship, the alternatives we have, and how rewarding a relationship is. Of course, positive communication is also a key ingredient in preventing relationships from declining or ending.

Voluntary Versus Involuntary Relationships

As you learned in Chapter 8, some relationships are voluntary. In other words, you had a choice regarding whether to be in the relationship or not. Other relationships are involuntary because you had no choice. It is best to think of this as a continuum, with some relationships being more voluntary or involuntary than others. Friendships and romantic relationships tend to be more voluntary. Family and work relationships tend to be more involuntary. It can be difficult to end some involuntary relationships completely. For example, you cannot stop being a member of your family (although you can act like you are not) and you cannot stop being co-workers with someone unless one of you quits.

Investments and Barriers

The extent to which there are investments and barriers preventing dissolution also affects how resilient relationships are. **Investments** are all the “resources that become attached to a relationship and would decline in value or be lost if the relationship were to end” (Rusbult et al., 1994, p. 119). Investments include time, energy, love, shared possessions, enmeshment in a joint social network, and building an identity as a couple, among others. **Breakup barriers** are all the forces that stop people from ending a relationship (Attridge, 1994). These can include obligation, public commitment, religious or moral beliefs, the legal process, concerns about children, and financial or emotional dependence.

When times get tough or feelings start to fade, investments and barriers provide people with reasons to put effort into trying to make a relationship work. For example, when you get married, you put barriers against breaking up in place. Instead of just being able to walk away, you would need to go through the process of a divorce. You might also need to navigate issues related to children and a shared home and possessions after investing time and effort into building a life together. Romantic partners, friends, and family members are often part of larger interconnected social networks. If you end your relationship with someone in this broader social network, it can alter your other relationships within the network. Your friends and family might take sides, and you may be excluded from certain group activities and deleted from group chats. After a breakup, people sometimes even unfollow their ex's friends on social media, so breakups can have a domino effect; ending a relationship with one person can lead you to lose relationships with other people as well. The more embedded we are into other people's lives, the more difficult it is to end a relationship without these types of consequences.

Rewards and Costs

As you learned in Chapter 11, many social psychologists believe that the ratio of rewards versus costs plays a key role in predicting whether a relationship continues or falls into decline. Recall

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that rewards are all the positive consequences people get from being in a relationship (Sprecher, 1998). These include material resources like shared possessions, but more importantly, rewards include more abstract resources such as feeling loved, being comfortable around someone, and having fun together. Positive communication is essential for creating a rewarding climate in a relationship. In Chapter 9, you learned about various positive forms of communication that help people maintain healthy and happy relationships, including self-disclosing positive information, spending time together having fun, complimenting one another, and showing affection. The more people engage in these behaviors, the more rewarding their relationship is and the more resilient it is to problems. Indeed, the Gottman Institute uses the term **positive sentiment override** to describe how developing a constructive and caring communication climate helps couples better handle disagreements (Werrbach, 2016). When people experience positive sentiment override, they are optimistic about their relationship and see problems as relatively minor and easily managed. The positive emotion they feel in the relationship acts as a buffer against misinterpreting their partner's actions or taking things overly personally.

Costs, on the other hand, are all the negative consequences people get from being in a relationship (Sprecher, 1998). These can include the time, effort, and lost opportunities associated with being in a relationship. As discussed in Chapter 11, relationships are also home to a lot of the most intense negative emotions we experience. When people engage in transgressions like cheating, or when conflict patterns become destructive, the costs within a relationship go up. The concept of **negative sentiment override** helps explain what happens when the negativity during conflict spills into other aspects of the relationship (Werrbach, 2016). People expect negativity, so they take things personally and are always on the defensive or the attack. This kind of communication climate makes a relationship costly rather than rewarding. According to social exchange theory, , people are much more likely to end a relationship if costs outweigh rewards than if rewards outweigh costs (Stafford, 2008; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This idea can



When you end a friendship or break up with someone, your shared social network can be affected. If a couple in this group broke up, how might it affect their standing in the group as well as their relationships with common friends?

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be extended to other kinds of relationships and situations as well. For example, if the costs at your workplace outweigh the rewards, you are likely to look for another job. If your roommate is inconsiderate and always in a bad mood, a new roommate may be in order.

Alternatives

Social exchange theory also suggests that the quality of alternatives influences whether people continue or end relationships (Rusbult et al., 2011; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The **quality of alternatives** refers to the various options people have outside of a current relationship. For example, Keiko has a new boyfriend, so spending time with him is a better alternative to her than spending most of her time with McKenna. In romantic relationships, people assess their alternatives by thinking about new potential partners or what it would be like to be single. If those alternatives are more appealing than staying in the current relationship, a breakup is likely. You might also stick with a friend group you are somewhat unhappy with until you have new friends to hang out with.

Alternative relationships can play a role in ending relationships in other ways. When people move into separate friend groups, start spending time with a new significant other, or start hanging out with people from work, the time and effort they put into these new relationships detracts from the investment they can make into old relationships. Indeed, studies have shown that when people transition from being single to being in a serious relationship, the number of close friends they have decreases (Fehr, 2000). Thus, the more positive alternatives you have, the harder it is to maintain all your relationships, and the more likely it is that some of your relationships will de-escalate or end. Conversely, when you see your current relationships as your best alternatives, you are likely to stay in those relationships. Some research even shows that when we are in happy relationships, we derogate our alternatives even if they are attractive (Rusbult et al., 1994). Therefore, if a man Keiko had a crush on in college texts her and confesses that he still thinks about her all the time, Keiko might think “he’s not all that anymore” if she is happy with her new boyfriend.

GENERAL TYPES OF DE-ESCALATION AND RELATIONSHIP ENDINGS

When relationships become too costly, there are better alternatives, or there is simply not enough affection and positive communication to sustain them, they are likely to de-escalate or end. The way this happens, though, can vary greatly. Some patterns of de-escalation or termination are more likely in some relationships than others, as discussed next.

Drifting Away

Drifting away involves a gradual decrease in contact that marks the de-escalation of a relationship. Drifting away is common, especially in friendships and former work relationships. A classic study by Rose and Serafica (1986) showed that casual friends are especially likely to fade out when they are no longer in proximity to each other. Common reasons for drifting away include changing jobs, moving away, and spending time with other people. The most common reasons precollege and college friendships end is that people grow apart, start to lack common experiences, and have fewer opportunities to spend time with each other (Owens, 2003). Sometimes friends do not even realize they are drifting apart at first (Rose, 1984), as was the case for Keiko and McKenna. People get absorbed in their lives and decrease communication with certain people without meaning to. Even married couples can drift apart. In fact, about 10 percent of

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divorced couples believe that there was no major reason that their marriage failed other than they simply grew apart (Amato & Previti, 2003).

When drifting apart is a mutual process, a friendship, or even a potential romantic relationship, can end without negativity. This leaves the door open for resuming the relationship in the future (Rawlins, 1994). Indeed, friends who drift away are better able to restore their friendships at a later date than those who end their relationships because of betrayals or competition (Fehr, 2000).

In today's high-tech society, drifting away rarely leads to completely ending a friendship. Even though the friendship may not be as close as it once was, former close friends usually stay in contact through social media. Staying connected on sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram is an easy way to maintain "weak ties" with someone (e.g., Burke et al., 2011; Ellison et al., 2007). **Weak ties** are acquaintances within our social networks. Studies have shown that most people want to maintain weak ties with a lot of people to keep their social network broad and diverse. Social media allows people to do that without expending a lot of energy. Therefore, two formerly close friends can easily de-escalate their relationship so that it functions more as an acquaintanceship by keeping in touch via social networking sites but not having much other contact.

Ending on Bad Terms

Instead of drifting apart peacefully, some relationships de-escalate or end after turmoil. Betrayal, hostility, criticism, and violence are all reasons people give for ending friendships (Rose, 1984). We expect our friends to be loyal and supportive, not disloyal and critical. Despite this, betrayals by friends are fairly common (Davis & Todd, 1985; Jones & Burdette, 1994; Shackelford & Buss, 1996). The worst betrayals involve a friend becoming involved with a current, potential, or former romantic partner. Other especially hurtful betrayals by friends include having a friend talk behind your back, fail to stand up for you, or betray a confidence.



Social media makes keeping in touch with a lot of people easy, but if that is the only communication occurring, a relationship will usually de-escalate or remain a weak tie.

Vladimir Vladimirov/E+ via Getty Images

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These same issues lead to breakups in romantic relationships. The top reason for divorce in the United States is infidelity (Amato & Previti, 2003), which most people consider to be one of the worst acts of betrayal. When a major event like cheating occurs, even the closest relationships can end suddenly. Davis (1973) explained this phenomenon as **catastrophe theory**. This idea has been supported by research showing that about 25 percent of romantic relationship breakups are caused by a critical event that leads to rapid disengagement (Baxter, 1984; Bullis et al., 1993; Lampard, 2014). Some of these events are extremely hurtful, such as cheating, having an especially nasty argument, being subjected to physical violence, or having someone spread untrue rumors about you. Close friends are more likely than casual friends to say that critical events ended their relationships (Rose & Serafica, 1986). Other research shows that pervasive conflict patterns that include criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling predict divorce (Gottman, 1994; see also Chapter 10). These costly behaviors can drain the warmth and fun out of a relationship, creating a toxic environment that eventually leads to a messy breakup.

When relationships end on bad terms, they can turn antipathetic. **Antipathetic relationships** are characterized by mutual dislike (Card, 2007). A sizeable proportion of antipathetic relationships started out as friendships. Researchers have investigated the reasons why some friendships turn antipathetic (Card, 2007; Casper & Card, 2010). The most common reasons have to do with jealousy and competition. The worst of these is one friend stealing another friend's partner or love interest. But jealousy and competition also include situations such as feeling a friend is becoming close to another person and excluding you.

Incompatibility was the second most common reason friendships turned antipathetic. People can become incompatible in ways that do not cause conflict, such as developing different interests. This type of incompatibility is more likely to lead to drifting apart than an antipathetic relationship. However, when incompatibility is based on perceiving another person's negative personality characteristics, the possibility that the friendship will turn into an antipathetic relationship rises. Behaviors perceived as annoying, fake, and controlling are just some of many possible examples.

Finally, the third most common reason friendships turn antipathetic is that the friend violated the implicit or explicit rules about how friends should act. In other words, they broke the "friend code" by engaging in behaviors such as lying, proving to be untrustworthy or unreliable, or not keeping promises. Behaviors involving competition and jealousy also break the friend code, but in a different way because they involve third parties.

Although research on antipathetic relationships has focused on friendships gone wrong, the same principles can be extended to other types of relationships. Couples who endure betrayals, jealousy, and destructive patterns of conflict are more likely to end on bad terms than partners who maintained loyalty and positive communication despite their problems.

Family Estrangement

Some people think family relationships can never really end because a person cannot stop being someone's daughter, brother, or aunt. While that may be true, family members can cut ties from one another so that they have no real relationship. Researchers have described two types of family estrangement (Agllias, 2016). **Physical estrangement** occurs when family members no longer have any contact with one another. **Emotional estrangement**, on the other hand, is a situation where family members have infrequent contact with one another but usually only when they feel obligated to do so. When they are in contact, communication is often awkward and uncomfortable.

A defining feature of family estrangement is that it is intentional. Losing contact with a cousin or not knowing where your Great Aunt lives anymore do not necessarily qualify as estrangement. For lack of contact to qualify as physical estrangement, communication must be cut off intentionally (Scharp, 2006). Another feature of family estrangement is that other family members are aware of it. Oftentimes, other family members act as intermediaries, not to try to fix things between the estranged family members but to convey general information. For example, if Gary and his sister, Brianna, are estranged, their other sibling, Jordan, might talk to them both about who should go where for the holidays. Significant unresolved conflict also defines estrangement. Typically, family members had some type of significant conflict that damaged their relationship so much that they no longer want to communicate with each other. Most of the time, grudges are held and one or both of the family members feels fully justified in stopping all communication.

The specific reasons cited for family estrangement are similar to those mentioned as causing the demise of friendships and romantic relationships. These include having unresolvable disagreements, including those related to issues such as money, divorce, and substance abuse (Agllias, 2016). But family estrangement is almost always the result of a series of problems rather than one major conflict or transgression (Sichel, 2007), with a particular event sometimes thought of as the “straw that breaks the camel’s back” (Scharp et al., 2015, p. 330). Family estrangements can be described as falling on various points along a continuum that ranges from no communication at all, called **continuous estrangement**, to a chaotic pattern where family members fluctuate between trying to connect but then acting distant (Scharp et al., 2015). Part of this fluctuation may be due to societal pressure to maintain relationships with family members.

On-Again–Off-Again Relationships

Family estrangements are not the only type of relationship characterized by cycling through patterns of closeness (the “on-again” side) and distance (the off-again side). On-again–off-again relationships are also especially common between romantic partners (Bevan & Cameron, 2001). In one study, two-thirds of college students reported that they had been in at least one on-again–off-again relationship (Dailey et al., 2009). These relationships may be more prevalent today than ever before, in part because social media keeps some ex-partners connected after breakups (Blight et al., 2019; Halperin, 2012). It used to be easy to avoid seeing an ex, but now unless you unfollow or block your exes, you may be subjected to seeing unexpected images of them on your social media. This may cause you to miss an ex, or to feel jealous if the ex is out with someone new. For more about how people deal with social media following a breakup, see the I Didn’t Know That! feature.

I DIDN’T KNOW THAT! BLOCKING, PRUNING, AND UNFOLLOWING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

People have very different opinions about what to do about their ex when it comes to social media. Some people strongly believe you should remove all traces of the person from your life, including your phone and social networking sites. Others believe doing so is petty and vengeful. What do you think? It might surprise you to know that the two main reasons people purge someone from their phones and social media are almost direct opposites—to either hurt the partner or to avoid being hurt oneself.

In a study of teens (who arguably are the savviest when it comes to cell phone communication), nearly half reported that they removed their exes from the contacts in their phones, and just under one-third said they blocked them (Lenhart et al., 2015). Almost half of the girls and one-third of the boys said that they took couple pictures off their social media (a process sometimes referred to as **scrubbing**; see Child et al., 2011) and pruned their ex from their account by unfriending and/or blocking. And it's not just teens who engage in scrubbing and **pruning** behaviors. A study on post-breakup behavior on Facebook showed that young adults engaged in actions such as blocking or unfollowing an ex, changing passwords so their ex could no longer get on their accounts, and even changing privacy settings from public to private so their exes could not monitor their behavior (Quan-Haase et al., 2018).

The reasons teens and young adults engage in these behaviors is more often to protect themselves than to hurt the ex. Seeing an ex on social media can stir up lingering feelings, create jealousy, or make someone miss their ex more. People also have the urge to “creep” on their exes and see what they are doing, which can also make it more difficult to get over someone. Unfollowing and blocking someone can help reduce the temptation to stalk someone's page. By changing privacy settings, people can also prevent exes from creeping on their pages. Pruning, by removing stories and comments, can be helpful in the healing process as well. You no longer have a reminder on your page of some of the good times you shared, and when people look at your page they will not mistakenly assume that you are still together. After some time, when people have sufficient closure, they might follow their ex again, and even repost some of the archived pictures. There are, of course, times when people block, unfollow, remove likes and comments, and so forth to try to hurt an ex by showing they no longer care. It can, indeed, be hurtful to have someone delete you from their social media as well as their lives as if you were never there. But instead of assuming that these actions were done in spite or out of pettiness, consider that maybe it is a normal part of the healing process for your ex.

What do you think? Based on your own experiences and those of your friends, what are some of the most common reasons people prune, unfollow, or block their exes? How do people feel when their ex engages in these types of behaviors? Do people engage in similar behaviors when their friendships end?

On-again-off-relationships are defined as breaking up and getting back together at least once, with the majority of couples going through this cycle between two and five times before either breaking up for good or staying together (Dailey et al., 2009; Halperin, 2012). As you might have guessed, most of these relationships end in a final breakup rather than a stable continuing relationship. As they run their course, on-again-off-again relationships appear to be characterized by a mix of highs and lows. These relationships have enough rewards that people go back to them, but enough costs that they do not usually last. A lot of times these relationships are also plagued by uncertainty (Blight et al., 2019). During the “on” times, people are not sure the relationship will last, and during the “off” times the possibility of a renewal seems possible, especially if it has happened before.

There are different types of on-again-off-again relationships (Dailey et al., 2013). One of the most common is a *habitual relationship* in which people gravitate back to each other because it is comfortable and convenient. In these relationships, it is easy to fall back into old communication patterns, including those that were destructive to the relationship. Unless couples address the issues that caused them to break up, they are likely to repeat the same cycle and break up again. Another type of on-again-off-again relationship involves *gradual separation*. In this case, partners may not be ready to let one another go, but with each on-again-off-again cycle they feel less connected until the relationship finally ends. In other situations, *one person is in control* of the on-again-off-again relationship. This is usually the person who is less attached to the



It's easy for friends to get busy and drift apart. Making time to talk is a key way to prevent friendships from de-escalating.

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relationship. This person can dictate the terms of any renewals and decides when to break up and when to get together again. Ultimately the person in control is likely to end the relationship for good at some point. None of these types of on-again-off-again relationships have particularly good prospects for lasting.

Some couples, however, are able to capitalize on transitions in a way that helps them be more successful if they get back together. **Capitalizing on transitions** means the couple uses the “off” time in the cycle to reflect on the relationship, improve themselves, sort out their feelings, and decide what they want and don't want as individuals and in the relationship. If they then come back together, they are more prepared to make the significant kind of changes necessary to improve the relationship. Couples who spend the transition time this way have less conflict, more positive feelings, and more relational improvement if they decide to try again (Dailey et al., 2013).

Both romantic partners and friends have other communication strategies at their disposal that can help them reconnect with someone after a relationship ends. In a classic study, Wilmot and Stevens (1994) described ways people were able to rejuvenate friendships that had declined or were in the process of declining. The top three rejuvenation strategies involved changing behaviors, having a relationship talk, and making gestures of reconciliation. Keiko and McKenna are on the path to doing all of these things. Meeting for lunch is a good start. This is a gesture of reconciliation—an activity signaling that they want their friendship to get back on track. During lunch, the women may have a relationship talk where they decide to put more effort into their friendship so it does not slip away. They agree to set time aside each week to catch up Facetiming or hanging out.

FEATURES OF BREAKUP BEHAVIOR

Sometimes rejuvenation strategies work, but other times, people do not put the effort in to keep a relationship going, or one or both people decide it is better to part ways. Some relationships end without hurt feelings; the decision to end the relationship is mutual and both parties agree it is time to move on. Oftentimes, however, the ending of a relationship is painful. As the old song lyrics say, breaking up can be hard to do. This can be true for many types of relationships, ranging from the former best friend who betrayed you to the significant other you thought was “the one.” Although relationship endings can be as unique as relationships themselves, certain strategies for ending or de-escalating relationships are fairly common. These strategies vary in important ways, including how direct versus indirect they are, how much information they provide, and how kind or hurtful they are.

Direct Versus Indirect Strategies

A critical feature of breakup strategies is how direct versus indirect they are. There are advantages to using direct communication to end a relationship. Intentions are clearer, so there is less room for someone to hang on and hope the relationship will continue. Direct strategies are expected when relationships were long term and serious. In these cases, there is more of a need for a formal “breakup.” While this is truer in romantic relationships than in friendships, even close friends sometimes engage in direct communication to end their friendship. For friends, direct communication is most likely when a major event or problem precipitated a desire to end the friendship. By contrast, people tend to use indirect strategies when the relationship has a shorter history or when there were no major problems or issues. Keiko and McKenna had a long history as close friends, but because they were not experiencing any specific issues they just started to drift away, which is common in many friendships. People also use indirect strategies to avoid the pain and drama that can accompany some direct breakups (LeFebvre et al., 2019).

Level of Information Provided

With some exceptions, direct breakup strategies also provide people with more information about the reasons behind the breakup, whether there is a possibility of restoring the relationship in the future, and how people are expected to treat each other now that the relationship is over. For example, do you unfollow each other on social media? If you have common friends, do you avoid hanging out in a group with them at the same time? The more enmeshed two people were in each other’s lives, the more necessary this type of information exchange is. Information is also important for helping people achieve closure. The **need for closure** is based on wanting to know the answers to questions as a way to alleviate confusion and ambiguity (Roets et al., 2015). When applied to breakups, the need for closure suggests that people have a natural desire to know why the relationship did not work out. This is normal. If you have invested a lot of time and effort into something, you want to understand what went wrong and learn from it. You also want to be able to move on rather than feeling as if you still have unfinished business with someone. Without getting answers, it can be difficult to gain closure and move on. Having a coherent explanation of the breakup in your head helps you learn and grow, which makes you more likely to have satisfying relationships in the future (Kansky & Allen, 2018).

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? IS HONESTY THE BEST POLICY WHEN ENDING A RELATIONSHIP?

Ending a relationship is difficult. Most people want to make sense of the breakup and understand what went wrong. Without this understanding, it can be challenging to achieve closure and move on. However, the reasons people end relationships are often messy and complex, and understanding those reasons can lead to more hurt. Indeed, needing closure and wanting to prevent further hurt are often two goals that are at odds with one another during breakups. These are ethical issues as well. How much closure should you feel obligated to give someone or compelled to ask someone to give you? And should you be completely honest about the reasons you are breaking up with someone? What is more ethical—to be truthful even though it hurts someone, or to be ambiguous or untruthful so as not to hurt someone's feelings more than you have to? And is it true that you sometimes need to be "cruel to be kind" so that someone understands that the breakup is final and moves on? Consider the following scenarios and think about (a) what you would do if you were in Sebastian or Audra's positions as well as (b) how you would feel if you were Jaycee or Dylan.

At first, Sebastian thinks Jaycee is the perfect woman—beautiful, smart, and outgoing. But after they go on a few dates, the glow starts to wear off. Sebastian still thinks Jaycee is great, but he realizes she isn't the fantasy girl he made her out to be in his head. He expected to have great chemistry and stimulating conversations with her, but things have fallen a little short in both those areas. Jaycee has told him that she really cares for him and sees a lot of potential in their budding relationship. He's not sure how to tell her that he does not feel the same, especially since she has not done anything wrong.

Audra thought she was in love with Dylan but now that they have started to settle into a relationship, she realizes that she latched on to him for all the wrong reasons. She had been feeling insecure and having trouble getting over her ex-boyfriend, and Dylan had been there for her. He was completely different than her ex, and at first that made him appealing. Now Audra always finds herself comparing Dylan to her ex in her head and wishing Dylan was more like him. Sometimes when she looks at Dylan she even wonders why she once found him attractive. He really isn't her type at all. She knows she needs to break up with him, but she dreads hurting him, especially since he had been there for her when she needed someone.

If you were in Sebastian's place, what would you say to Jaycee that could give her the closure she needs without hurting her feelings unnecessarily? Would you tell her the whole truth—that you had put her on a pedestal and then been disappointed? Or that the chemistry wasn't there and conversations with her were boring? These would be honest responses, but they would be hurtful.

Audra faces similar choices. Should she tell Dylan she now realizes that she used him to try to get over her ex? If he pushes her to try to work it out, should she tell him that he's not her type and she doesn't find him attractive anymore? Such words would certainly be difficult for Dylan, or anyone else, to hear.

On the other hand, giving vague or cliché reasons for breaking up does not seem authentic and may not provide people closure. For example, Sebastian may say, "I'm sorry. You're great, but it's just not there for me." Or Audra might tell Dylan, "My feelings have changed." These types of cliché breakup lines are often meant to save people from the hurt of hearing more specific reasons for the breakup, but they also seem impersonal and can leave people frustrated and wondering what the deeper causes of the breakup were. Knowing this, what would you advise Sebastian and Audra to say and do?

Level of Hurtfulness

Ending a relationship can make people feel uncomfortable, awkward, and vulnerable. People's identity is at stake during breakups. We want others to see us as possessing an array of positive characteristics, such as kindness, competence, friendliness, and intelligence. Yet if you initiate a breakup, people might see you as cold and unkind for hurting someone you once cared about. If you are the person being left, you may question if you have the good qualities necessary to attract and keep people close to you. So how then do you end a relationship without being unkind and hurting someone? In some cases, it is impossible to avoid deeply hurting another person during a breakup, but the strategies you use can make a big difference. As you will learn, breakup strategies vary in terms of how kind versus cruel they are.

COMMON BREAKUP BEHAVIORS

People can break up using a single strategy, such as texting someone and saying “I want to break up” (not a particularly kind strategy), ghosting or ignoring someone completely (also not a particularly kind strategy), or having a face-to-face conversation with someone to try and show respect while still letting them know the relationship is not working (a better strategy). As you read about the various ways people end relationships, keep in mind that more than one strategy can be used to break off a relationship. A common pattern, for example, is gradually decreasing communication for a while but then meeting with the person to communicate directly that the relationship is over.

The Direct Dump

The most common direct strategy for ending a relationship is the **direct dump**, which involves simply stating that the relationship or friendship is over (Baxter, 1984; Dailey et al., 2009; Thieme & Rouse, 1991). This strategy can be used by itself. More often, though, it is used along with other strategies. For example, you could receive a text message saying “It’s over” without any other discussion, or you could receive the same message after a week of limited contact that signaled something was wrong. Most people agree that the most respectful way to tell someone a relationship is over is to deliver the message face-to-face. Even among teens, breaking up with someone in person is perceived to be more than twice as acceptable as breaking up with someone via text (Lenhart et al., 2015). Among adults, sending a breakup message through text is regarded as disrespectful and lacking in compassion (Sprecher et al., 2010). If the relationship was at all important, people feel they deserve to have the person take the time to break up with them in person. Using the direct dump without any discussion can also fail to give the receiver of the breakup message closure. People usually want to know the reasons why someone is ending a relationship with them. Sometimes those reasons are obvious. Perhaps two friends have been struggling with issues of competitiveness for a while or someone in a dating relationship cheated. In these cases, using the direct dump can provide an unambiguous way to mark the end of a relationship. Other times, however, people are surprised that the other person wants to end things and need more discussion than the direct dump alone supplies.

The Relationship-Talk Trick

Another strategy people use to end relationships, the **relationship-talk trick**, involves at least some discussion of what went wrong in the relationship. This strategy is called the relationship-talk



Sometimes people need to talk to fix things or because they have something important to share; other times this can be a harbinger of the relationship-talk trick.

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trick because the person who wants to break up says they want to talk about the relationship when, in actuality, people using this strategy have no intention of working things out; their intention is to break up. The relationship talk is structured in a way that a breakup will be a logical conclusion. This strategy is fairly common (Baxter, 1984). It provides a way for people to talk before breaking up, which can give both people more closure. The relationship-talk trick also gives people who are thinking about initiating a breakup a way out if they change their mind.

During the “relationship talk,” the person initiating the breakup often provides justifications for why the relationship should end. There is a fine line, however, between providing justifications that help give someone closure and hurting someone more than necessary. Some justifications, such as “It’s just not working anymore,” can be too vague to be helpful. More specific justifications, however, can be hurtful. Saying someone is annoying, unintelligent, or boring or making statements such as “I never really loved you” might be honest, but they can also cause additional hurt at a vulnerable moment. The What Would You Do? feature ponders the issue of whether honesty is always the best policy when ending relationships.

Positive Tone Strategy

Although it may be true that sometimes there is no good way to end a relationship, one of the best strategies is to use the **positive tone strategy**. This strategy focuses on breaking up in a direct and unambiguous manner, while also trying to reduce the degree of hurt experienced (Banks et al., 1987; Baxter, 1982; Cody, 1982; Perras & Lustig, 1982). People view the positive tone strategy as a compassionate way to break up with someone (Collins & Gillath, 2012). While ideal in many ways, this strategy can be difficult to implement effectively. The key is to focus on the specific positives of the person and the relationship rather than using cliché lines.

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Referring back to the examples in the What Would You Do? feature, instead of saying “I’m sorry. You’re great, but it’s just not there for me,” Sebastian might instead point out some of Jaycee’s positive qualities and even say that he is surprised that his feelings aren’t stronger given how great she is. Rather than tell Dylan that her feelings have changed, Audra might emphasize that he helped her through a difficult time when she was confused about a lot of things, that he is a truly wonderful person, and that he deserves someone who is 100 percent into him. Are these statements better than clichés? They are, but they would still be hurtful. Positive tone can help make a breakup a little easier and provide needed closure (Collins & Gillath, 2012). Yet even with the best of intentions, feelings are going to be hurt. Another challenge for someone using positive tone is not to sound condescending. Communicating in a sincere manner that shows genuine regret about having to end a relationship is critical.

The Negotiated Farewell

Another breakup strategy that aims for kindness is the **negotiated farewell**. With positive tone, one person is clearly in the position of initiating the breakup, as was the case in the scenarios involving Sebastian and Audra. The negotiated farewell, in contrast, represents an amicable and mutual breakup process that involves negotiating how to best end or de-escalate a relationship that both people agree is in decline (Dailey et al., 2009; Emmers & Hart, 1996; Metts, 1997; Sprecher et al., 2010). In this case, two people have agreed that ending the relationship is either the best thing to do or is necessary.

One example is a couple who falls out of love but wants to be good parents to their children. Another is business partners who worked together for years, had projects and patents together, but are now going their separate ways. In these cases, it is important to negotiate the terms of the change in relationships status. For example, the couple might end their marriage but maintain a relationship as co-parents. They also have to decide how to equitably split up their possessions



The process of determining how to split up possessions after a divorce is smoother and more amiable if a couple uses the negotiated farewell strategy.

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and how to deal with their former in-laws. The former business partners might end their professional relationship but agree to continue to give each other credit for work they did together and to bolster each other's reputations when possible. Fairness and being open-minded are key ingredients for a successfully negotiated farewell.

The Blame Game

In contrast to the kinder strategies of positive tone and the negotiated farewell, the **blame game** describes a situation where ending a relationship becomes a competitive struggle between two people. Some friendships that turn into antipathetic relationships follow this path. Two people who were once best friends become enemies, with each trying to make the case that the other is more to blame for the demise of the friendship.

The blame game is often the “end game” in a relationship where negative cycles of conflict or demand-withdraw started to pervade the relationship (see Chapter 10). Both people know the relationship is deteriorating, both blame the other for their problems, and sometimes they give different reasons for why the relationship is ending (Cody, 1982; Dailey et al., 2009). This type of relationship ending can be messy. Ex-friends and ex-partners might block each other on social media and try to get people on their sides. Although the blame game is clearly a hurtful way to end a relationship, it can give people closure because both individuals usually feel justified in ending the relationship and are glad to get out of a toxic situation.

Genuine and Pseudo De-Escalation

Sometimes people do not completely end a relationship. Instead, the relationship either de-escalates or changes. For example, the divorced couple mentioned above will continue to be co-parents, and the former business partners will maintain a cordial professional relationship. Sometimes de-escalating a relationship is what we want. Maybe we still want to be friends with a former best friend or be on good terms with an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend.

The **genuine de-escalation** strategy allows people to reduce the closeness of a relationship without completely ending it. This strategy can involve taking a break to give each other space, deciding to be friends instead of dating, or acknowledging that even though you are not best friends anymore, you still want to stay in contact and consider each other friends. The key for genuine de-escalation is that it represents an honest attempt to maintain a relationship with the person, either by taking a break to improve it or by reducing closeness but staying on good terms (Banks et al., 1987; Cody, 1982).

In contrast to genuine de-escalation, **pseudo de-escalation** involves a false declaration about wanting to decrease the closeness of the relationship either temporarily or permanently (Baxter, 1985). In this case, the person requesting to “take a break” or “still be friends” has no intention of doing either; the intention is to end the relationship altogether but to let the person down easily or not have to face hurting them. A major problem with this strategy, however, is that it can give people false hope. One study showed that less than 10 percent of people who received a pseudo de-escalation message understood that the relationship was really over (Baxter, 1984). The rest hung on to hope that the relationship would resume or get back to normal sometime in the future.

Ghosting

Avoidance can be used to end any relationship, but it is an especially common way to end relatively new relationships or to stop progress toward developing a close relationship with someone

(Baxter, 1982; Cody, 1982; Emmers & Hart, 1996; Perras & Lustig, 1982). Avoiding can take different forms, the most extreme of which is ghosting. **Ghosting** is the process of shutting down all communication with someone, usually abruptly and with no explanation, so that someone disappears from your life as if they were a ghost who had never really been there at all (LeFebvre, 2017; Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019; Vilhauer, 2015). A study of college students identified three especially common ways that people ghost (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). First, cell phone communication stops. People are left on “read,” Snapchat streaks are broken, and no likes or comments are left on your social media. Second, ghosting involves stopping all face-to-face communication, including actively avoiding talking to the person or being places they might be. Third, sometimes social media is purged. This involves removing the person and any traces of the former relationship from one’s social media. Specific tactics include unfollowing or blocking someone and removing pictures or comments from social media.

Ghosting is viewed by many as an especially disrespectful way of ending a relationship. People often feel that they at least deserve an explanation. Ghosting provides little if any closure, although some people believe that if someone ghosts them, then that person does not deserve to have them in their life, which can give some closure. If ghosting is perceived so negatively, why do people do it? The most common reason is that it is easier and less emotionally stressful to ghost someone than to engage in a discussion about breaking up (LeFebvre et al., 2019). People are also more likely to ghost if they fear the person they are ending things with will get emotional or try to hang on to them. Finally, for relationships in the early stages of development, some people believe ghosting is an acceptable alternative to going through the emotional labor of ending things that never got serious. In contrast, ghosting is rarely seen as acceptable in relationships that were highly committed (Freedman et al., 2019).

Fading Out

A less extreme form of avoidance involves fading out. Fade-outs generally happen two ways. One is the **one-way fade**, which occurs when one person gradually reduces communication and the other person is left trying to figure out how to respond to the reduced contact. Unlike ghosting, the drop in communication is gradual rather than sudden. College students describe fading out as a weak form of ghosting that is more acceptable than decreasing communication completely (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). Strategies involve maintaining some forms of contact while relinquishing others, while also decreasing the overall amount of communication. For example, someone trying to fade out might send someone fewer Snapchats every day while still maintaining a Snapchat streak. When they do answer Snapchats, they might send just their face when in the past they included words or emojis. Another strategy is to increasingly leave messages unanswered for longer stretches of time. As these examples show, with the mutual fade out, both the quantity and quality of communication decreases, providing a signal to the receiver that the initiator no longer cares as much about the relationship.

The second way of fading out is the **mutual fade out**, which is also referred to as “drifting away.” This is what happened with Keiko and McKenna. They simply got busy with their lives after graduating and slowly started communicating less with one another. Mutual fade-outs can be intentional, with both people trying to fade out a friendship or romantic relationship



Ghosting has become so common that it is a frequent subject of memes and was even a Halloween costume. Ghosting strikes a chord in people; it may be a convenient and easy way to break things off with someone, but it is often seen as disrespectful.

Courtesy of Laura Guerrero



The one-way fade is characterized by strategic decreases in communication, such as increasingly long intervals between replies to texts and shorter or “drier” responses when they finally do reply.

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that they both know is no longer working, but more often mutual fade-outs are unintentional. This type of drifting apart is common in friendships and long-distance relationships where proximity is the main reason for relationship decline. Lack of shared interests can also lead people to mutually fade out.

In some cases, fading out makes it easier to re-establish a relationship in the future (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). While strategies such as the blame game or ghosting leave people angry and confused, fading out can be gradual enough that is less hurtful. In addition, the rela-

relationship often ends without either person having to say hurtful things about why the relationship is not working. If people change their minds and want to try again, they do not have as much baggage from their old relationship as do people who used more direct negative strategies. However, this is much truer when people fade out in the early stages of relationships. When people fade out from committed relationships, and especially if it is a one-way fade, it can feel almost as disrespectful as ghosting (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). All avoidant strategies, but especially the one-way fade and ghosting, are seen as providing less closure and producing more uncertainty than more direct strategies for ending relationships (Collins & Gillath, 2012).

Manipulation

Finally, people can end relationships in indirect ways that are manipulative. These strategies are indirect because the person initiating the breakup does not communicate directly to the partner. Two common manipulative strategies are cost escalation and third-party manipulation. **Cost escalation** involves making yourself appear less attractive and rewarding to your partner so your partner breaks up with you (Baxter, 1984; Emmers & Hart, 1996; Thieme & Rouse, 1991). Think back to the discussion about rewards and costs in relationships. People tend to stay in relationships where rewards outweigh costs. Therefore, if you want someone to break up with you, it follows that you might decrease how rewarding your presence in their life is. People who use cost escalation purposefully engage in strategies such as being obnoxious, disloyal, or selfish as a way to make the partner like them less, in the hope that they will initiate the breakup (Baxter, 1985). While this strategy is certainly manipulative, people report feeling better about breaking up with someone whom they started disliking. Overall though, cost escalation is viewed as a less-than-ideal way of ending a relationship because it shows low concern for the partner’s feelings (Collins & Gillath, 2012).

A second manipulative way to end a relationship involves using third parties. **Third-party manipulation** can be accomplished in two general ways. First, people can use their social network to either leak news of the impending breakup to their partner or ask someone in the social network to talk to their partner and tell them they want to break up. This, of course, has a ring of “middle school” to it, but it still happens in adult relationships, just more subtly. For example, Audra might talk to Dylan’s best friend about how she feels, asking him to help her soften the blow by talking to Dylan for her. Although her intentions are good, she is still manipulating the situation by hoping she will not have to do as much emotional labor during the breakup after getting Dylan’s friend involved. For friends, third-party manipulation is a more common way of either de-escalating or ending a friendship. Imagine that you have not been getting along with a certain friend who we will call Kyler. You discover, through mutual friends, that Kyler hosted a hang-out over the weekend and did not invite you. Moreover, Kyler intentionally decided not to invite you, knowing that you would find out about the party and interpret it as a sign that you are no longer close friends. In this case, Kyler’s third-party manipulation worked as a way of communicating a lack of closeness.

A second way of manipulating third parties is to engage in activity that lets someone know that they are being replaced. In romantic relationships, this could involve telling your partner that you should both feel free to date other people (Baxter, 1982; Collins & Gillath, 2012). In friendships, this includes actions such as deciding to go on a Spring Break trip with a new group of friends instead of the old group you always went with previously. These types of strategies are indirect, but the message is still usually clear.

BREAKUP RECOVERY

Although the end of a relationship can be one of the most heartbreaking events humans face, ending a relationship is not always a negative experience. Getting out of a relationship that is not working can open the door to new experiences. There is more time to devote to developing oneself and to making new connections. People can also experience personal growth after breakups, feeling stronger and more confident because they were able to get through a difficult time (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003; Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2015). See the following Skill Builder for suggestions of positive ways to cope with a breakup.

SKILL BUILDER COPING WITH BREAKUPS

Breakups are difficult, especially if your partner broke up with you. Breakups are also harder the more attached you were, the more time you spent together, the longer the relationship, and the more enmeshed you were in each other’s lives. Although most of the research on breakups has focused on divorce or dating relationships, the ending of a friendship can also be painful. The literature on breakups and recovery gives some helpful information on how to cope when you are having trouble dealing with any kind of breakup (Brenner & Vogel, 2015; Fisher & Alberti, 2016; Kansky & Allen, 2018; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003; Yıldırım & Demir, 2015). Here are some key suggestions.

1. **Give yourself time.** It takes time to recover after a breakup, and the longer and more serious the relationship was, the longer the recovery time is likely to be. Think of recovery as a process. It will not happen overnight. Just as it takes a while for a new relationship to develop, it takes a while to get over one.

2. **Do things that make you feel good about yourself.** After a breakup, your self-esteem can take a hit. You might wonder what you did wrong and why your partner did not love you enough to treat you right or stay with you. These thoughts are natural. However, breakups are usually about two people, not just one; even if you do everything right, the relationship can still end. Realizing this, engaging in activities that make you feel good about yourself, and spending time with people who support you can all help you feel better about yourself. Getting over a breakup also shows you are a strong person, which is something to feel good about.
3. **Get your mind off your partner.** If you find yourself thinking about your ex, try distracting yourself by reading a good book, watching a good movie, hanging out with friends, or doing whatever you find entertaining. Resist the temptation to creep on their social media, keep tabs on them, or contact them. In some cases, unfriending or blocking them may be helpful, at least while you are trying to move on. Try not to think about the possibility of getting back together, and instead focus on being the best person you can be.
4. **Embrace and capitalize on your new freedom.** Relationships take time away from other activities. Think about things you enjoy doing but did not have time to do while you were in the relationship and do them now. Start a new hobby, attend a class, and reconnect with old friends. Focus on yourself and what makes you happy personally. The extra time you have can also give you an opportunity for personal growth and exploration.
5. **Focus on what you learned.** Regardless of the level of closure you got, you can learn from your relationship experience. Ask yourself what you liked and disliked about your past relationship. Are there certain things you now know you need in a relationship and a partner? Think about what you could have done differently. Could you have communicated better or put in more effort? Or perhaps you put in too much effort or become too dependent on the relationship. Don't blame yourself, and do not dwell on the past, but do learn from your experience. Create a narrative that helps you make sense of what happened so you can learn from it.
6. **Stay open to new relationships.** It can be tempting to shut yourself off after a breakup to avoid further hurt. When the time is right, however, you should be ready to drop your guard and be open to new relationships. The research is mixed on how quickly you should get into a new relationship following a breakup. It is important not to rush into something for the wrong reasons, but it is also important to be open to exploring something new if it seems right.

Which of these ways of coping do you think would be particularly helpful in promoting healing after a relationship ends? Can you think of other strategies that might be beneficial in working through the aftermath of a breakup, either with a romantic partner or a good friend?

A repeated theme in the breakup recovery literature is the importance of being able to learn from your experience. In a study of 18- to 24-year-old gay and bisexual men, those who were able to positively appraise their breakups as helping them better understand what they want in future relationships reported low levels of anxiety and depression, along with high levels of self-esteem (Ceglarek et al., 2017). Studies of both same-sex and opposite-sex couples have shown that people can actually experience positive emotions such as happiness and relief after breakups (Hebert & Popadiuk, 2008; Kurdek, 1993; Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). In one study, college students were interviewed and asked about their breakups. These students mentioned many more positive than negative outcomes associated with their breakups, the most common of which were learning things that would be helpful for future relationships, being a stronger person, "feeling more independent or free," being more self-aware and mature, and reprioritizing things in their lives (p. 5). Thus, even though breakups can be extremely hurtful and upsetting, they can eventually lead to increased growth and new opportunities.

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PRINCIPLES FOR DE-ESCALATING OR ENDING RELATIONSHIPS

Principle 1. Breakups are usually hard.

This first principle may seem obvious, but it frames everything else about ending relationships. Being broken up with and losing a friendship are considered particularly hurtful events. A person who you cared about is basically saying they do not want to continue having a relationship with you. Breakups cause people to feel rejected and abandoned. The person doing the breaking up also usually feels bad. Most people do not want to hurt anyone, especially someone they care about. Because breakups can be emotionally traumatic, it is especially important to try to communicate in constructive ways when ending or de-escalating a relationship.

Principle 2. Relationship decline can occur naturally or be precipitated by critical events.

Some relationships decline naturally and gradually due to factors such as moving apart from each other, having different friend groups, or having less opportunity to spend time together. When people drift away from each other, like Keiko and McKenna did, the breakup is usually less painful and people can easily take steps to rejuvenate the relationship in the future. On the other hand, some relationships end suddenly after a catastrophic event such as a romantic partner cheating or a friend being disloyal. In these cases, more repair would need to be done to try to restore the relationship. Still other times, people fall into destructive communication patterns that spread negative affect through a relationship, eventually leading to its end. For these relationships to be revived, real change must take place, as is the case for those who learn how to capitalize on transitions to improve themselves and their relationships.

Principle 3. The directness and information level of a breakup strategy affects closure.

This chapter included several strategies that are indirect, including ghosting and the one-way fade. In general, strategies such as these do not provide the receiver of the breakup message with much information about the reasons why the relationship is ending. Sometimes the reasons are obvious, but when they are not, indirect strategies can lead people to experience uncertainty and prevent people from getting closure and moving on. Some indirect strategies, such as pseudo de-escalation, can even lead people to harbor false hope that a relationship will resume after a short break. Although it can be difficult to be direct when breaking up with someone, such strategies, when delivered in a positive tone, can help both people cope more effectively with a breakup.

Principle 4. Some ways of ending relationships are kinder than others.

Strategies such as ghosting and the one-way fade can be viewed as disrespectful because people believe they deserve someone to take the time to break up with them in a considerate manner. Therefore, in-person communication is generally preferable to being broken up with by text or other electronic means. But in-person communication can be difficult. Facing someone whom you are breaking up with, or who is breaking up with you, can make you feel vulnerable and uncomfortable. Sometimes there is no right thing to say. However, remembering to stay clear of clichés, and instead focus on showing the other person respect and giving details about why you appreciate them and valued your time with them, can often help make a breakup easier. It is important to be clear about your intentions, but also to let the other person know they are valued.

Principle 5. There are benefits to ending relationships.

Although the end of an important relationship can sadden people, ending relationships can also open the door to many new experiences and opportunities (Hebert & Popadiuk, 2008; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). People sometimes feel relief and happiness when ending a relationship that was toxic or filled with unpredictable ups and downs. After ending or de-escalating a

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relationship, people also have more time and energy to spend on improving themselves and developing other relationships. Even the process of getting through a hard breakup can end up giving a person a newfound sense of strength and confidence. Another bright spot in breakups is that they can be a learning process. After ending any type of relationship, lessons can be learned about the type of relationship you want, the mistakes you made and will try not to repeat, and the type of friend or relational partner you want to be.

CONCLUSION

Not all relationships are meant to last forever. Some relationships run their course and end amiably or de-escalate into a relationship that is less close. Others end in turmoil, leaving former friends, romantic partners, and even family members confused or angry. The key is not to dwell on these feelings but to move on and make good decisions about relationships in the future. For friends like Keiko and McKenna, some relational de-escalation can be beneficial because it triggers people to assess where they are in a relationship and decide if they want to rejuvenate it. At the beginning of this chapter, we asked whether you thought Keiko and McKenna would be able to revive their friendship, or whether getting together for lunch could mark a last attempt to save a failing friendship. A lot depends on how they communicate. If they are honest about their feelings, talk about their friendship, and negotiate guidelines for expected behavior, their friendship has a good shot of not only surviving but flourishing.

CHAPTER 12 STUDY GUIDE

KEY TERMS

Identify and explain the meaning of each of the following key terms.

antipathetic relationships	negotiated farewell
blame game	on-again–off-again relationships
breakup barriers	one-way fade
capitalizing on transitions	physical estrangement
catastrophe theory	positive sentiment override
continuous estrangement	positive tone strategy
cost escalation	pruning
direct dump	pseudo de-escalation
emotional estrangement	quality of alternatives
genuine de-escalation	relational de-escalation
ghosting	relational termination
investments	relationship-talk trick
mutual fade out	scrubbing
need for closure	third-party manipulation
negative sentiment override	weak ties

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Based on your experiences and observations, what are some differences in how various types of relationships—such as romantic relationships, friendships, work relationships, and family relationships—de-escalate? Do you think the communication that accompanies de-escalation varies in these relationships? If so, how? What do you think the success rate of on-again–off-again relationships is? Based on what you learned in this chapter, what are some telltale signs that suggest a couple might be better off ending an on-again–off-again relationship instead of cycling back in? What are some signs that it might be worthwhile to give the relationship another try?
2. What role do you think social media plays in preventing and/or helping people get closure after ending a dating relationship or friendship? Do you think people should sever ties on social media by unfollowing or blocking each other after ending a relationship? Why or why not? Should they remove all relationship pictures or leave some up? What other behaviors related to social media do you think people engage in after breakups, and how healthy are those behaviors?
3. In this chapter, you learned about various ways that people can end relationships. Thinking about your own experiences, the experiences of people you know, and the information you learned in this chapter, what breakup messages do you think are the most hurtful and why? If someone came to you asking for advice on how to break up with someone in the kindest but clearest way possible, what communication strategies would you recommend?