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1 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION TAKES TWO

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to

1.1   Define and discuss the connection between interpersonal communication and communication presence.

1.2   Use a communication model to identify the essential elements and transactional nature of interpersonal communication.

1.3   Explain the functions interpersonal communication serves.

1.4   Describe the characteristics, core principles, and axioms of interpersonal communication.

1.5   Demonstrate how gender and culture affect interpersonal communication.

1.6   Provide examples of how digital media influence interpersonal contacts and communication presence.

1.7   Develop a plan to grow as an interpersonal communicator.

As we faced self-imposed cocoons brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, some wondered if they would remember how to relate when once again able to be face-to-face with others. Having gotten used to quarantining, quite a number of us were nervous about reentering society. Those content in their solitude didn't seek change. Most of us, however, were eager to get back to "normal," even a "new normal."[1] Quarantining had given us time to rethink our interpersonal relationships and lives, to figure out how we might do things better or different. That's where this course and this new edition of *The Interpersonal Communication Playbook* come into play.

Welcome to the second edition of *The Interpersonal Communication Playbook*! A playbook is a game plan—a plan of action designed to achieve results. Playbooks introduce their users to the plays and strategies of a specific subject—whether a sport like football, a vocation like acting, or a discipline like interpersonal communication. In interpersonal communication, as in any sport or vocation, preparation is key. Reflecting a plan, and stressing the importance of mastering their contents, playbooks offer their users new ideas and creative approaches to apply immediately. This second edition of *The Interpersonal Communication Playbook* will equip you with new knowledge and skills, as it coaches you to become a more effective communicator. This playbook contains your game plan for using interpersonal communication to enrich those relationships in life that matter most to you.

Now and again, you may think that your real-life relationships resemble those depicted in reality TV shows that many viewers enjoy experiencing vicariously. There are differences, however. Your interpersonal relationships really are *real*—and you come up with and deliver your own lines, rather than have them fed to you by a TV producer. Not only do you partici-pate in creating the scripts, directing each scene, and choosing the settings, but you also enact a featured role in every episode. Joining with you, as the sets revolve, revealing the key contexts

of your actual life, are various friends, relatives, and professional contacts, your co-stars. Some of these individuals appear in scenes with you more frequently than others. Those who do play more relevant roles in your story and therefore are more involved. Here's the question: Are you as effective at relating to those people important to you as you want to be or could be? Use this playbook as your "go-to" resource—your guide to building interpersonal relationships that are stronger, more sustainable, and more successful. As all grows quiet on the interpersonal playing field of life—you call "Action!"

Before continuing your reading of this chapter, which of the following five statements do you believe to be true, and which do you believe to be false?

1. Communication is normally intentional.   T   F

2. Interpersonal communication is always between two people.   T   F

3. If you already consider yourself a good communicator, then how you engage others does not need to change.   T   F

4. Interpersonal communication affects your health.   T   F

5. Machines are altering the nature of interpersonal communication.   T   F

See the answer key at the end of the chapter to discover if your answers are right or if you've made any erroneous assumptions.

CONNECTING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNICATION PRESENCE

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1.1   Define and discuss the connection between interpersonal communication and communication presence.

Our most important relationships are interpersonal ones. As a result, interpersonal communication merits attention. From our relationship with a parent or caregiver to our relationship with a significant other. From our feelings about our instructors to our thoughts about our employers. From how we engage with health care providers to how we engage with sports and life coaches. From our interactions with close friends to our interactions with those who give us a hard time. Interpersonal connections make themselves felt in every life context, from home to college, from the doctor's office to the corporate office, from the playing field to playing the field. Since interpersonal relationships play such key roles in every aspect of life, their impact on our personal and professional well-being is undeniable. The world is complex and constantly changing with individuals coming and going from our lives. Becoming better at connecting and establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships, whether face-to-face or virtual, is something we all can benefit from. Are you on board?

TRY THIS

A First Look at Digital Branding

In an effort to influence others' reactions, Wi-Fi network names have morphed from boring series of digits to personalized monikers much like vanity license plates. If you haven't yet done so, give your Wi-Fi network a name. Choose a Wi-Fi name that you believe will reveal to others something they may not know about you. For example, one ballet dance instructor branded her Wi-Fi network "PointToMe."[2]

What would you like your chosen Wi-Fi network name to communicate about you? What impressions do you hope it sends to others? Are there any unintended conclusions your network's name might cause others to assume about you? In your opinion, is there anything you can do to keep others from forming opinions about you based on unintentional messages they receive?

What Is Interpersonal Communication?

Communication is our link to humanity. In its broadest sense, it is a process involving the deliberate or accidental transfer of meaning. One person does or says something, while others observe what was done or said and attribute meaning to it. Whenever you observe or give meaning to behavior, communication is taking place.

Interpersonal Communication Is About Relationships

There are many kinds of communication. We distinguish them based on the number of people involved, the interaction's formality, and the opportunity to give and receive feedback. For example, since **intrapersonal communication** occurs when you think or talk to yourself, it requires only a single communicator—you! In contrast, **interpersonal communication** occurs when you interact with another person, forming a **dyad**, or pair. Both individuals in a dyad share the responsibility for determining the nature of a relationship by creating meaning from the interaction, whether it is in person or mediated by technology.

It Takes Two

The fact that interpersonal communication takes two people means that it is indivisible. Interpersonal communication is impossible without a second person. Thus, the parties to interpersonal communication are a duo: a couple, a pair, or perhaps adversaries. From an interpersonal perspective, even groups of three or more individuals are viewed as composites of dyads, effectively serving as the foundations for separate pairings and potential coalitions. Without a dyad, a relationship does not exist, and without a relationship, there is no interpersonal communication.[3] This means that if one person withdraws from the relationship, then that relationship terminates—unless or until their connection is reestablished.

Interpersonal Communication Establishes Connection

We measure the quality of an interpersonal relationship along a continuum, with "intimate communication" at one end and "impersonal communication" at the opposite end. The more

personally we engage, the more "interpersonal" is our relationship. When communicating interpersonally, the goal is to treat one another as genuine people, not as objects, and to respond to each other as unique individuals with whom we create a distinct relational culture, not as people merely playing roles.[4]

The more personal a relationship, the more interdependent the members are, sharing thoughts and feelings with each other. Lives become interconnected, especially when contrasted with how people relate to those with whom they are uninvolved and to whom they don't reveal much about themselves. People develop personal relationships because of the intrinsic rewards they derive from them; they find them emotionally, intellectually, and perhaps even spiritually fulfilling. In contrast, people have impersonal relationships usually because of the extrinsic rewards they offer, such as maintaining professional working relationships with those who help them reach their goals. Which kinds of relationships do you have more of—those that are impersonal or those that are personal in nature?

Interpersonal Communication Is a Paradox

We want others to know us, yet we fear what they will think of us once they do. Until we come to know each other, however, for all practical purposes, we remain unknown or anonymous to one another. If, for example, we pretend to be someone whom we are not when with another person, while they may think they are getting to know us, they actually are not. How often do you attempt to remain unknown rather than reveal "the real you" to those with whom you hope to share an interpersonal relationship? How might remaining anonymous be enabling and disabling simultaneously?

ANALYZE THIS

Are You in a Disguise?

Carlos Perales/EyeEm/Getty Images

Read "Are You in a Disguise?" by Teri Gamble, reflecting on it as you answer the questions that follow the poem.

I'm looking at you.

Who do I see?

Do I see who I want you to be?

You smile ever so briefly

Before putting on

Your expressionless model-face.

Hesitant to give away too much

Too quickly.

I'm looking at you.

It's not you I see

I only see what you set free.

1. Have you ever experienced a similar feeling?
2. What could compel you to want to disguise yourself when interacting with another person virtually or offline?

Interpersonal Communication Is a Lifelong Project

The effectiveness of interpersonal relationships depends on the extent to which we practice and exhibit interpersonal skills. While we may be born communicators, we are not born with effective interpersonal skills. Those we need to learn. Nor are effective skills static; the same techniques may not work in all situations. A person's culture, their gender, the environment, and their goals will determine how they approach and process interpersonal communication.

Just as every one of us represents a unique combination of physical, psychological, education, gender, and cultural characteristics that distinguish us from one another, each new relationship teaches us a little bit more about the nature of people and interpersonal communication, including about those whose attitudes, life experiences, and perspectives differ from ours. For example, when you were a young child, your parents and/or caregivers probably cautioned you not to speak to strangers. However, travel opportunities and social networks such as Facebook and Instagram have made interacting with strangers much more commonplace, even ordinary. In which arena are you more willing to interact with a stranger: online, at the mall, or when taking public transportation? Why? How does the anonymity or privacy of online relationships affect your level of comfort? Which is more likely to result in a lasting interpersonal relationship—a friendship you begin online or one that begins face-to-face?

As we grow and learn, we should continually revise and update our personal theories of what works during interpersonal contacts, or our assumptions will compel us to repeat interpersonal scenarios or scripts that are doomed to fail. The effective interpersonal communicator does not take others or the means of communicating for granted. Instead, they attempt to continually

enhance their communication presence (e.g., their sense of personal identity that results from and influences their interpersonal relationships). When we do it well, interpersonal communication helps us work through problems, building up feelings of self-worth. When we do it poorly, however, personal growth and achieving our unique potential may be frustrated.

Whether an interpersonal relationship is productive or not depends on how satisfying it is and how much attention we pay to its health. Having good interpersonal skills can mean the difference between happiness and unhappiness or success and failure in multiple life contexts—home, job, school, health care settings, and society—as well as across cultures and generations. Enhanced understanding of the factors in play when two people communicate, whether in a personal or a professional relationship, increases the chance of developing **interpersonal competence**—the ability to communicate effectively.[5]

Consider what your answers to the following questions suggest about your interpersonal competence:

- How effective am I at communicating with people from diverse cultures?

- Am I equally effective interacting with people across the gender spectrum, including those whose sexual orientations differ from my own?

- How easy is it for me to develop relationships with people my own age and those of different ages?

- How comfortable am I being myself?

- How well do I think others understand me?

- To what extent am I able to maintain self-control when I interact with others? Under what conditions do I lose control?

- What contributes to my not wanting to be with someone?

- Whom do I trust and why?

- To what extent do I use power and exert influence in my relationships?

- How and to what extent do I use technology in my interpersonal relationships? In what ways is technology changing my interpersonal communication?

As we begin exploring the implications of your answers, let's add communication presence to the mix.

How's Your Communication Presence?

What do the key people in your life think of you? How do they assess your **communication presence**—the unique composite of characteristics you present to others in both the physical and virtual worlds? How others respond when joining with us in different domains reveals how effective we are at navigating between communication spaces. How positive or negative individuals are toward the characteristics they attribute to us shapes our relationships. For instance,

after being with you, might another person describe you as attentive or distracted, authentic or fake, empathic or distant, clear or confused, confident or insecure? Might they want to continue their relationship with you or cancel you? And how should you react to their judgment? Might you take steps to change your communicative behavior in response to a less than positive assessment? What about your own assessment of your communication presence? Are you able to be honest with yourself?

SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.1: HOW'S MY COMMUNICATION PRESENCE?

Communication presence is the unique composite of characteristics you present to others in both the physical and virtual world. This self-assessment helps you determine if yours is as positive as you hope it is.

Identify five individuals with whom you share key interpersonal relationships and with whom you interacted in the past week. Evaluate your assessment of your communication presence when with each of these persons, rating your perception of your communication presence in each relationship on a scale of 1 to 5 for each of the five characteristics listed, where 1 represents an extremely negative assessment, 2 represents a negative assessment, 3 represents a neutral assessment, 4 represents a positive assessment, and 5 represents an extremely positive assessment.

People					
	Attentiveness	*Authenticity*	*Empathy*	*Clarity*	*Confidence*
Person A					
Person B					
Person C					
Person D					
Person E					

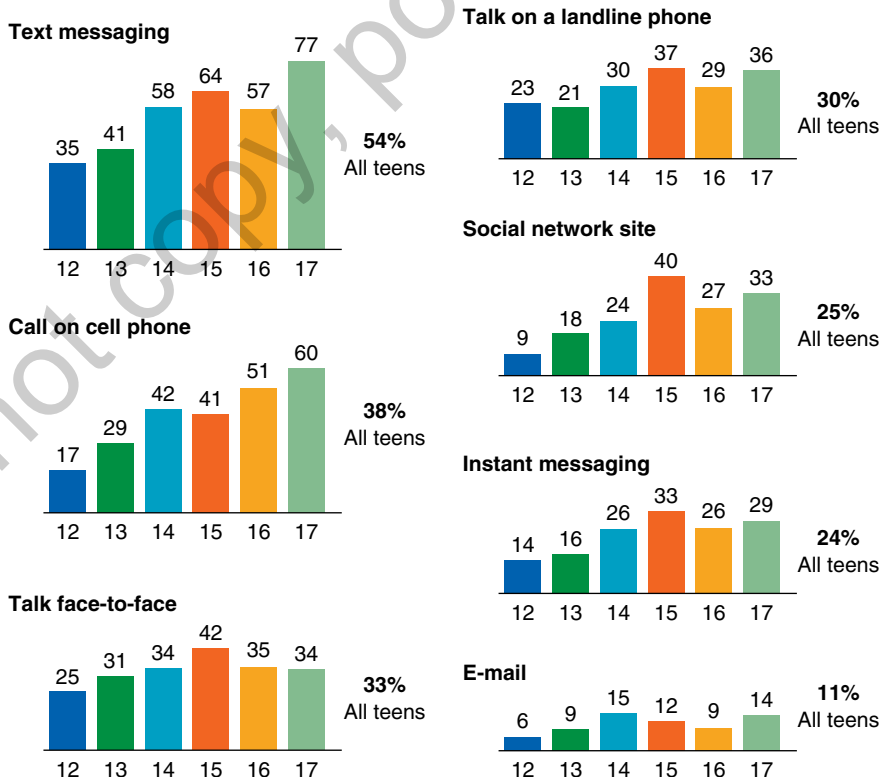|	
Scoring Calculation	Explore the total score for each column characteristic. The closer the total in a column is to 25, the more positive is your score on that characteristic.
	Then explore the cumulative total to determine your rating for overall communication presence. The closer your total score is to 125, the more positive is your overall perception of your communication presence.
Feedback	What does your score reveal?
	Although this evaluation is not a scientific instrument, it should give you some indication of your general feelings toward and acceptance of diversity.

Communication Presence and Communication Options: How Do You Decide?

How do you decide which of your many relationships to devote more time to? And when you do decide, what's your go-to option for interacting with those persons—the means you usually find most comfortable and appealing? How do you differentiate among the communication options available to you including social networking ones? How do you decide whether to engage with a person face-to-face or in a virtual world, on Zoom or via text? What if your options were to post to a Facebook wall or to Instagram? Which would you select and why? Are you best at communicating when individuals are physically present or do you prefer communicating via social media? And why does any of this matter for your relationships?
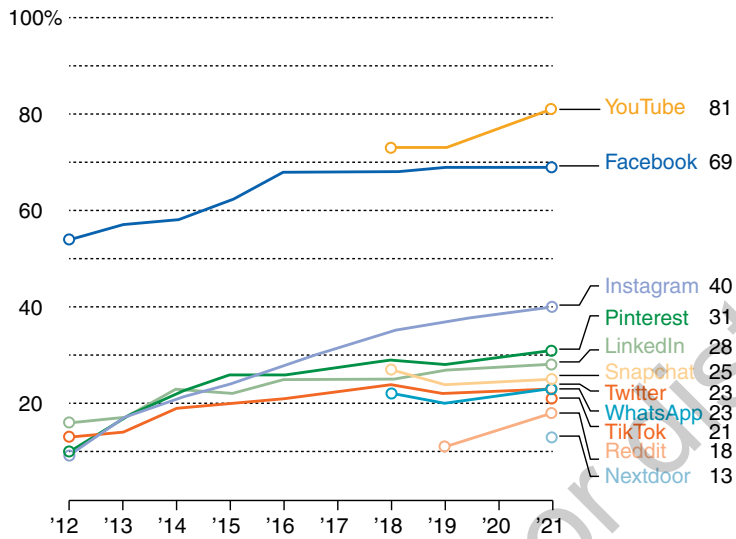
You may be among the two thirds of people more likely to use your smartphone to connect with others.[6] If you're like many young adults, your smartphone serves as a prime interpersonal connector. You likely use it to check Facebook, text, tweet, use snapchat, or post on Instagram. You may use it less often to make phone calls. For some people, actually talking to another person creates discomfort. Such individuals find technology freeing, because they don't have to be in the physical presence of others. They feel able to say what they want without fear of being interrupted or even having to listen to another's response.

We have an abundance of communication choices (see Figure 1.1). With so many available options, making the right choice is not always easy, and our choice may not necessarily be the

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Social Media Use in 2021

Text messaging — 12: 35, 13: 41, 14: 58, 15: 64, 16: 57, 17: 77 — **54%** All teens

Talk on a landline phone — 12: 23, 13: 21, 14: 30, 15: 37, 16: 29, 17: 36 — **30%** All teens

Call on cell phone — 12: 17, 13: 29, 14: 42, 15: 41, 16: 51, 17: 60 — **38%** All teens

Social network site — 12: 9, 13: 18, 14: 24, 15: 40, 16: 27, 17: 33 — **25%** All teens

Instant messaging — 12: 14, 13: 16, 14: 26, 15: 33, 16: 26, 17: 29 — **24%** All teens

Talk face-to-face — 12: 25, 13: 31, 14: 34, 15: 42, 16: 35, 17: 34 — **33%** All teens

E-mail — 12: 6, 13: 9, 14: 15, 15: 12, 16: 9, 17: 14 — **11%** All teens

% of U.S. adults who say they ever use ...

YouTube	81
Facebook	69
Instagram	40
Pinterest	31
LinkedIn	28
Snapchat	25
Twitter	23
WhatsApp	23
TikTok	21
Reddit	18
Nextdoor	13

'12 '13 '14 '15 '16 '17 '18 '19 '20 '21

Source: Based on information from the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Ariel Skelly/Digital Vision/Getty Images

How do others describe your communication presence?

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one favored by those with whom we interact. Consider your communication choices and the potential benefits and drawbacks they present for becoming as effective as you can be at communicating interpersonally and eliciting desirable relationship outcomes.

Understanding the elements involved in communicating and visualizing how they work together can facilitate the making of better communication choices.

A TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1.2   Use a communication model to identify the essential elements and transactional nature of interpersonal communication.

Whether we are able to share meaning and have others rate our communication presence positively during person-to-person encounters depends on how well we handle the essential elements active in the process. For example, depending on the situation, patting someone on the back may be perceived as friendly and supportive or as a form of sexual harassment. Seven key elements influence interpretation of this act (see Table 1.1). Let's discuss each one in turn.

TABLE 1.1 ■ The Essential Elements of Interpersonal Communication	
People	The senders and receivers of communication messages
Messages	The content of communication
Channels	The media through which messages travel
Noise	Interference with the ability to send or receive messages
Feedback	Information received in exchange for messages
Context	The environmental, situational, or cultural setting in which communication takes place
Effect	The result of a communication episode

1. People

Recall that interpersonal communication between any two people ranges from "impersonal" at one end of an imaginary continuum to "intimate" at the other end. When you respond impersonally to another person, you communicate based on limited knowledge of the categories into which to place that person—that is, the social groups or the culture to which you believe the person belongs—rather than on your personal experience interacting with that individual. In contrast, when you respond to someone personally, you respond to an individual, drawing on your knowledge of their personality to guide your interactions. In other words, your past experience with the individual allows you to differentiate that person from the groups to which that individual belongs. You now take this unique person and their needs into account.

As a relationship develops and you get to know someone better, not only can you describe the person's behavior, but you also can more accurately predict their behavior in a particular situation. When you know someone really well, you also are able to explain the reasons for their actions. For instance, when you share an impersonal relationship with someone at work, you likely can describe the individual's behavior—maybe how they procrastinate in completing assignments. When you see a supervisor giving that person a project to work on, you may be able to predict that the project will not be completed on time. Were you to share an even more personal relationship with your coworker, however, you also might be able to explain the reasons behind the procrastination, such as concerns about a child's illness or feelings of inadequacy.

Each party in an interpersonal relationship participates in the functions of sending and receiving messages. Each serves simultaneously as sender and receiver, both parties giving out and taking in messages. For example, in the following exchange, both Jana and Karl give and receive messages:

Jana: I'm so tired. I wish we didn't have to go to the Joneses' party.

Karl: You always feel tired whenever we have plans to go to a party for someone I work with.

Jana: Why do you have to attack me when I say how I feel?

Karl: What's the matter with you? I'm not attacking you. I'm only commenting on what I observe and experience directly.

Jana: Give me a break. Don't I have a right to be tired?

Karl: Sure you do. Just tell me one thing. Why do you never feel tired when we're going to a party hosted by your friends?

Interpersonal communication is transactional in nature. It is a process in which transmission and reception occur simultaneously, and source and receiver continually influence one another. What we think of each other and what we believe the other to know affect the messages we send.[7] Each party in a dyad simultaneously performs the roles of sender and receiver, also known as **role duality**. How the individuals perform the roles, or how good they are at sending and receiving, depends on what they bring to the relationship, including their feelings about themselves, their knowledge about communication, and their attitudes, values, and goals. All these elements influence how well a sender encodes theirthoughts, feelings, emotions, and attitudes by putting them into a form another can relate to and how the receiver decodes the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and attitudes of the sender.

TRY THIS

Rating Relationships

Think about some of the relationships you have had over your lifetime to date.

1. Identify one extremely satisfying interpersonal relationship and one extremely frustrating relationship.
2. Identify the specific aspects of each relationship that made it satisfying or frustrating for you.
3. After summarizing the characteristics and qualities that differentiate your most satisfying relationship from your most frustrating one, propose steps you might have taken to increase your satisfaction with the relationship you found frustrating.

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2. Messages

We negotiate the meaning we derive from interpersonal communication by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal **messages**. Whom we speak to, what we choose to speak about, what we do as we interact, the words we use, the sound of our voices, our posture, our facial expressions, our touch, and even our smell constitute the message or the content of our communication. Everything we do has potential message value for the person with whom we are interacting or for someone observing the interaction.

Messages can be conveyed through any one of our five senses. Some messages—such as a kiss or the words "I love you"—are more personal than others. Some of our messages we send purposefully, while others, such as nervous tics, we emit unconsciously or accidentally.

We use each of our five senses to convey messages.

designalldone/DigitalVision Vectors/Getty Images

Everything we do when interacting with another person has potential message value as long as the other person is observant and gives meaning to our behavior.

3. Channels

Messages travel via channels. A **channel** is a medium that connects sender and receiver, much as a bridge connects two locations. We may use multiple channels at the same time to communicate a single message. In fact, under most circumstances, interpersonal communication is a multichanneled interaction using visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and situational means to convey both verbal and nonverbal messages. Consider a first date: You make sure you look and smell nice, you choose a quiet setting to ensure you can hear each other, and you generally put your best face forward in both verbal and nonverbal ways in order to say, "I like you and I hope you like me too."

Capable communicators are adept channel switchers. They know how to use sound, sight, touch, taste, smell, and the environment, as well as words and nonverbal signs, to get messages across. However, if you find yourself consistently tuning in on just one channel, you might miss the most salient parts of a message. For instance, if you speak to people only by text, you might miss the underlying tone of concern when your best friend asks, "Is everything okay? I haven't

seen you in a while." While we may prefer to send or receive messages through a particular channel, we should pay attention to and use all of the available channels.

Being adept at channel switching means that if one channel is closed or damaged, we can open another to compensate. For instance, rather than assuming that a blind person will be able to recognize us by our voice, we also should name ourselves. Since the blind person is unable to see the visual cues we use to shade the meaning of a verbal message, we also may need to take special care to ensure that the meanings we want conveyed are contained in the words we choose and the expressiveness of our voice.

4. Noise

In communication studies, **noise** includes anything that interferes with or impedes our ability to send or receive a message. Noise distracts communicators by focusing their attention on something extraneous to the communication act. As the level of noise increases, it becomes increasingly unlikely that we will be successful at negotiating or sharing meaning. Effective communicators find ways to ensure their messages get through accurately despite any noise.

Noise emanates from both internal and external sources. Among the external sources of noise are the sight, sound, smell, and feel of the environment. A drab room, an overly warm space, a loud siren, an offensive odor, and too many conversations occurring at the same time are all examples of environmental noise. Among the internal sources of noise are personal thoughts and feelings. Racism, sexism, ageism, feelings of inadequacy, hunger, excessive shyness or extroversion, and deficient or excessive knowledge can all interfere with the ability to send and receive messages effectively. Most of us find it easier to cope with external noise than with internal noise because closing a window, for example, is usually a lot easier than opening a mind or changing a personality. Have you created or been influenced by noise in any of your relationships today? Which kind(s) of noise typically causes you the greatest problems? (See Table 1.2.)

TABLE 1.2 ■ Types of Noise	
Semantic noise	Noise due to the failure to understand the intended meaning of one or more words or the context in which the words are being used (people speaking different languages, using jargon and "technicalese")
Physiological noise	Noise due to personal illness, discomfort, or a physical problem including speech, visual, auditory, or memory impairment (difficulty articulating, hearing or sight loss, fatigue, disease)
Psychological noise	Noise due to anxiety, confusion, bias, past experience, or emotional arousal that interferes with communication (sender or receiver prejudice, closed-mindedness, rage)
Intellectual noise	Noise due to information overload or underload (over- or underpreparedness)
Environmental noise	Noise due to the sound, smell, sight, and feel of the environment or physical communication space that distracts attention from what is being said or done (cars honking, garbage rotting, people talking at once, cellular or computer interference)

5. Feedback

Feedback is information we receive in response to messages we have sent. Both verbal and non-verbal, it lets us know how another person is responding to us. Feedback offers clues as to how we are coming across, whether we were heard through the noise, and how the receiver interpreted our communicative efforts. Feedback reveals whether or not our message was interpreted as we hoped and, if not, which portions of the message need to be resent.

Feedback can be positive or negative. **Positive feedback** enhances behavior in progress. It serves a reinforcing function, causing us to continue our behavior. In contrast, **negative feedback** stops behavior in progress. It serves a corrective function, prompting us to discontinue one or more behaviors because of their apparent ineffectiveness. In this way, negative feedback helps eliminate behavior that others judge inappropriate.

Because we constantly communicate with ourselves (even as we communicate interpersonally), feedback can emanate from both internal and external sources. **Internal feedback** is the feedback you give yourself as you assess your own performance during an interpersonal transaction. **External feedback** is feedback you receive from the other person. Competent communicators are sensitive to both feedback types, since both serve important functions.

Feedback often focuses on a person or a message. We can, for example, comment on a person's appearance or message effectiveness. In addition, we can be totally honest about feedback, offering **low-monitored feedback**, or we can carefully craft a response designed to serve a particular purpose, offering **high-monitored feedback**. Whether our feedback is spontaneous or guarded depends on how much we trust the other person and how much power that person has over our future.

We also can offer immediate or delayed feedback. For example, we can nod our head every time the other person says something we agree with. Or we can withhold our reaction until after she or he has finished speaking. When we interview for a job, we are rarely told immediately after the interview whether we will be given the position. Instead, we receive delayed feedback; sometimes days, weeks, or even months pass before we know whether or not the interview was successful.

Feedforward is a variant of feedback. However, instead of being sent after a message is delivered, it is sent prior to a message's delivery as a means of revealing something about the message to follow. Feedforward introduces messages by opening the communication channel and previewing the message, much as this book's preface does. (For more on feedback, see Chapter 5.)

6. Context

The environmental and situational or cultural **context** in which the communication occurs (its setting) can also affect its outcome. The physical setting includes an interaction's specific location, that is, its appearance and condition. A candlelit exchange may have a different feel and outcome from one held in a busy, brightly lit office. The social setting derives from the status relationships and roles assumed by each party. Some relationships seem friendlier and are less formal than others. The psychological setting includes the interaction's emotional dimensions. It influences how people feel about and respond to each other. The temporal

setting includes not only the time of day an interaction takes place but also the history, if any, that the parties share. Any previous communication experience that you and another person have had will influence the way you treat each other in the present. The cultural context is composed of the beliefs, values, and rules of communication that affect your behavior. If you and the other person are from different cultures, the rules you each follow may confuse the other or lead to missing chances for effective and meaningful exchanges. Sometimes the context is so obvious or intrusive that it exerts great control over our interaction by restricting or dominating how we relate to one another; other times, it seems so natural that we virtually ignore it.

7. Effect

As we interact, we each experience an **effect**—meaning that we are influenced in some way by the interaction. One person may feel the effects more than the other person. One person may react more quickly than the other. The effects may be immediately observable or initially not observable at all.

An effect can be emotional, physical, cognitive, or any combination of the three. As a result of interacting with another, we can experience feelings of elation or depression (emotional), we fight and argue or walk away (physical), or we can develop new ways of thinking about events or become confused (cognitive).

How does your current physical setting affect you?

skynesher/E+/Getty Images

Visualizing Communication

To be sure, the thinking about interpersonal communication has evolved over the years. The earliest model—a **linear model**—depicted communication as going in one direction only, as being unidirectional. Questions such as "Did you get my message?" statements such as "I gave you that idea," and acts such as leaving someone a note with instructions suggest this one-way perspective.

Gradually, a more realistic two-way model—known as an **interaction model**—came to be preferred. The interaction model visualized interpersonal communication as a back-and-forth process, much like a game of tennis; it also acknowledges the presence and effects of both feedback and context. However, although more accurate than the one-way model, the interaction model fails to capture the complexity of interpersonal communication, including the reality that interpersonal communication does not involve a straightforward back-and-forth action and reaction as might occur when you send a text and a friend responds.

In reality, however, communication exchanges involve source and receiver responding to one another simultaneously rather than sequentially. A new and even more realistic **transactional model**, as shown in Figure 1.2, emerged to capture this reality. The transactional model's strength is that it depicts sending and receiving as simultaneous rather than distinctly separate acts. In so doing, it helps us visualize the vital complexity of interpersonal interaction. (See Table 1.3 for a summary of the various models' strengths and weaknesses.)

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Transactional Model of Interpersonal Communication
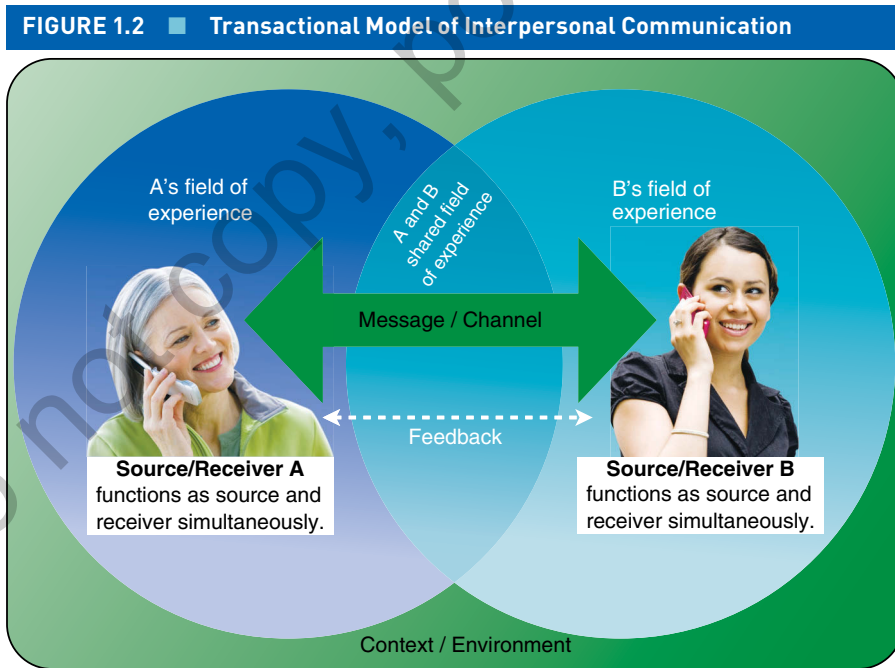
Noel Hendrickson/Photodisc/Thinkstock; Jupiterimages/Photos.com/Thinkstock

		TABLE 1.3 ■ Advantages and Limitations of Communication Models	

Model	Communication Examples	Advantages	Limitations
Linear	Television and radio E-mail and texts Packaged presentations that do not allow for modifications	Simple and direct	Not useful for most face-to-face encounters
Interaction	Instant messaging Class presentations where content is adjusted based on feedback	Wider applicability	Still discounts receiver's active role in creating meaning
Transactional	Any encounter in which meaning is co-created	Most realistic depiction of interpersonal communication	Does not apply to texting, tweeting, and posting

Use the transactional model of interpersonal communication in Figure 1.2 to analyze the following dyadic scenario. Identify how each of the essentials of interpersonal communication included in the model—people, messages, channels, noise, feedback, context, and effect—makes its presence felt during the interaction.

Simona: *(approaching a restaurant table)*: Hi, Kevin. I thought I recognized the back of your head. How ya doing? Long time no see.

Kevin: *(turning, somewhat startled)*: I recognized your perfume—I used to love it when—*(abrupt break)*. It's been a while, hasn't it? When was the last time we got together? Is it a year?

Simona: *(smiling)*: Longer than that. I haven't heard from or seen you since your divorce from Jan.

Kevin: Haven't seen me since the divorce. That makes it almost 2 years and 24 days, then.

Simona: Time sure goes fast when you're having fun, doesn't it? Well, you look great. Life's been good to you, huh?

Kevin: Yeah, I just got back from 6 months troubleshooting in Singapore. I got a promotion, and I'm finally making the kind of money I deserve.

Simona: Good for you! Emilio and I still see Jan, you know.

Kevin: Do you? How's she doing? I haven't spoken to her in 2 years, either.

Simona: You haven't spoken to your ex since the divorce? Actually, I'm meeting her for lunch today.

Kevin: Didn't seem to be anything left to say to her. *(Does a double take)* Did you say you're meeting Jan here? I was just leaving. I've got to get back to the office. I've got a key client coming. It was sure nice running into you.

Simona: Sure thing. I'll tell Jan you say hi.

Kevin: No. Don't even tell her you saw me. It would just open up her old wounds.

Simona: Why would it do that? She's great, has a great job, and she's seeing one of Emilio's friends. Besides, I'm sure she'd like to know you're doing so well.

Kevin: So, she picked up the pieces, did she? I didn't think it would happen that fast. She was so broken up, so devastated by my leaving.

Simona: Life goes on.

Kevin: Guess it does. Well, gotta go. Be good.

Simona: *(Under her breath, as he walks away)*: What a conceited jerk!

Messages	Simona's message:
	Kevin's message:
Channels	
Noise	
Feedback	Simona's feedback:
	Kevin's feedback:
Context	
Effect	The effect on Kevin:
	The effect on Simona:

FUNCTIONS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
1.3   Explain the functions interpersonal communication serves.

Communicating interpersonally helps us discover who we are. It fulfills our need for human contact and personal relationships, and it can contribute to our changing our attitudes and behavior. In these ways, interpersonal communication serves psychological, social, information, and influence functions.

Psychological Functions

According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, people seek to fulfill a hierarchy of needs.[8] First and foremost, we need water, food, and shelter (our most basic physical needs). Next, we need to feel safe and secure (have a job and feel free from threat). Once these needs are met, we turn our attention to our need for people, seeking to meet our social needs. When faced with social isolation brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us realized how important

interpersonal connections were for our survival.[9] During the pandemic, periodically many of us had to self-isolate and/or practice social distancing. Large numbers of individuals experienced loneliness. Some felt as if their home had become their prison. Prisons, however, can be even more cruel to humans than the isolation many experienced during the pandemic. Some maximum-security prisoners are locked alone in their cells for up to 23 hours each day. The feelings of isolation the inmates experience result in their becoming restless, angry, violent, and potentially suicidal. When restrictions are loosened, however, and inmates allowed out of their cells for hours each day, able to play sports and mingle and dine with others, their behavior and emotional health improve.[10] When people are cut off from human contact, health suffers. In fact, being in at least one good relationship appears to be a prerequisite of physical and psychological well-being.[11]

In addition to affecting physical and mental well-being, interpersonal communication also enhances self–other understanding. As we interact with others, we learn how different individuals affect us. In fact, we depend on interpersonal communication to develop our self-awareness, hone our communication presence, and maintain our sense of self. To quote communication theorist Thomas Hora: "To understand oneself, one needs to be understood by another. To be understood by another, one needs to understand the other."[12]

Because interpersonal communication is a fluid process that depends on constantly changing components, it offers lots of opportunities for self–other discovery. Different contexts help us figure out who likes or dislikes us and why, when and why to trust or distrust someone, what behaviors elicit the strongest reactions, under what conditions we have the power to influence another person, and whether we have the ability to resolve relational conflict.

Social Functions

Through interpersonal communication, we are able to begin and sustain relationships. Our interpersonal contacts meet our social needs to varying degrees. Although we vary greatly in the extent to which we experience these needs, according to psychologist William Schutz, our relationships reflect the following in particular:

- Our need for *affection*—to express or receive fondness

- Our need for *inclusion*—to be included or include others as full partners

- Our need for *control*—to direct or exert influence over the self and others so that we feel we are able to deal with and manage our lives and environment[13]

When we are in a relationship with someone whose needs complement or balance our own, each of us is able to have our needs met. When our needs are not complementary, however, we are more apt to experience relationship struggles or conflict. Do your experiences confirm this? (We explore the work of William Schutz in more depth in Chapter 13.)

Have you ever felt isolated when in a crowd?

georgeclerk/E+/Getty Images

Interpersonal communication helps form our personal identity. Our interactions shape how we see ourselves. We compare ourselves to others, developing a self-description based on what we see as our distinguishing qualities, helping us understand who we are and who we aspire to be.[14] Good interpersonal communication also allows us a glimpse into another person's reality. For example, developing an interpersonal relationship with someone whose culture differs from our own broadens our point of view. Our interpersonal styles may differ, but we adapt to the sound, form, and content of their messages and pay attention to how members of different cultures feel about displaying affection, exerting control, defining roles, and meeting goals. While it may be easier to identify and associate with those who are like us, coming from different cultures does not preclude our learning to share similar meanings.

Interpersonal communication similarly fulfills our need to *be friended* and to *friend* others. It helps alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness, reducing our stress and fulfilling our desire to feel needed, loved, wanted, and capable.[15] Because of this, interpersonal communication may increase our personal satisfaction, helping us feel more positive about ourselves.

Information Functions

During interpersonal contacts, as we share information, we reduce the amount of uncertainty in our lives. By taking in information, we meet the need to acquire knowledge. Information is not the same thing as communication. Just as more communication is not necessarily better communication, more information is not necessarily better information. Sometimes no information and no communication may be the best course. We can, after all, talk a problem or issue to death. Thus, just as there is a time to talk, there is a time to stop talking and listen.

Influence Functions

We use interpersonal communication to influence others—sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly. As we exercise influence, our need to gain agreement is met. Interpersonal communicators are both the users of and targets of persuasion.

As we observed earlier in this chapter, interpersonal communication is often goal directed. We methodically plan how to get what we want. We seek contact with and advice from others whom we believe can help us. This is not to say that human beings are naturally manipulative or deceptive, as neither of these practices supports the interdependent and transactional nature of interpersonal communication.[16] Communication is not something we do to others or have done to us. It is a mutually reinforcing activity we engage in together. What each of us does and says affects the other.

TRY THIS

Functions in Action

Consider three conversations: one you recently had with a significant other, one between you and a friend, and one between you and an acquaintance or coworker you usually don't see outside of work. Explain which interpersonal communication function(s) each interaction fulfilled: psychological, social, information, and/or influence. Be specific in describing and assessing how each interaction illustrates the function(s) you identify.

	Conversation With Significant Other	Conversation With a Friend	Conversation With a Coworker
Psychological			
Social			
Information			
Influence			

UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL CONTACTS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
1.4   Describe the characteristics, core principles, and axioms of interpersonal communication.

Every interpersonal communication contact has certain essential elements and serves one or more functions. Every interpersonal communication contact also illustrates the following:

- *Key characteristics:* descriptions of the communication that are common across different situations or contexts

- *Core communication principles:* identifiable behavioral patterns and motivations

- *Axioms:* the fundamental rules by which communication may be analyzed or explained

Five Characteristics of Interpersonal Communication

Let's first explore the noteworthy characteristics of interpersonal communication (see Table 1.4).

TABLE 1.4 ■ Characteristics of Interpersonal Communication	
Communication Is . . .	**In Other Words . . .**
A dynamic process	It is ongoing, continuous, and in a constant state of flux.
Unrepeatable	It is unique.
Irreversible	It cannot be erased.
Learned	We find out over time what works for us and what does not work if we remain conscious of the communication.
Characterized by wholeness and nonsummativity	It operates as a complete entity, much like a team functions.

Interpersonal Communication Is a Dynamic Process

By dynamic process, we mean that interpersonal communication is ongoing and in a constant state of flux. All the components continually interact with and affect each other. What one person says or does influences what the other person says or does. Every interpersonal encounter is a point of arrival from a previous encounter and a point of departure for a future encounter.

Interpersonal Communication Is Unrepeatable

Every interpersonal contact is unique. It has never happened in just that way before, and it will never happen in just that way again. Why? Because every contact changes us in some way and,

as a result, can never be exactly repeated or replicated. Try as we might, we can never recapture exactly the same feelings, thoughts, or relationship that existed at a specific point in time. We are no longer exactly the same person we were before we made contact.

Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible

In addition to being unrepeatable, interpersonal communication is irreversible. Once we have said or done something to another, whether in person or online, we cannot erase its impact. After exhibiting behavior, we cannot simply say, "Forget that!" and substitute a better or more appropriate behavior in its place (although we sometimes try). We cannot unhear words, unsee sights, or undo acts. They are irretrievable. Presenting a new stimulus does not change the previous stimulus. It merely becomes part of a behavioral sequence.

Interpersonal Communication Is Learned

Over time, we learn what works for us in an interpersonal relationship and what does not. We can hinder our communication with another person if we remain unconscious of how we affect them and vice versa. Part of the art of interpersonal communication involves recognizing how our words and actions affect others, how their words and actions affect us, and then, based on our observations, making the necessary adjustments.

We also learn the formal (explicit) and informal (implicit) rules that govern behavior in different contexts. Explicit rules tend to be clearly articulated and may even be codified, expressing the direct expectations for interaction, for example, not engaging in hate speech. In contrast, implicit rules are those we follow although they have not been formally expressed, such as, facing front in an elevator.

Interpersonal Communication Is Characterized by Wholeness and Nonsummativity

When we say that the interpersonal relationship is characterized by "wholeness," we mean that we consider more than the individuals who are in the relationship; we look at the unique ways in which the people involved influence each other. When we say that interpersonal communication is characterized by "nonsummativity," we are saying that the whole is more than the sum of its parts; interpersonal communication is about more than just its participants per se. We cannot understand a couple by looking at each of the partners individually. The nature of the relationship must be examined. The "us" must be explored. The relationship takes on a quality that we cannot understand merely by possessing information about its parts.[17]

Interpersonal Patterns

Interpersonal communication involves understanding patterns of behavior, predicting what others will do and say, and providing reasons for their actions, as well as our own.[18] Thus, understanding an individual's patterns of behavior, not just a single behavior, provides the basis for understanding the person's interpersonal communication. In other words, a single isolated behavior is not what we need to focus on; rather, we must take into account entire behavioral sequences.

Once sent, it is virtually impossible to take back an e-mail message.

JGI/Jamie Grill/Tetra Images/Getty Images

Interpersonal communication involves not only interpreting but also predicting and accounting for another person's behavior. If we are able to distinguish individuals from a general group, then we recognize their uniqueness and are able to know and understand them. For example, were we to date a number of different people yet not distinguish one date from another, we would not be very effective interpersonal communicators. To the extent that we can predict the behavior of a specific romantic interest and account for that behavior—what we term **reasoned sense making**—we can understand that individual more than we might understand others.

We also reason retrospectively. **Retrospective sense making** means making sense of our own behavior once it has occurred. We interpret our own actions in light of the goals we have or have not attained. We look back on interactions and continually redefine our relationships, which is our way of making sense of them. As our interactions with another person progress, the events of our relationship increase in number, and as a result, the relationship and how we feel about it changes.

Five Communication Axioms

A classic study by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson identified five axioms, or universally accepted principles, of communication that enable us to understand interpersonal interactions more fully.[19] (See Table 1.5.)

TABLE 1.5 ■ Axioms of Communication
1. You cannot not communicate.
2. Interactions have content and relationship dimensions.
3. Interactions are defined by how they are punctuated.
4. Messages are verbal symbols and nonverbal cues.
5. Exchanges are symmetrical or complementary.

From a study by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson.

Axiom 1: You Cannot Not Communicate

Behavior has no opposite. We cannot voluntarily stop behaving. Even if we consciously decide not to respond, even if we do our utmost not to move a muscle or utter a sound, our stillness and silence are responses and have message value and influence others.

Axiom 2: Every interaction Has a Content and Relationship Dimension

The content dimension of a message involves the literal meaning of the words used, while the relationship dimension involves how the message was said, indicating how it is to be interpreted. The relationship dimension reveals what one party to the interaction thinks of the other. For example, a husband says to his spouse, "Get over here right now." The content level is the husband's words. But the message can be delivered in a number of ways: as an order, a plea, a flirtation, or an expression of sexual desire, for example. Each manner of delivery suggests a different kind of relationship. It is through such variations that we offer clues to another person regarding how we see ourselves in relation to that person.

Axiom 3: Every Interaction Is Defined by How It Is Punctuated

Though we often feel as if we can label the beginning and the end of an interaction, in actuality, communication has no definitive starting or finishing line. It is difficult to determine exactly what is stimulus and what is response. Consider this example:

> *A woman is usually late getting home from work. When she does get home, she often finds her partner asleep. Both are angry. The woman might observe that she works so much because all her partner does is sleep. The partner might say that all he does is sleep because she's never home.*

Neither of them interprets the other's behavior as a response to their own. For the woman, her partner's behavior is the stimulus, and hers is the response; he causes her behavior. For the partner, it's just the opposite. Whereas he sees the sequence as going from working to sleeping, she sees it as going from sleeping to working. Which is it, really?

We all segment experience somewhat differently because we each see it differently. We call the dividing of communication into segments *punctuation*. The way a communication is punctuated usually benefits the person doing the punctuating. Punctuation also reveals how an

individual interprets a situation and offers insight into the nature of an interpersonal conflict in particular and the interpersonal relationship in general.

Axiom 4: Messages Consist of Verbal Symbols and Nonverbal Cues

During face-to-face or online interactions, we emit two kinds of messages: discrete, verbal symbols (i.e., words) and continuous, nonverbal cues. According to Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, the content of a message is more apt to be carried via the verbal system, whereas the relationship level of the message is typically carried via the nonverbal system. Although we can usually control what we say or write, it is much more difficult to control the nonverbal cues we emit. Thus, we may not speak angry words, but our face may betray our rage. As a result, it is easy to lie with words but hard to produce behavior that supports the lie. Nonverbal behavior often gives us away.

Axiom 5: Interactions Are Either Symmetrical or Complementary

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson categorize relationships as either symmetrical or complementary. In a **symmetrical relationship**, the parties mirror each other's behavior. If one person is solicitous, the other is as well. If one person whines, the other does also. In contrast, in a **complementary relationship**, the parties engage in opposite behaviors. If one person is docile, the other is assertive. If one leads, the other follows.

Neither symmetrical nor complementary relationships are trouble free. In a symmetrical relationship, the parties run the risk of experiencing "symmetrical escalation." Believing they are "equal," both people might assert, for example, the right to exert control. Once this starts, each may feel compelled to engage in battle to demonstrate his or her equality. And so, a status struggle begins. The main danger facing those in a symmetrical relationship is a runaway sense of competitiveness.

In contrast, those who share complementary relationships may face a problem called "rigid complementarity." This problem surfaces when one party begins to feel that control is automatically theirs. An overly protective mother who cannot accept that her child is grown, an employer unable to share leadership, and a teacher who cannot learn from others—all illustrate the rigidness that can develop in people who become locked into self-perpetuating, unchanging, unhealthy patterns of behavior. Switches in power are natural; we need to be prepared for them.

Taken together with the characteristics and principles of communication, the five axioms of communication provide additional knowledge as we seek to enhance our understanding and increase the effectiveness of our interpersonal contacts. Now let's widen our focus.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
1.5   Demonstrate how culture and gender affect interpersonal communication.

Because U.S. society is multicultural, and because cultural values help shape our acceptance of and preference for specific communication styles, we should understand the role culture plays in our interpersonal contacts. While in Chapter 3 we consider culture's effects on interpersonal communication, because of their significance, we integrate aspects of culture and gender in every playbook chapter as well. Even though the United States is the most demographically diverse country in the world, how regularly do you take cultural differences into account in your person-to-person interactions?

Diversity and Communication Style

Are you prepared to participate in a social and professional world in which people of different backgrounds, from different ethnicities to different nationalities, from different gender identities to different affectional orientations, from different social classes to different abilities, are your relational partner? Developing **cultural awareness**, the ability to understand the role that cultural prescriptions play in shaping communication, is an asset. Intercultural ignorance too frequently slows our ability to create meaningful interpersonal relationships with people who are culturally different from us.

Whenever cultural variability influences the nature and outcomes of interpersonal communication, culture is having an effect. Learning about other cultures, including their systems of knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, and artifacts, facilitates person-to-person interaction. Every culture can be subdivided into **co-cultures** consisting of members of the same general culture who differ in some ethnic or sociological way from the dominant culture. In the United States, African Americans, Latinx, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, disabled people, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and older people are examples of co-cultural groups. To engage in effective interpersonal communication with members of these and other groups, it is important to enhance your knowledge of the norms and rules that characterize their interactions. Remember, the lessons taught to you by your culture are not necessarily the lessons others have been taught by theirs. Among culture's lessons are how to say hello and goodbye, when to speak and when to remain silent, how to behave when angry, how much eye contact to make when interacting, and how much gesturing and touching is appropriate. If culture guides behavior, we must make the effort to understand someone's culture if we are to understand the person.[20]

When interacting with someone whose cultural background differs from yours, considering the following questions can improve your communication:

- How does this person's feelings about socialization differ from mine?

- How does their concept-of-self differ from mine?

- To what extent do our attitudes, values, and thinking processes differ?

- To what degree are they more or less competitive than me?

- In what ways does their use of nonverbal cues differ from mine?

Becoming culturally aware increases communication competence.

Antonio Saba/Image Source/Getty Images

Mind-Sets and Cultural Orientations

Society is a composite of diverse groups, some with which we identify and others with which we don't. We tend to generalize and simplify our judgments of these different groups, too frequently coming to believe that the mental constructs or stereotypes we attribute to the people within these groups are always true. We imagine that those with whom we identify are more like us than they are and that those with whom we don't identify are more different from us than they are.[21] Sometimes we even pit diverse groups against each other, putting our very identities at stake. Too frequently, however, we neglect to see the individual person within the category. Instead of asserting the rightness of our stereotypes, we would be better to acknowledge their wrongness. The truth is that all of them are wrong to some degree. We can see groups and individuals. The more "personal" our understanding of the people within a group, the more we can learn about how they navigate their lives, and the better we come to understand their individual stories. Keep this in mind when in future chapters, including Chapter 3, which focuses on the interface of interpersonal and intercultural communication, we explore the various orientations used to distinguish the members of one culture from another and other ways that culture and cultural mind-sets influence interpersonal relationships.

The Impact of Gender

Culture also shapes gender, and gender shapes communication.[22] Socially accepted variations in the definitions and views of masculinity and femininity and other gender differences are taught

to us as we grow up. As historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes, "To be an 'I' at all means to be gendered."[23]

Gender and Communication Style

Gender is a social creation that imposes a sense of social order by reflecting the societal characteristics associated with the biological categories of sex, inclusive of girls and women, boys and men, and the gender diverse. Subtly or overtly, we are pressured to conform to social norms, are encouraged to learn accepted interaction scripts, and usually develop preferences for using different communication styles. Our **gender identity** reveals how each of us has been socialized in relation to our sex. Gender identity is self-identified and is one's personal conception of the self as male, female, both, or neither. Though attitudes have evolved, in U.S. society, many still expect women to be more nurturing, sensitive to others' needs, and more emotional than men. Similarly, they expect men to be more independent, assertive, and emotionally restrained than women. Some families even persist in dividing responsibilities along gendered lines, assigning more physically demanding outdoor chores to males, while expecting females to clean the home's interior, cook, and care for other family members, including younger siblings and aging parents. Some hospitals still wrap baby girls in pink blankets and baby boys in blue blankets. Similarly, some girls and boys are provided with different kinds of toys—perhaps dolls for girls and action figures for boys. Schools have been criticized for encouraging students to pursue different curricula depending on their gender. So, from the delivery room to the home, to the school, and on to romantic relationships and career paths, we see gender shaping lifestyle.

As we become more conscious of arbitrarily created gendered meanings, we broaden understanding of what is appropriate behavior and accepted as "normal." Thinking of people as gender diverse has become more acceptable.[24] Now, U.S. passports, as well as birth certificates, drivers' licenses, and death certificates in an increasing number of states in the United States, also acknowledge multiple options, rather than just male or female, in order to reflect the presence and meet the needs of nonbinary or transgender people—those who find the male and female options present inadequate descriptions of themselves.

The day-to-day communicative activities of individuals situated across the gender spectrum in the United States and many other nations have evolved.[25] In general, men today enact more relational roles than did their fathers. They are more involved as caregivers, home planners, and sounding boards. Today, women enact more task-related roles outside of the home than did their mothers. Like men, they bring work home from the office, and more of them see themselves as personally responsible for their economic health and for the economic stability of their families. The thinking is that gender differences are not purely categorical ones but rather are dimensional, distinguished by degree along a continuum rather than by category.[26]

While we all express gender through behavior that we believe is normal, what we define as normal changes with time. By identifying how arbitrarily created gendered constructions, or conventions, affect interpersonal communication and our relationships, we take a step toward understanding what we hope for when it comes to our interpersonal lives. Do you see your options as unlimited? What tasks do you feel free to perform? What limits, if any, do you believe should be placed on the role gender plays in our social, professional, and family relationships?

While all societies promote gender ideologies that specify their views of appropriate gendered behaviors, what should you do if you believe a gendered construction is privileging, disadvantaging, empowering, or paralyzing you or a partner? We address these and other gender-related questions in succeeding chapters.

THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
1.6 Provide examples of how digital media influence interpersonal contacts and communication presence.

Mediated communication includes communication occurring via a technological channel.[27] Included in mediated communication are social media, the websites and applications we use to reach out to networks of people and view and share content. The term **masspersonal communication** describes how we use mediated communication to reach a large audience while creating and sustaining connections with others that remain very personal.[28] "Likes" let us know how our posts are doing—if others are approving and supporting our message.[29] While masspersonal posts extend connections, when dealing with our most personal relationships, we likely make them less public and more private, relying instead on mediated interpersonal channels.

"The medium is the message." "The medium is the massage." We can trace both of these sayings to the musings of the late media critic and communication theorist Marshall McLuhan. According to McLuhan, the channels of communication affect both the sending and the receiving of messages. The same words convey different messages depending on whether they are sent using face-to-face interaction, print, a cell phone, a tweet, a video, or a podcast. Digital media are reshaping interpersonal relationships. The medium changes things, altering messaging by massaging the contents of our communication and our senses. It is now well over half a century since McLuhan predicted that the introduction of new technologies would transform our world into a mobile global village.[30] And has it ever!

Who's Using What Technology?

Over 5 billion people now use mobile phones. In fact, time spent on cell phones tops the list, consuming half of all our Internet time and now accounting for more of our time than watching TV. Equally noteworthy, over 4.2 billion of us use social media, with approximately 1.3 million people being added to that total daily. When added together, users of social media spend some 3.7 trillion hours a day on social media.[31] In the United States alone, over 72 percent of the public uses some type of social media.[32] With about one full waking day of our lives spent on social media every week, what is it that we're all doing online? We're connecting, sharing ideas, and

acquiring information. Primarily we're using Facebook and YouTube, but significant numbers of us also regularly use Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and LinkedIn.[33]

What Are Technology's Benefits?

Technology makes it increasingly possible for us to watch and listen to, introduce ourselves to, and have continuing contact with individuals across the country and around the world without ever leaving our homes. By supplementing face-to-face interaction, we're able to sustain our connections with those who otherwise it would be difficult to see.[34] During the Covid-19 pandemic, social media became a lifeline to others, enabling people to maintain personal and professional relationships, even forge new ones. Online education and working from home are likely to remain part of our lives for the foreseeable future.

Technology continues to alter our sense of self, our social norms, our views of reality, our images of success and failure, our happiness, our interpersonal options, and the communication rules we adhere to. By adding to our communication options, digital options help us bond more with others, creating opportunities for access and increased feelings of connection. All these changes have an impact on our communication presence. While sometimes criticized for interfering with our well-being, being able to interact with others online also has been found to contribute to our health (mental and physical) and our happiness.[35]

Are We Realistic about Expectations?

Years ago, Apple's Steve Jobs observed that computers really were personal and should be renamed "inter-personal computers."[36] Today we use computers, tablets, and smartphones to log on to an endless litany of sites, to connect with others. When we form a relationship online, however, we need to be cautious not to idealize and create heightened expectations for it, expectations that might not be realized should we actually meet. In fact, online partners feel greater intimacy with and attraction to one another than when they actually meet one another face-to-face.[37] Have any of your online relationships developed into flourishing offline ones? To what do you attribute their success or failure?

TRY THIS

What's Okay with You?

What guidelines do you think people ought to follow when using electronically enhanced communication? For example, have you ever engaged in any of the behaviors identified in the chart below yourself? Would you become annoyed, insulted, or feel at risk if another person engaged in any of the identified behaviors? Use the chart to record your answers.

The Behavior	Exhibited the Behavior Myself	My Reaction to Another Exhibiting the Behavior
Texting while walking in the street		
Texting another person while dining out with a friend		
Answering a cell phone during a movie		
Talking loudly on your cell phone on public transportation		
Texting back in response to a missed call		
Talking on a cell phone with one friend when out with someone who is talking on a cell phone to another friend		
Not liking an Instagram post right away		
Tweeting about one friend to another		
Accessing Facebook while watching TV with a significant other		

1. What rules, if any, would you advise we adhere to when using digitally enhanced communication?
2. What makes certain uses of digitally enhanced communication either acceptable or unacceptable in your eyes?
3. How would you react if a rule important to you were violated?

Do We Know the Drawbacks?

Are social media effective substitutes for interacting physically face-to-face? On the contrary, displaying a preference for social media and using social media excessively have been shown to increase feelings of anxiousness and loneliness, contributing to increased feelings of alienation.[38] Not taking time off from social media can adversely affect our mood—even lead to depression and feelings of inferiority. In fact, teens who spend too much time on social media spend less time physically with their friends and report being unhappy.[39] When use of social media is out of balance, our mental health and face-to-face relationships are put at risk. Conversely, there are dangers in underuse too—as it can contribute to decreases in social support and lead to feelings of being disconnected.

What Role Do Influencers Play?

Do you follow any of the social media stars who have turned their lives into virtual brands? Do you ever imagine reinventing yourself by transforming from a follower into an influencer? If so, what is it that you envy and seek? Social media influencers lead very public lives. Many, in

an effort to attract followers, can go too far with their "insta-worthy" efforts. Emphasizing the importance of physical appearance and consumerism, influencer culture feeds on our insecurities. However, image and reality are not the same thing. Has another's filtered living brand ever made you green with envy? Keep in mind that acquiring followers and reposts are not requirements for happiness. Social media pressures exact a toll.

Can We Process the Paradoxes and Possibilities?

Can we depend on social media? On the upside, they influence our cultural sensibilities, making it easier for many among us to identify like-minded people who share our interests. On the downside, they make it less likely that we will expose ourselves to different points of view. Also on the downside, they make it possible for us to remain anonymous or to disguise ourselves. But on the upside, if we do remain anonymous, our online communication will be evaluated more for what we write than for how we look. On the downside, again, social media allow us to present our lives through filters—delivering a carefully curated image of ourselves to the world—but then again, those filters also can be problematic.[40]

Social media reshape human consciousness and relationships. Because there are only so many hours in a day, the time we spend using social media takes time away from other activities. Social media impede our living "in the moment." Rather than enjoying the company of others or an event or celebration, we tweet, use Snapchat, or check Instagram and Facebook. They also foster our dependency on others. We anxiously wait to see if our post will receive approval and affirmation.[41] On the other hand, they do make it more possible for marginalized groups to find support. And they were there for us during the pandemic. They have upsides and downsides, downsides and upsides.

Additionally, being a communicator in the age of the **metaverse** (an immersive virtual reality world) and AI (artificial intelligence) adds multiple layers to our communication experiences. However, the virtual worlds we inhabit are not necessarily virtuous, but they can be convincing even when they mislead.[42] Online, our messages become more permanent. Online, ethically challenged individuals can troll our pages, hack into our files, make our private messages public, and forward to other people something that we had no intention of communicating to them. What happens online influences offline realities.

In addition to broadening the network of people we communicate with, technology makes it possible for those who experience communication apprehension when face-to-face with another person to connect without such fear. We can interact remotely or in person, be anonymous, someone else, or ourselves. If the choice were yours alone, would you opt to increase or decrease the number of your virtual interactions compared to those you experience face-to-face? Why?

As well as spending more time in the digital dimension, we also devote more time to viewing and talking about an endless stream of entertainment options with our mediated experiences sometimes spilling over and influencing our real-life relationships. Mediated reality, however, is often sexier or more violent than real life. Despite this, we sometimes try to apply what we learn from what we view to our own lives, only to end up disappointed. Our love affairs are rarely as poignant or as passionate as those in the media. Our friends are rarely as attractive, giving, or fun to be with as those we see depicted. Physicians and lawyers are rarely as successful treating

or representing us as their fictional counterparts are. Somehow, real life falls short of the lives we encounter either online or via television and film.

Are We Addicted?

Years back, parents used to cajole, "Turn off the TV." Their plea has now changed to something like, "Turn off the device and come watch television." Or are your parents as plugged into Facebook and other apps as you are? Do you or they take the smartphone to bed as you once did a stuffed animal? The claims we make about Internet addiction, while much like the claims people used to make about television being a plug-in drug, are being taken seriously by consumers and creators alike. Might you be addicted to your device? Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are hypnotically compelling for many of us, in part because they deliver unscheduled "variable rewards" much like slot machines do. Messages, alerts, notifications, photos, and "likes" are sent to us randomly, making it virtually impossible for us not to react to them. They induce large numbers of us to become compulsive site checkers looking for a dopamine boost—almost as if we were seeking a fix.

Are We Mindful?

Quite simply, a machine is altering our consciousness and the nature of our interpersonal interactions.[43] We need to think about that and what it does to our feelings of engagement in the present moment. In coming chapters, we will continue looking at the extent to which our devices are personalizing or depersonalizing our contacts, improving or harming communication with friends and family members, and fostering or impeding the development of what we

How are phones affecting relationships?

Nisian Hughes/Stone/Getty Images

call a community. When immersed in the digital domain, for example, do we gravitate toward cliques of people who share our interests, or do we seek to widen and diversify our interpersonal circle? And do we keep uppermost in our mind the effectiveness and appropriateness of our digital messaging, self-monitoring our communication and reminding ourselves that once something is online, it's virtually impossible to erase? In chapters to come, we will investigate these and other concerns.

GAINING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND SKILLS: DEVELOPING INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
1.7   Develop a plan to grow as an interpersonal communicator.

Even though interpersonal communication is an inevitable part of life, few, if any, of us are as effective or as successful at it as we could be. Therefore, we invite you to treat this class as your interpersonal communication laboratory. Use the information you gain and the skills you practice as guides when you interact with others. There is no such thing as being too good at interpersonal communication. Whatever your capabilities are right now, to help yourself become better at communicating interpersonally, promise yourself you will do the following.

Add to Your Storehouse of Knowledge about Interpersonal Communication

Your chance of influencing your interpersonal encounters depends, at least to some extent, on your knowledge of how interpersonal relationships work. While our relationships vary significantly, with some being plagued by problems and others proceeding smoothly, one of our objectives in this book is to share with you a number of techniques you can use to enhance the quality of your relationships and the satisfaction you derive from them.

Recognize the Effects of Your Relationships

Every relationship affects you in some way. Some influence your understanding of others; some alter the quality of your life. Some add to your confidence; others diminish your belief in yourself. While healthy relationships enrich your life, unhealthy ones too often rob you of energy, leaving you demoralized or apathetic. Another goal of this course is to help you understand the forces at work during person-to-person contacts and the complex ways in which interpersonal communication changes you. If you understand the challenges you face, identify alternative modes of responding, and learn how to think about your relationships, then you will be better prepared to deal effectively with them.

Analyze Your Options

The interpersonal communication choices you make have impacts on you and your partner. Rather than responding automatically, take time to think about your options. What happens in a relationship usually is not beyond your control. In most situations, you have freedom to respond in any number of ways. Every contact you engage in offers opportunities to improve it if you remain flexible and open. Another of our goals is to help you learn to take advantage of this.

Interact Ethically, Respect Diversity, Think Critically, and Respond Empathically

Effective interpersonal communicators act ethically in their relationships, demonstrate their respect for diversity, think critically about the interactions they share, and respond empathically to the people with whom they share relationships.

Ethical communicators demonstrate the ability to adhere to standards of right and wrong. They follow appropriate interaction rules, treat other people as they would like to be treated, and never knowingly harm someone else in an effort to achieve personal goals.

Interpersonal communicators who respect diversity understand culture's role in person-to-person interactions, tolerate difference and dissent, willingly interact with people from a variety of backgrounds, demonstrate a decreased use of stereotypes to guide behavior, process experience from the viewpoints of others, avoid imposing their cultural values on other people, and refrain from holding discriminatory attitudes.

Individuals who think critically about their relationships know that communication is complex, and they don't know all there is to know. They are open-minded; reflect on others' ideas rather than respond impulsively; open themselves to new ideas and new ways of perceiving; challenge themselves to reexamine their beliefs, values, and behaviors; and concern themselves with unstated assumptions in addition to overt discourse. They think things out, analyzing and evaluating outcomes, seeking to understand and remember what worked or didn't, and creating opportunities for their own personal growth together with the personal growth of others.

Individuals who respond with empathy make the effort to put themselves in other's shoes—adopting their perspective—in order to try and experience their thoughts and feelings. Realizing not everyone thinks and feels similarly, they recognize the merit in challenging themselves to think and feel not as they themselves do but as someone else does.

REFLECT ON THIS

The Smartphone/Social Media Effect

According to the Pew Research Center's 2021 Mobil Fact Sheet, 97 percent of U.S. Americans own a cell phone of some kind (100 percent if you look only at people aged 18–29), with some 85 percent owning a smartphone (96 percent for those aged 18–29) that they also use to access social media. Many users are smartphone dependent. While their accessibility is

undeniable, does the time we spend using them enhance or detract from our feelings of happiness and mental health?

Research studies have focused on the connection between smartphone use and feelings of unhappiness and mental distress. For example, about two decades ago, researcher Noelle Chesley sought to find out if the time people spent on cell phones enhanced or detracted from their overall feelings of happiness. To answer the question, Chesley surveyed more than 1,200 adults and concluded that a correlation existed: the more time individuals spent on cell phones, the less happy and less satisfied they became with their family relationships. Chesley attributed this, at least in part, to the work lives of people spilling over into their personal lives and causing stress at home. More recent studies have reported a connection between smartphone/social media use and users' negative moods and appearance concerns. For example, in 2018, the Pew Research Center reported that users tend to be distracted and feel upset and anxious. Another study indicated that smartphone use undermined the enjoyment users attributed to face-to-face interactions. And still another reported on their increasing addictiveness.

Consider the time spent texting, zooming and facetiming, and using social media apps.

Consider these questions:

1. Do your experiences today confirm, extend, or negate these findings? Does time spent talking, texting, and accessing social media on your phone stress the relationships you share with people important to you, or does it help bring you closer?
2. Based on the time you devote to social media in general, including Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, how would you describe their impact on your overall level of happiness and life satisfaction? Explain your answer.
3. What recommendations can you offer for alleviating relationship stressors related to smartphone/social media use? For example, would you expect others to abide by rules specifying when to rely on smartphones or other digital tools?

Sources: Mobile Fact Sheet, Pew Research Center, April 7, 2021; Noelle Chesley, "Blurring Boundaries? Linking Technology Use, Spillover, Individual Distress, and Family Satisfaction." *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 67, 2005, p. 1237–1238; Jingjing Jaing, "How Teens and Parents Navigate Screen Time and Device Distractions," Pew Research Center, August 22, 2018; Dwyer RJ, Kushlev K, Dunn EW. Smartphone use undermines enjoyment of face-to-face social interactions. *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2018;78:233–9. 10.1016/j.jesp.2017.10.007; and Basen I. You can't stop checking your phone because Silicon Valley designed it that way. CBC Radio 2018.

Self-Monitor, Practice, and Apply Skills to Raise Your Interpersonal Presence

Do you self-monitor your communication—observing yourself, assessing your interpersonal behavior, and correcting or redirecting your interactions when things go awry? This text shares skills you can practice in order to enhance your interpersonal presence. Commit to practicing them. How you present yourself, perceive others, use words and nonverbal cues, listen, progress in a relationship, overcome relational obstacles, demonstrate trust and trustworthiness, and handle your emotions all affect your effectiveness when interacting with friends, family members, coworkers, health providers, and others. The extent to which you practice and apply the

skills we discuss will determine whether you add to your interpersonal behavioral repertoire, demonstrating your interpersonal versatility and resourcefulness.
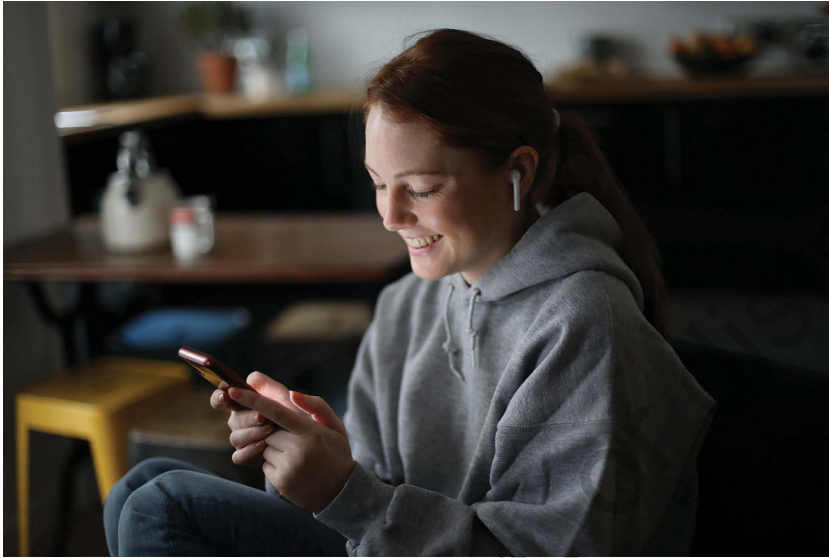
How omnipresent is technology in your life? Could you live without it? Would you want to?

Catherine Delahaye/DigitalVision/Getty Images

CONNECT THE CASE

The Case of Sylvia and Khalil

"After he left my dorm, he texted me, 'I'm sorry, it's over.' That's all he said," Sylvia told her roommate Justine. "How could he end things just like that? Why didn't he talk to me when we were together? I thought everything was fine with us."

Sylvia and Khalil had been together for several months. They had met on campus at the beginning of the semester and had been seeing each other regularly. Sylvia had even invited Khalil to spend Thanksgiving with her at her parents' house. They had returned to campus after the holiday, and then this happened. "What did I do to cause this?" Sylvia asked Justine. "Do you think he met someone else?"

Sylvia was despondent. Questions raced through her mind. She tried to access Khalil's Facebook page, but he had already defriended her, deleted her pictures, and changed his relationship status to single. She decided to text him back, asking, "What happened? What did I do?" Then she turned off her cell, afraid of what he would text back to her.

Khalil was sitting in his off-campus apartment staring blankly at his iPad. He had just defriended Sylvia and changed his Facebook status. He didn't feel good about it, but he told himself he had no choice. Now she was texting him. He didn't want to read it. "How can I tell her the truth?" he wondered. Sure, they had had some great times together—but that was until he went home with her for Thanksgiving dinner. Soon after entering Sylvia's parents' home, Khalil had begun to feel uncomfortable. Her folks were nice enough, but he sensed a certain amount of distance on their part.

By the time they had finished dinner, Khalil was certain that because he was Egyptian, Sylvia's parents had reservations about him. They hadn't done or said anything directly to him; he just had a feeling. Maybe he should have raised his concerns with Sylvia. But he told himself that ending things this way was easier. Was he right? Khalil just didn't know. He turned off his cell.[44]

Demonstrate your understanding by answering these questions:

1. What do you think about the way Sylvia and Khalil handled their situation?

2. What does the behavior of each suggest about his or her communication weaknesses and strengths?

3. Would you have used texting and Facebook in the same way as Sylvia and/or Khalil? Explain your answer.

4. Given the current status of their relationship, what advice would you give each of them?

REVIEW THIS: CHAPTER SUMMARY

1.1 Define and discuss the connection between interpersonal communication and communication presence.

Interpersonal communication occurs between two people who form a dyad. Interpersonal communicators make personal contact, build a connection, and establish a relationship. The process of interpersonal communication is ongoing and ever changing, and it occurs whenever we interact with another person, sharing responsibility for creating meaning (what we extract from the interaction) and managing our relationship (determining its nature). Communication presence is the unique composite of characteristics we present when interacting both digitally and in the real world. Communication presence affects interpersonal effectiveness and relationship development.

1.2 Use a communication model to identify the essential elements and transactional nature of the interpersonal communication process.

Every interpersonal interaction is transactional in nature, meaning it involves two people who simultaneously function as sender and receiver; it contains messages (the content of communication), channels (the medium or media carrying the message), noise (anything interfering with the reception of a message), feedback (information returned to a message source in response to a message sent), context (the physical, psychological, temporal, and cultural setting for communication), and effect(s) (the emotional, physical, and/or cognitive influence of the communication).

1.3 Explain the functions that interpersonal communication serves.

Interpersonal communication fulfills psychological functions by enhancing self–other understanding; social functions by meeting our needs for affection, inclusion, and

control; information functions by promoting the sharing of knowledge and reduction of uncertainty; and influence functions by enabling us to use strategic communication to achieve goals.

1.4   Describe the characteristics, core principles, and axioms of interpersonal communication.

Among interpersonal communication's characteristics are that it is a dynamic process, unrepeatable and irreversible, learned, and noted for its wholeness and nonsummativity. Among the principles underlying interpersonal communication are the importance of using behavioral patterns and both reasoned and retrospective sense making to predict and interpret behavior. The following five axioms add to our understanding of interpersonal relationships: (1) you cannot *not* communicate, (2) every interaction has content and relationship dimensions, (3) every interaction is defined by how it is punctuated, (4) messages consist of verbal symbols and nonverbal cues, and (5) interactions are either symmetrical or complementary.

1.5   Demonstrate how gender and culture affect interpersonal communication.

Gender and cultural prescriptions shape interpersonal communication. Because of their potential to enhance or complicate interpersonal relations, we can demonstrate sensitivity and avoid misunderstandings by increasing our awareness of the culture and gender preferences of others and recognizing the importance of respecting and adjusting to differences.

1.6   Provide examples of how digital media are reshaping interpersonal contacts and communication presence.

Digital media have broadened our options for communicating interpersonally. They are altering our sense of self, social norms, and views of reality. We send an increasing number of texts, using our cell phones more than ever before. Whether such options are personalizing or depersonalizing interaction is still open to debate.

1.7   Develop a plan to grow as an interpersonal communicator.

Adding to your storehouse of knowledge about interpersonal communication, critically analyzing how your relationships affect you as well as the behavioral options open to you, committing to interacting ethically, respecting diversity, and thinking critically about person-to-person interactions, together with developing and practicing skills, will make you a more effective interpersonal partner.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Can you explain the different kinds of communication you use in a day and how they help meet your needs?

2. Can you give examples of what makes communication interpersonal?

3. Can you name and define the elements and axioms at work during interpersonal communication by using them to analyze some of your recent communication exchanges?

4. Can you summarize how communicating online as opposed to face-to-face alters the nature of interpersonal communication?

5. Can you write a paragraph describing the steps you will take to enhance your interpersonal skills?

KEY TERMS

Channel (p. 14)

Communication (p. 4)

Communication presence (p. 7)

Complementary relationship (p. 28)

Co-culture (p. 29)

Context (p. 16)

Cultural awareness (p. 29)

Dyad (p. 4)

Effect (p. 17)

External feedback (p. 16)

Feedback (p. 16)

Feedforward (p. 16)

Gender (p. 31)

Gender identity (p. 31)

High-monitored feedback (p. 16)

Interaction model (p. 18)

Internal feedback (p. 16)

Interpersonal communication (p. 4)

Intrapersonal communication (p. 4)

Interpersonal competence (p. 7)

Low-monitored feedback (p. 16)

Masspersonal communication (p. 32)

Mediated communication (p. 32)

Messages (p. 13)

Metaverse (p. 35)

Negative feedback (p. 16)

Noise (p. 15)

Positive feedback (p. 16)

Reasoned sense making (p. 26)

Retrospective sense making (p. 26)

Role duality (p. 13)

Symmetrical relationship (p. 28)

Transactional model (p. 18)

ANSWER KEY

1. F; 2. T; 3. F; 4. T; 5. T