

THE



Joseph A. DeVito



# The Interpersonal Communication Book

FIFTEENTH EDITION

**Joseph A. DeVito**

*Hunter College of the City University of New York*

Director, Portfolio Management: Karon Bowers  
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# Brief Contents

## PART ONE Preliminaries to Interpersonal Communication 1

- 1 Foundations of Interpersonal Communication 1
- 2 Culture and Interpersonal Communication 29
- 3 Perception of the Self and Others 55

## PART TWO Interpersonal Messages 87

- 4 Verbal Messages 87
- 5 Nonverbal Messages 116
- 6 Listening 157
- 7 Emotional Messages 181
- 8 Conversational Messages 205

## PART THREE Interpersonal Relationships 236

- 9 Interpersonal Relationship Stages, Communication, and Theories 236
- 10 Interpersonal Relationship Types 267
- 11 Interpersonal Conflict and Conflict Management 303
- 12 Interpersonal Power and Influence 327

# Contents

Specialized Contents	viii		
Welcome to <i>The Interpersonal Communication Book</i>	ix		
<b>PART ONE</b> Preliminaries To Interpersonal Communication	1		
<b>1</b> Foundations of Interpersonal Communication	1		
The Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Communication	2		
Personal Benefits	2		
Professional Benefits	2		
The Elements of Interpersonal Communication	4		
Source–Receiver	5		
Messages	7		
Channel	9		
Noise	10		
Context	11		
Effects	12		
Ethics	13		
The Principles of Interpersonal Communication	16		
Interpersonal Communication Exists on a Continuum	16		
Interpersonal Communication Involves Interdependent Individuals	17		
Interpersonal Communication Is Inherently Relational	17		
Interpersonal Communication Is a Transactional Process	18		
Interpersonal Communication Serves a Variety of Purposes	19		
Interpersonal Communication Is Ambiguous	21		
Interpersonal Relationships May Be Symmetrical or Complementary	22		
Interpersonal Communication Refers to Content and Relationship	22		
Interpersonal Communication Is a Series of Punctuated Events	24		
Interpersonal Communication Is Inevitable, Irreversible, and Unrepeatable	24		
<b>Summary</b>	<b>27</b>		
<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>28</b>		
		<b>2</b>	<b>Culture and Interpersonal Communication 29</b>
		Culture	30
		The Importance of Cultural Awareness	30
		The Transmission of Culture	34
		The Aim of a Cultural Perspective	34
		Cultural Differences	37
		Individual and Collective Orientation	39
		High- and Low-Context Cultures	40
		Power Distance	40
		Masculine and Feminine Cultures	41
		High-Ambiguity-Tolerant and Low-Ambiguity-Tolerant Cultures	42
		Long- and Short-Term Orientation	42
		Indulgence and Restraint	43
		Principles for Effective Intercultural Communication	45
		Educate Yourself	46
		Recognize Differences	47
		Confront Your Stereotypes	48
		Reduce Your Ethnocentrism	49
		Recognize Culture Shock	50
		Adjust Your Communication	51
		<b>Summary</b>	<b>53</b>
		<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>53</b>
		<b>3</b>	<b>Perception of the Self and Others 55</b>
		The Self in Interpersonal Communication	56
		Self-Concept	56
		Self-Awareness	58
		Self-Esteem	60
		Perception in Interpersonal Communication	64
		Stage One: Stimulation	65
		Stage Two: Organization	65
		Stage Three: Interpretation–Evaluation	66
		Stage Four: Memory	67
		Stage Five: Recall	67
		Impression Formation	69
		Impression Formation Processes	69
		Increasing Accuracy in Impression Formation	74
		Impression Management: Goals and Strategies	78
		To Be Liked: Affinity-Seeking and Politeness Strategies	79



To Be Believed: Credibility Strategies	81	Silence	136
To Excuse Failure: Self-Handicapping Strategies	82	Spatial Messages and Territoriality	138
To Secure Help: Self-Deprecating Strategies	82	Artifactual Communication	141
To Hide Faults: Self-Monitoring Strategies	83	Olfactory Messages	144
To Be Followed: Influencing Strategies	83	Temporal Communication	145
To Confirm Self-Image: Image-Confirming Strategies	83	Nonverbal Communication Competence	151
<b>Summary</b>	<b>85</b>	Encoding Skills	152
<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>86</b>	Decoding Skills	153
<b>PART TWO</b> Interpersonal Messages	<b>87</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>155</b>
		<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>4</b> Verbal Messages	<b>87</b>	<b>6</b> Listening	<b>157</b>
Principles of Verbal Messages	88	The Process and Skills of Listening	158
Messages Are Packaged	88	Stage One: Receiving	159
Message Meanings Are in People	88	Stage Two: Understanding	160
Meanings Are Denotative and Connotative	89	Stage Three: Remembering	161
Messages Vary in Abstraction	90	Stage Four: Evaluating	162
Messages Vary in Politeness	91	Stage Five: Responding	163
Messages Can Be Onymous or Anonymous	93	Listening Barriers	165
Messages Can Deceive	94	Physical and Mental Distractions	165
Messages Vary in Assertiveness	96	Biases and Prejudices	165
Confirmation and Disconfirmation	100	Racist, Heterosexist, Ageist, and Sexist Listening	165
Racism	101	Lack of Appropriate Focus	166
Ageism	102	Premature Judgment	166
Heterosexism	103	Hearing Impairment	167
Sexism	104	Styles of Effective Listening	168
Cultural Identifiers	105	Empathic Listening	169
Guidelines for Using Verbal Messages Effectively	108	Polite Listening	170
Extensionalize: Avoid Intensional Orientation	108	Critical Listening	172
See the Individual: Avoid Allness	109	Active Listening	173
Distinguish between Facts and Inferences:		Culture, Gender, and Listening	176
Avoid Fact-Inference Confusion	109	Culture and Listening	177
Discriminate Among: Avoid Indiscrimination	111	Gender and Listening	178
Talk about the Middle: Avoid Polarization	111	<b>Summary</b>	<b>180</b>
Update Messages: Avoid Static Evaluation	112	<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>7</b> Emotional Messages	<b>181</b>
<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>115</b>	Principles of Emotions and Emotional Messages	183
<b>5</b> Nonverbal Messages	<b>116</b>	Emotions Occur in Stages	184
Principles of Nonverbal Communication	117	Emotions May Be Primary or Blended	185
Nonverbal Messages Interact with Verbal Messages	118	Emotions Involve Both Body and Mind	186
Nonverbal Messages Help Manage Impressions	119	Emotional Expression Uses Multiple Channels	187
Nonverbal Messages Help Form Relationships	119	Emotional Expression Is Governed by Display	
Nonverbal Messages Structure Conversation	120	Rules	188
Nonverbal Messages Can Influence and Deceive	121	Emotions Can Be Used Strategically	189
Nonverbal Messages Are Crucial for		Emotions Have Consequences	190
Expressing Emotions	122	Emotions May Be Adaptive and Maladaptive	190
Channels of Nonverbal Communication	123	Emotions Are Contagious	191
Body Messages	123	Obstacles to Communicating Emotions	193
Facial Communication	126	Personality Factors	193
Eye Communication	129	Inadequate Interpersonal Skills	193
Touch Communication	132	Societal and Cultural Customs	194
Paralanguage	134	Fear	195

Emotional Competence	196	Politeness Theory	262
Emotional Expression	196	<b>Summary</b>	<b>265</b>
Emotional Responding	201	<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>266</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>10 Interpersonal Relationship Types</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>204</b>	Friendship Relationships	269
<b>8 Conversational Messages</b>	<b>205</b>	Definition and Characteristics	269
Principles of Conversation	206	Friendship Types	270
The Principle of Process	206	Friendship Needs	272
The Principle of Cooperation	208	Friendship and Communication	272
The Principle of Politeness	210	Friendship, Culture, and Gender	274
The Principle of Dialogue	211	Love Relationships	276
The Principle of Turn Taking	212	Love Types	277
Conversational Disclosure	215	Love and Communication	279
Revealing Yourself	215	Love, Culture, and Gender	280
Influences on Self-Disclosure	216	Family Relationships	281
Rewards and Dangers of Self-Disclosure	217	Characteristics of Families	282
Guidelines for Self-Disclosure	219	Couple Types	283
Everyday Conversations	222	Family Types	284
Making Small Talk	223	Family and Communication	285
Making Introductions	224	Families, Culture, and Gender	287
Making Excuses	226	Workplace Relationships	289
Apologizing	227	Workplace Communication	289
Asking for a Favor	229	Networking Relationships	291
Complimenting	231	Mentoring Relationships	292
Advising	232	Romantic Relationships at Work	293
<b>Summary</b>	<b>235</b>	The Dark Side of Interpersonal Relationships	296
<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>235</b>	Jealousy	296
<b>PART THREE Interpersonal Relationships</b>	<b>236</b>	Violence	297
<b>9 Interpersonal Relationship Stages, Communication, and Theories</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>301</b>
Relationship Stages	238	<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>302</b>
Contact	240	<b>11 Interpersonal Conflict and Conflict Management</b>	<b>303</b>
Involvement	240	Preliminaries to Interpersonal Conflict	304
Intimacy	241	Definition of Interpersonal Conflict	304
Deterioration	241	Myths about Interpersonal Conflict	305
Repair	242	Interpersonal Conflict Issues	305
Dissolution	243	Principles of Interpersonal Conflict	308
Movement among the Stages	243	Conflict Is Inevitable	308
Relationship Communication	246	Conflict Can Have Negative and Positive Effects	308
Communicating in Developing and Maintaining Relationships	246	Conflict Is Influenced by Culture and Gender	309
Communicating in Deteriorating and Dissolving Relationships	248	Conflict Styles Have Consequences	311
Communicating in Relationship Repair	251	Conflict Management Is a Multistep Process	313
Relationship Theories	255	Conflict Management Strategies	317
Attraction Theory	255	Win-Lose and Win-Win Strategies	319
Relationship Rules Theory	258	Avoidance and Active Fighting Strategies	320
Relationship Dialectics Theory	260	Force and Talk Strategies	321
Social Exchange Theory	261	Face-Attacking and Face-Enhancing Strategies	322
Equity Theory	262	Verbal Aggressiveness and Argumentativeness Strategies	323
		<b>Summary</b>	<b>326</b>
		<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>326</b>

<b>12</b>	<b>Interpersonal Power and Influence</b>	<b>327</b>		
Principles of Power and Influence		328	Sexual Harassment	342
Some People Are More Powerful Than Others		328	Bullying	344
Power Can Be Shared		329	Power Plays	346
Power Can Be Increased or Decreased		330	Prosocial Communication	348
Power Follows the Principle of Less Interest		330	The Nature of Prosocial Communication	348
Power Generates Privilege		331	Factors Influencing Prosocial Communication	348
Power Is Influenced by Culture		331	Examples of Prosocial Communication	349
Relationship, Person, and Message Power		333	Effects of Prosocial Communication	350
Power in the Relationship		333	<b>Summary</b>	<b>351</b>
Power in the Person		335	<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>352</b>
Power in the Message		337	Glossary	353
Resisting Power and Influence		340	References	364
Misuses of Power		342	Credits	398
			Index	401



# Specialized Contents

## Understanding *Interpersonal Skills*

<b>Mindfulness:</b> A State of Mental Awareness (Chapter 1)	15
<b>Cultural Sensitivity:</b> Responsiveness to Cultural Variation (Chapter 2)	36
<b>Other-Orientation:</b> A Focus on the Other Person and that Person's Perspective (Chapter 3)	68
<b>Metacommunication:</b> The Ability to Talk about Your Talk (Chapter 4)	99
<b>Immediacy:</b> Interpersonal Closeness and Togetherness (Chapter 5)	151
<b>Openness:</b> Willingness to Disclose and be Honest (Chapter 6)	177
<b>Flexibility:</b> The Ability to Change Communication Patterns to Suit the Situation (Chapter 7)	195
<b>Expressiveness:</b> Communication of Genuine Involvement (Chapter 8)	222
<b>Empathy:</b> Feeling What Another Person Feels From That Person's Point of View (Chapter 9)	254
<b>Supportiveness:</b> Supportive Messages Express Understanding Rather Than Evaluation (Chapter 10)	288
<b>Equality:</b> An Attitude and a Pattern of Behavior in Which Each Person Is Treated as Interpersonally Equal	316
<b>Interaction Management:</b> Your Ability to Carry on an Interpersonal Interaction Smoothly and Effectively (Chapter 12)	341

## Ethics in Interpersonal Communication

<b>Ethical Standards</b> (Chapter 1)	14
<b>Culture and Ethics</b> (Chapter 2)	36
<b>The Ethics of Impression Management</b> (Chapter 3)	82
<b>Lying</b> (Chapter 4)	95
<b>Interpersonal Silence</b> (Chapter 5)	136
<b>Ethical Listening</b> (Chapter 6)	168
<b>Motivational Appeals</b> (Chapter 7)	191
<b>The Ethics of Gossip</b> (Chapter 8)	221
<b>Your Obligation to Reveal Yourself</b> (Chapter 9)	245
<b>Relationship Ethics</b> (Chapter 10)	295
<b>Ethical Fighting</b> (Chapter 11)	324
<b>The Ethics of Compliance-Gaining Strategies</b> (Chapter 12)	340

## The Cultural Map

<b>The Cultural Map</b> (Chapter 1)	12
<b>Internet Access</b> (Chapter 2)	33
<b>Ambiguity Tolerance</b> (Chapter 3)	77
<b>High- and Low-Context Cultures</b> (Chapter 4)	92

<b>Long-Term Versus Short-Term Orientation</b> (Chapter 5)	148
<b>Politeness</b> (Chapter 6)	172
<b>Indulgent and Restraint Orientation</b> (Chapter 7)	187
<b>Apologies</b> (Chapter 8)	229
<b>Relationship Length</b> (Chapter 9)	248
<b>Masculine and Feminine Orientation</b> (Chapter 10)	275
<b>Success</b> (Chapter 11)	312
<b>High- and Low-Power Distance</b> (Chapter 12)	332

## Integrated Experiences

<b>Interpersonal Communication: Easy and Difficult</b> (Chapter 1)	3
<b>Beliefs about Interpersonal Communication</b> (Chapter 1)	4
<b>Ethical Beliefs</b> (Chapter 1)	13
<b>Relationship Uncertainty</b> (Chapter 1)	21
<b>Cultural Orientation</b> (Chapter 2)	37
<b>Self-Esteem</b> (Chapter 3)	61
<b>Impression Formation</b> (Chapter 3)	69
<b>Personality Theory</b> (Chapter 3)	70
<b>Consistency</b> (Chapter 3)	72
<b>Assertiveness</b> (Chapter 4)	97
<b>Distinguishing Facts from Inferences</b> (Chapter 4)	110
<b>Polarization</b> (Chapter 4)	112
<b>Estimating Heights</b> (Chapter 5)	126
<b>Facial Management Techniques</b> (Chapter 5)	128
<b>Time Orientation</b> (Chapter 5)	145
<b>Styles of Listening</b> (Chapter 6)	168
<b>Listening with Empathy</b> (Chapter 6)	170
<b>Attitudes about Expressing Feelings</b> (Chapter 7)	182
<b>Effective and Ineffective Emotional Expression</b> (Chapter 7)	183
<b>Conversational Politeness</b> (Chapter 8)	210
<b>Self Disclosure</b> (Chapter 8)	216
<b>Small-Talk Behavior</b> (Chapter 8)	222
<b>Relationship Advantages and Disadvantages</b> (Chapter 9)	237
<b>Attractiveness Preferences</b> (Chapter 9)	255
<b>Love Style</b> (Chapter 10)	276
<b>Love Styles and Personality</b> (Chapter 10)	279
<b>Involvement in Relationship Violence</b> (Chapter 10)	298
<b>Myths about Interpersonal Conflict</b> (Chapter 11)	305
<b>Interpersonal Conflict Strategies</b> (Chapter 11)	318
<b>Interpersonal Power</b> (Chapter 12)	333
<b>Credibility</b> (Chapter 12)	336

# Welcome to *The Interpersonal Communication Book*

## FIFTEENTH EDITION

It's a rare privilege for an author to present the fifteenth edition of a book. With each revision, I've been able to update and fine tune the presentation of interpersonal communication so that it is current—accurately reflecting what we currently know about the subject—and as clear, interesting, involving, and relevant to today's college students as it can be.

Like its predecessors, this fifteenth edition provides in-depth coverage of interpersonal communication, blending theory and research on the one hand, and practical skills on the other. The book's philosophical foundation continues to be the concept of *choice*. Choice is central to interpersonal communication, as it is to life in general. As speaker and listener, you're regularly confronted with choice points at every stage of the communication process: What do you say? When do you say it? How do you say it? Through what channel should you say it? And so on. In large part, the choices you make will determine the effectiveness of your messages and your relationships. The role of this text, then, is threefold:

1. to identify and explain the choices you have available to you in a vast array of interpersonal situations;
2. to explain the theory and research evidence that bears on these choices—enabling you to identify your available choices and to select more reasoned, reasonable, and effective communication choices;
3. to provide you with the skills needed to communicate your choices effectively.

*The Interpersonal Communication Book* is available in both print and digital formats. The flexibility of these options encourages students to make choices about their own learning style preferences in order to become more engaged and involved in the learning process.

## What's New in This Fifteenth Edition?

### Revel™

**Educational technology designed for the way today's students read, think, and learn**

Revel is an interactive learning environment that deeply engages students and prepares them for class. Media and assessment integrated directly within the authors' narrative lets students read, explore interactive content, and practice in one continuous learning path. Thanks to the dynamic reading experience in Revel, students come to class prepared to discuss, apply, and learn from instructors and from each other.

**Learn more about Revel**

[www.pearson.com/revel](http://www.pearson.com/revel)

## Interpersonal Communication: Easy and Difficult

Interactive

Consider the following twelve situations and rate them on a continuum from "Extremely easy" to "Extremely hard".

1. Impressing a recruiter at a job fair.

☐ Extremely easy  
☐ Easy  
☐ Moderate  
☐ Hard  
☐ Extremely hard

2. Asking a work supervisor to be friends on Facebook.

☐ Extremely easy  
☐ Easy  
☐ Moderate  
☐ Hard  
☐ Extremely hard

Previous
Next


Rather than simply offering opportunities to read about and study interpersonal communication, Revel facilitates deep, engaging interactions with the concepts that matter most. For example, when learning about assertiveness in Chapter 4, students are presented with a self-assessment that rates their own communication behaviors, allowing them to examine their level of assertiveness and consider how they could improve on it. By providing opportunities to read about and practice communication at the same time, Revel engages students directly and immediately, which leads to a better understanding of course material. A wealth of student and instructor resources and interactive materials can be found within Revel. Interactive materials include the following:

- Integrated Experiences** These interactive exercises allow students to analyze their own communication behavior, enabling them to learn and grow over the duration of the course. A variety of question styles are offered, including fill-in-the-blank, True or False, and numerical ratings.
- Videos and Video Self-Checks** Short video clips showcase interviews with working professionals, examples of face-to-face scenarios, and concept reviews to boost mastery of content. All videos are bundled with correlating self-checks, enabling students to test their understanding immediately after watching the clip.

Video Self-Check: A Rare Sales Skill

Interactive

2 questions



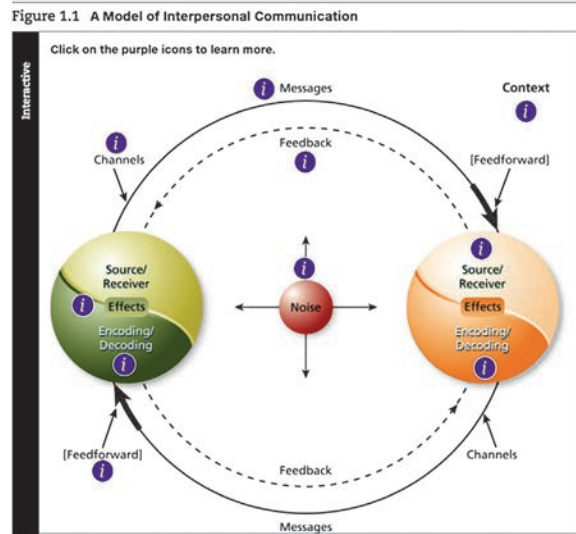
1. Wagner notes the salesman was particularly good because he got \_\_\_\_\_.

☐ more money in Q1 than any salesmen before  
☐ the customers to talk  
☐ special requests for his service  
☐ effective results

Next

- Dialogue Examples** Examples of effective and ineffective dialogue are enhanced with audio demonstrations, which add the dimensions of inflection, tone, and volume to enhance the learning experience.

- **Interactive Figures** Interactive figures (such as Figure 1.1: A Model of Interpersonal Communication) allow students to interact with the illustrations, increasing their ability to grasp difficult concepts. By allowing students to examine specific parts of a model, with either additional explanation or real-life examples, broad and theoretical concepts are easier to understand.



- **Interactive Tables** Two-stage interactive tables (such as Table 1.2: In a Nutshell – The Elements of Interpersonal Communication) allow students to first study and review the information in the original presentation, and then, when ready, assess their memory and understanding of the concepts by removing and then dragging content back to the correct position.

Table 1.2 In a Nutshell: The Elements of Interpersonal Communication

Study the elements of interpersonal communication. When you're ready, click "Check Your Understanding" below.

Elements	Meaning
Source-receiver	The sender-receiver, the person who both sends and receives messages during communication.
Messages	The verbal and nonverbal signals that are sent by the source/encoder and received by the receiver/decoder.
Channels	The media through which the signals are sent.
Noise	Disturbances that interfere with the receiver receiving the message sent by the source.
Context	The physical, sociopsychological, temporal, and cultural environment in which the communication takes place.
Effects	Interpersonal communication can have cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects on others and on yourself.
Ethics	The morality, the rightness-wrongness aspect of communication behavior.

Check Your Understanding

- **Interactive Cultural Maps** These maps recall major cultural differences discussed in Chapter 2 (such as ambiguity tolerance, masculine or feminine orientation, and high-or-low context) and describe how these differences may impact communication around the world. In Revel, readers are given the opportunity to manipulate the maps.





of new interactive tables that offer low-stakes assessment opportunities for review and retention purposes, and a new integrated exercise “Interpersonal Communication: Easy and Difficult” that offers students the opportunity to consider and learn from their own communication experiences. Two new videos with accompanying Self-Checks offer enhanced examples to illustrate this foundational content: one in which a working professional describes the value of good communication skills, and a concept review about ethical communication.

- **Chapter 2, Culture and Interpersonal Communication**, covers the nature of culture, and the major cultural differences that impact interpersonal communication, with some suggestions on how to make intercultural communication more effective. *New material in this chapter* includes additional figures and a new Cultural Map about internet access. The concept of ethnic identity has been clarified and a new nutshell table summarizes important concepts. The Revel version of this chapter also includes two new interactive figures (2.1 Factors Contributing to the Importance of Culture in Interpersonal Communication and 2.3 Some Steps to Effective Intercultural Communication), a variety of new assessment tables, and two videos with accompanying Self-Checks about culture and communication, and diversity and communication.
- **Chapter 3, Perception of the Self and Others**, covers the essential concepts of the self, the stages of perception, and impression formation and management. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with ambiguity tolerance. *New material in this chapter* includes a brief section on improving accuracy in perception, and two new figures: 3.5 The Stages of Perception and 3.6 Impression Management Goals. The Revel version includes new interactive activities linked to the new figures and integrated exercises that deal with personality theory and consistency, as well as two videos with accompanying Self-Checks. The first video is about perception barriers, and the second is a brief lecture about impression management and networking basics.
- **Chapter 4, Verbal Messages**, covers the principles of verbal messages, confirmation and disconfirmation, and verbal message effectiveness. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with high- and low-context cultures. *New material in this chapter* includes a revised organization (the chapter is now in three parts instead of two), two integrated exercises created out of text from the fourteenth edition, a slight expansion of coverage on cultural identifiers, and two new figures: 4.1 The Abstraction Ladder and 4.2 Effective Verbal Messaging. The Revel version of this chapter includes new interactive activities linked to the new figures, and two videos with accompanying Self-Checks: the first video is a concept review about assertive communication, and the second is an ABC News clip that shows racist interactions.
- **Chapter 5, Nonverbal Messages**, covers the principles of nonverbal communication, the ten major channels or codes, and nonverbal competence in encoding and decoding. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with time orientation. *New material in this chapter* includes an expansion of the benefits from studying nonverbal communication, more coverage of nonverbal communication competence (summarized by a new nutshell table), and a new figure 5.1 The Power of Nonverbal Messages. The Revel version of this chapter includes interactivity linked to the new figures and tables, two new interactive exercises “Estimating Heights” and “Facial Management Techniques,” and a multimedia gallery illustrating the five major meaning of touch. There are two videos with accompanying Self-Checks: the first video is an ABC News feature about the body language of politicians, and the second is a concept review of nonverbal messages.
- **Chapter 6, Listening**, covers the stages and styles of listening, as well as cultural and gender differences. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with politeness. *New material in this chapter* includes a discussion on critical listening, a revision and reconceptualization of the styles of listening, the inclusion of hearing impairment as a potential barrier to listening, a new integrated exercise on empathy, and an



enhanced section on politeness and the mobile phone. The Revel version includes a new interactive figure (6.2 Four Listening Styles), as well as two videos. The first video shows a family dinner in which parents and children fail to listen to one another, and the second features a businesswoman describing how she learned to be a better listener when she transferred from a company based in Ireland to one based in Japan.

- **Chapter 7, Emotional Messages**, covers the principles of emotional communication, some obstacles to communicating emotions, and emotional competence. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with indulgent and restraint orientation. *New material in this chapter* includes an integrated exercise on expressing emotions effectively, a discussion on “emotional labor” (with display rules), and the inclusion of emotional happiness. The Revel version includes a new interactive exercise and new interactive figure (7.1 The Principles of Emotions and Emotional Expressions), as well as two videos with accompanying Self-Checks. The first video features a British backgammon champion explaining the importance of controlling her emotions under pressure, and the second shows Sheryl Sandberg describing how she dealt with the grief of losing her husband.
- **Chapter 8, Conversational Messages**, covers the principles of conversation, self-disclosure, and some everyday conversational encounters. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with apologies. *New material in this chapter* includes a discussion on how to ask for a favor, along with three new figures that preview some of the major concepts in this chapter. In addition, the discussion of the conversation process has been reduced in length. The Revel version of this chapter includes activities related to the new figures: 8.1 The Principles of Conversation, 8.3 The Maxims of Conversation, and 8.4 The Maxims of Politeness. There are a host of new interactive tables with low-stakes assessment opportunities, as well as two videos, both of which show examples of face-to-face conversations. In the first video, three counselors try to discuss the best way to help a struggling student, and in the second, a manager tries to draw out an employee at a company party.
- **Chapter 9, Interpersonal Relationship Stages, Communication, and Theories**, covers the stages of relationships, the communication that takes place at these different stages, and some of the major theories that explain how relationships grow and deteriorate. *New material in this chapter* includes a reorganization that places “Relationship Communication” immediately after “Relationship Stages,” and coverage of social penetration with the discussion on intimacy, rather than with the theories. The Revel version of this chapter includes two new interactive exercises on the advantages and disadvantages of interpersonal relationships, a new interactive figure (9.5 Relationship Theories), as well as two videos with accompanying Self-Checks. The first video is about friendship and social media, and the second shows how a student juggles classes, childcare, and work.
- **Chapter 10, Interpersonal Relationship Types**, covers friendship, love, family, and workplace relationships; and two of their dark sides: jealousy and violence. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with masculine and feminine orientation. *New material in this chapter* includes nutshell tables and a tightening and updating of the narrative. The Revel version of this chapter includes a new multimedia gallery that illustrates relationship types, new preview figure (10.1 Types of Love), and a new interactive exercise on love styles and personality. Two new videos with accompanying Self-Checks include an overview of family relationships, and interviews with students about their own experiences with jealousy.
- **Chapter 11, Interpersonal Conflict and Conflict Management**, covers the nature and principles of conflict and the strategies of effective conflict management. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with masculine and feminine orientation. The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with success. *New material in this chapter* includes a restructuring of the principles of conflict (the principles of content and

relationship conflict and conflict can occur in all forms are now covered under conflict issues), and a refocused and rewritten section on conflict management is presented as a multistep process. The Revel version includes a new interactive figure (11.3 Conflict Management Strategies), and two videos. The first video is a concept review of conflict and communication, and the second shows students talking about their own relationship conflicts.

- **Chapter 12, Interpersonal Power and Influence**, covers the principles of power and influence; power in the relationship, person, and message; and the misuses of power (sexual harassment, bullying, and power plays). The Cultural Map in this chapter deals with high- and low-power distance. *New material in this chapter* includes a major section on prosocial communication, which now concludes this chapter and the book. The Revel version of this chapter includes an interactive Cultural Map on high- and low-power distance, a new multimedia gallery about the different types of power, and a new interactive figure: 12.1 Six Principles of Power. The two videos are both about communication in the workplace: one in which a professional describes two very different managers and another in which a professional explains how she dealt with bullying from a co-worker.

## Features

This text is a complete learning package that will provide students with the opportunity to learn about the theories and research in interpersonal communication, and to acquire and practice the skills necessary for effective interpersonal interaction.

## Learning Objectives

Learning objectives are presented in the chapter opener, repeated in the text with each major head, and iterated again in the summary. This feature helps focus attention on the key concepts and principles discussed, and how this learning can be demonstrated.

## Preview Figures and Nutshell Summary Tables

Throughout the text, visuals preview the content of the sections, and Nutshell summary tables at the end of the sections help students review the content and fix it more firmly in memory.

## Interpersonal Choice Points and ViewPoints

Interpersonal Choice Points—brief scenarios that require you make an interpersonal communication choice—encourage students to apply the material in the chapter to varied specific interactions. They are designed to encourage the application of the research and theory discussed in the text to real-life situations. These appear throughout the text in the margins.

ViewPoints appear as captions to all the interior photos and ask you to consider a wide variety of issues in interpersonal communication. These are designed to encourage students to explore significant communication issues discussed in the chapter from a more personal point of view.

## Balance of Theory/Research and Skills

While a great deal of new research is integrated throughout the book, much of it is from the past five years, this text recognizes the practical importance of skill development and so gives considerable attention to mastering interpersonal skills. But it bases these skills on theory and research, which are discussed throughout the text. The boxes on Understanding Interpersonal Theory & Research from the previous edition have been integrated into the text narrative to give them a clearer context and the chapters greater continuity.

Like theory and research, interpersonal skills are discussed throughout this text. In addition, each chapter contains an Understanding Interpersonal Skills box. These boxes are designed to highlight some of the most important skills of interpersonal communication: Mindfulness, Cultural Sensitivity, Other-Orientation, Openness, Metacommunication, Flexibility, Expressiveness, Empathy, Supportiveness, Equality, and Interaction Management.

## Culture and Interpersonal Communication

As our knowledge of culture and its relevance to interpersonal communication grows, so must culture's presence in an interpersonal communication textbook and course. The text stresses the importance of culture to all aspects of interpersonal communication.

An entire chapter devoted to culture (Chapter 2, Culture and Interpersonal Communication) is presented as one of the foundation concepts for understanding interpersonal communication. This chapter covers the relationship of culture and interpersonal communication, the ways in which cultures differ, and the strategies to make intercultural communication more effective. In addition to this separate chapter, here are some of the more important discussions that appear throughout the text:

- the cultural dimension of context; and culture in complementary and symmetrical relationships, in the principle of adjustment, and in ethical questions (Chapter 1)
- the role of culture in the development of self-concept, accurate perception, implicit personality theory, the self-serving bias, and uncertainty (Chapter 3)
- listening, culture, and gender (Chapter 4)
- cultural and gender differences in politeness, directness, and assertiveness; and cultural identifiers, sexism, heterosexism, racism, and ageism in language and in listening (Chapter 5)
- culture and gesture, facial expression, eye communication, color, touch, paralanguage, silence, and time (Chapter 6)
- the influences of culture on emotions, and cultural customs as an obstacle to the communication of emotions (Chapter 7)
- conversational maxims, culture, and gender; culture and expressiveness; and the influence of culture on self-disclosure (Chapter 8)
- the influences of culture on interpersonal relationships and the stages of relationships (Chapter 9)
- cultural differences in friendship and loving, and culture and the family (Chapter 10)
- cultural influences on conflict and conflict management (Chapter 11)
- the cultural dimension of power (Chapter 12)

The Cultural Map feature returns to the basic cultural differences discussed in Chapter 2 and connects these concepts with the content of the various chapters.

People with disabilities may also be viewed from a cultural perspective, and in this edition, three special tables offer suggestions for more effective communication between people with and people without disabilities. These tables provide tips for communication between people with and without visual impairments (Table 5.4 in Chapter 5); with and without hearing difficulties (Table 6.3 in Chapter 6); and between people with and without speech and language disorders (Table 8.1 in Chapter 8).

## Politeness

Politeness in interpersonal communication is stressed throughout this text as one of the major features of effective interaction. Some of the major discussions include:

- politeness strategies for increasing attractiveness (Chapter 3)
- message politeness (Chapter 4)

- polite listening (Chapter 6)
- conversational politeness (Chapter 8)
- politeness theory of relationships (Chapter 9)
- politeness in conflict management (Chapter 11)

## Social Media

The ways and means of social media are integrated throughout the text. For example, the principle of anonymity in interpersonal communication is included as a basic principle because of its increasing importance due to social media. The ubiquity of the cell phone and texting has changed interpersonal communication forever and is recognized throughout the text. Likewise, dating, keeping in touch with family and friends, making friends, and engaging in conflict—and much more—is viewed in a world dominated by (not simply a world that includes) social media.

## In-Text Application

In print as well as in Revel, this text includes a variety of features that encourage interaction and self-exploration.

- *New to this edition*, integrated exercises appear throughout the text in every chapter. These exercises are part of the text narrative but require you to interact with and respond to the text material. Some of these are brand new and some of them have been revised and reconfigured from material in the previous edition.
- Interpersonal Choice Points that appear in the margins encourage you to apply the principles and skills of the text to specific interpersonal situations.
- ViewPoints captions encourage you to explore the implications of a variety of communication theories and research findings.
- Understanding Interpersonal Skills boxes ask for personal involvement that enables you to actively engage with these important skills.
- Ethics in Interpersonal Communication boxes present ethical issues and ask what you would do in each of the presented scenarios.

## End of Chapter

Each chapter has a two-part ending: (1) Summary, a numbered propositional summary of the major concepts that are discussed in the chapter, organized by major topic headings. Each topic heading also contains the learning objective. (2) Key Terms, a list of key terms that are used in the chapter (and included in the “Glossary of Interpersonal Communication Concepts” at the end of the text).

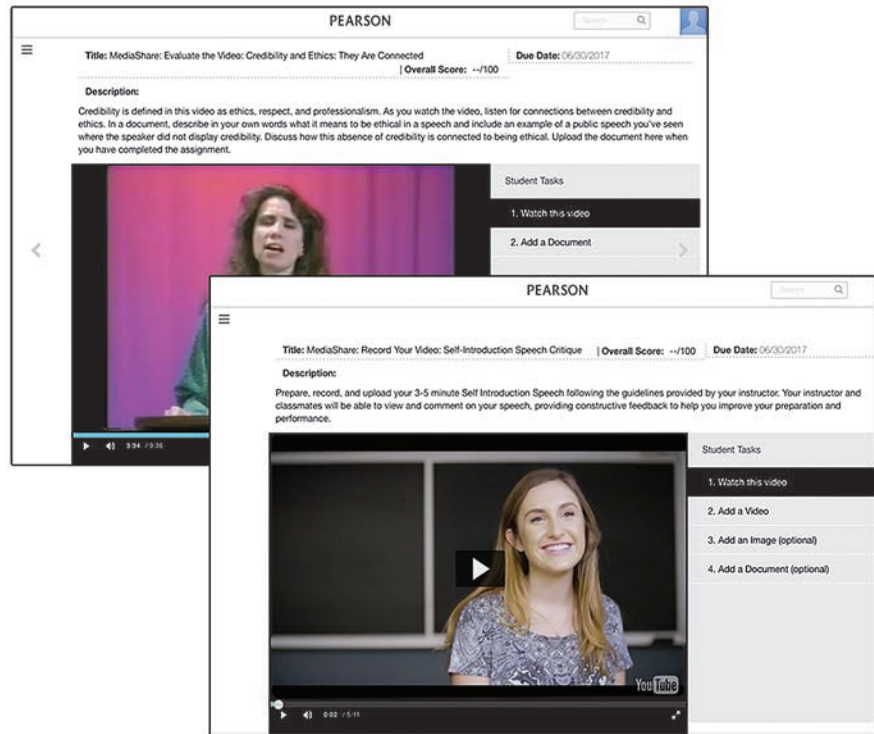
## Instructor and Student Resources

Key instructor resources include an Instructor’s Manual (ISBN 0-13-462440-8), TestBank, (ISBN 0-13-462438-6), and PowerPoint Presentation Package (ISBN 0-13-462449-1). These supplements are available on the catalog page for this text on [Pearson.com/us](http://Pearson.com/us) (instructor login required). MyTest online test-generating software (ISBN 0-13-462442-4) is available at [www.pearsonmytest.com](http://www.pearsonmytest.com) (instructor login required). For a complete list of the instructor and student resources available with the text, please visit the Pearson Communication catalog at [www.pearson.com/communication](http://www.pearson.com/communication).

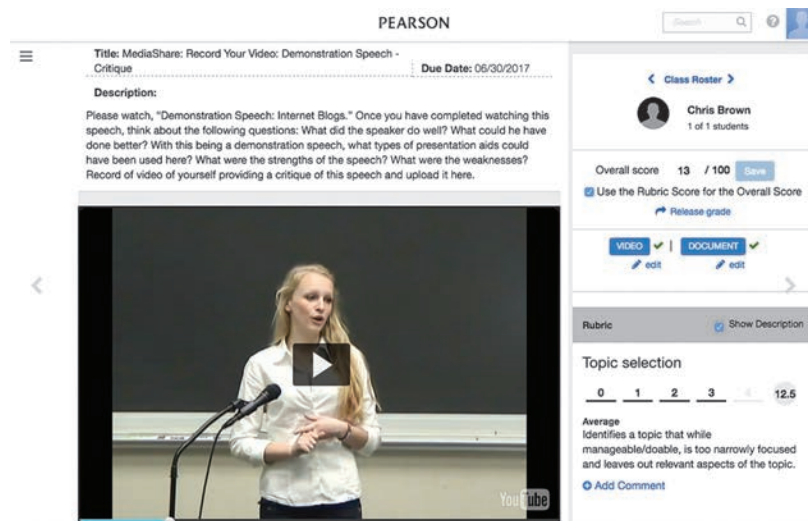
## Pearson MediaShare

Pearson’s comprehensive media upload tool allows students to post videos, images, audio, or documents for instructor and peer viewing, time-stamped commenting, and assessment. MediaShare is an easy, mobile way for students and professors to interact

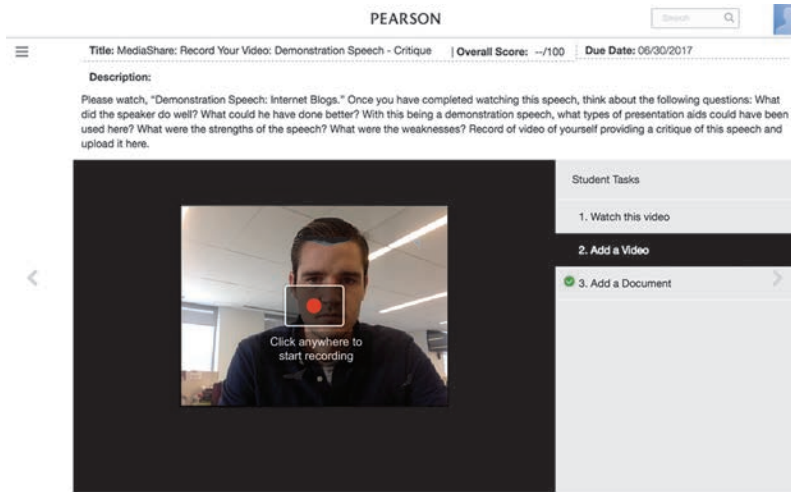
and engage with speeches, presentation aids, and other files. MediaShare gives professors the tools to provide contextual feedback to demonstrate how students can improve their skills.



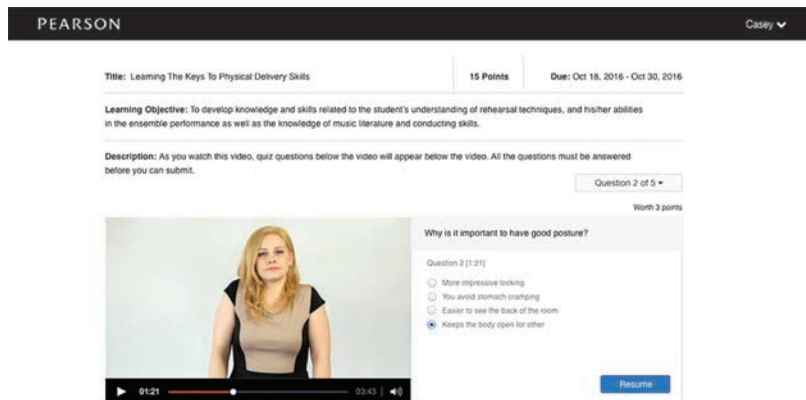
The best of MediaShare’s functionality, including student video submissions with grading and video quizzes, is now available to use and assign *within Revel*, making Revel an even more complete solution for Communication courses. By placing the key components of MediaShare within Revel, students have an all-inclusive space to practice and have their performance assessed, while actively learning through interactive course content. Revel with MediaShare is an unparalleled immersive learning experience for the Communication curriculum.



- Use MediaShare to assign or view speeches, video-based assignments, role-playing, and more in a variety of formats including video, Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.
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- Set up assignments for students with options for full-class viewing and commenting, or private comments between you and the student.
- Record video directly from a tablet, phone, or other webcam.
- Embed video from YouTube via assignments to incorporate current events into the classroom experience.



- Set up quiz questions on video assignments to ensure students master concepts and interact and engage with the media.
- Import grades into most learning management systems.
- Ensure a secure learning environment for instructors and students through robust privacy settings.



# Acknowledgments

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*Joseph A. DeVito*

# Foundations of Interpersonal Communication



Effective and satisfying interpersonal communication rests on a solid foundation of knowledge and skills. *Resolve to build a really strong foundation for your own communication.*

## Chapter Topics

The Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Communication

The Elements of Interpersonal Communication

The Principles of Interpersonal Communication

## Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Identify the personal and professional benefits of studying interpersonal communication.
- 1.2** Define *interpersonal communication* and its essential elements including *source–receiver*, *messages*, *channels*, *noise*, *context*, *effects*, and *ethics*.
- 1.3** Paraphrase the principles of interpersonal communication.

This chapter introduces the study of interpersonal communication and explains why interpersonal communication is so important, examines the essential elements of this unique form of communication, and describes its major principles.

## The Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Communication

### 1.1 Identify the personal and professional benefits of studying interpersonal communication.

Fair questions to ask at the beginning of this text and this course are “What will I get out of this?” and “Why should I study interpersonal communication?” One very clear answer is given by the importance of interpersonal communication: it’s a major part of human existence that every educated person needs to understand. Much as you need to understand history, science, geography, and mathematics, for example, you need to understand how people interact (how people communicate interpersonally) and how people form relationships—both face-to-face and online. On a more practical level, you’ll learn the skills that will yield both personal and professional benefits.

### Personal Benefits

Your personal success and happiness depend largely on your effectiveness as an interpersonal communicator. Close friendships and romantic relationships are developed, maintained, and sometimes destroyed largely through your interpersonal interactions. Likewise, the success of your family relationships depends heavily on the interpersonal communication among members. For example, in a survey of 1,001 people over 18 years of age, 53 percent felt that a lack of effective communication was the major cause of marriage failure—significantly greater than money (38 percent) and in-law interference (14 percent) (How Americans Communicate, 1999).

Likewise, your success in interacting with neighbors, acquaintances, and people you meet every day depends on your ability to engage in satisfying conversation—conversation that’s comfortable and enjoyable.

### Professional Benefits

The ability to communicate interpersonally is widely recognized as crucial to professional success (Morreale & Pearson, 2008; Satell, 2015; Morreale, Valenzano, & Bauer, 2016). From the initial interview at a college job fair to interning, to participating in and then leading meetings, your skills at interpersonal communication will largely determine your success.

Employers want graduates who can communicate orally and in writing (Berrett, 2013). This ability is even considered more important than job-specific skills, which employers feel could be learned on the job. For example, one study found that among the 23 attributes ranked as “very important” in hiring decisions, “communication and interpersonal skills,” noted by 89 percent of the recruiters, was at the top of the list. This was a far higher percentage of recruiters than the percentage who noted “content of the core curriculum” (34 percent) or “overall value for the money invested in the recruiting effort” (33 percent) (Alsop, 2004). Interpersonal skills offer an important advantage for persons in finance (Messmer, 1999), play a significant role in preventing workplace violence (Parker, 2004), reduce medical mishaps and improve doctor–patient communication (Smith, 2004; Sutcliffe, Lewton, & Rosenthal, 2004), are one of six areas that define the professional competence of physicians and trainees (Epstein & Hundert, 2002), and contribute greatly to maintaining diversity in the workplace, team building, and employee morale (Johnson, 2017). In a survey of employers who were asked what colleges should place more emphasis on, 89 percent identified “the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing” as the highest of any skill listed (Hart

Research Associates, 2010). And in that same survey, the largest number of employers (84 percent), when asked what would prepare college students for success, identified “communication skills.” In still another survey of women and leadership, the ability to communicate and to build relationships—the essential of interpersonal communication—were noted among the competencies exemplified by top leaders (Goleman, 2013b). The importance of interpersonal communication skills extends over the entire spectrum of professions.

Clearly, interpersonal skills are vital to both personal and professional success. Understanding the theory and research in interpersonal communication and mastering its skills go hand in hand (Greene & Burleson, 2003). The more you know about interpersonal communication, the more insight and knowledge you’ll gain about what works and what doesn’t work. The more skills you have within your arsenal of communication strategies, the greater your choices for communicating in any situation. Put differently, the greater your knowledge and the greater the number of communication choices at your disposal, the greater the likelihood that you’ll be successful in achieving your interpersonal goals. You might look at this text and this course as aiming to enlarge your interpersonal communication choices and give you a greater number of options for communicating effectively than you had before this exposure to the study of interpersonal communication.

Because of the importance of choice—after all, your interpersonal messages and relationships are the result of the choices you make in any given situation—you’ll find boxes labelled *Interpersonal Choice Point* throughout the text. **Choice points** are simply moments when you need to make a choice, a decision, about your interpersonal communication—for example, about whom you communicate with, what you say, what you don’t say, how you phrase what you want to say, the photos you want to post and those you don’t, and so on. Some of the questions about choices will prove easy to answer while others will prove to be more difficult. This variation in difficulty mirrors real-life interpersonal communication; getting your meanings and feelings across is easy sometimes and very difficult at others. Let’s look first at the easy-difficult dimension and then at a choice point.

Consider the following situations and rate them on a continuum from easy to difficult (use 1 for extremely easy and 5 for extremely difficult).

- \_\_\_ 1. Impressing a recruiter at a job fair.
- \_\_\_ 2. Asking a work supervisor to be friends on Facebook.
- \_\_\_ 3. Breaking up a two-year romantic relationship because you’ve fallen out of love with your partner.
- \_\_\_ 4. Responding to a compliment about the way you dress.
- \_\_\_ 5. Reconnecting with a long-lost friend by phone.
- \_\_\_ 6. Voicing an opinion about religion in class that is contrary to the opinions of all others in the class.
- \_\_\_ 7. Crying at a movie you’re attending with three or four same-sex friends.
- \_\_\_ 8. Asking a relative to lie for you so you can get out of a family gathering.
- \_\_\_ 9. Introducing yourself to a group of people who are culturally very different from you.
- \_\_\_ 10. Asking an instructor for an extension on your term paper.
- \_\_\_ 11. Making small talk with someone you don’t know in an elevator.
- \_\_\_ 12. Meeting someone face-to-face with whom you’ve interacted romantically online.

If you have the opportunity to compare your continuum with those of others, you’ll probably find both similarities and differences. Reflecting on the easy-to-difficult interpersonal interactions will help you identify the skills you’d want to acquire or enhance as you make your varied interpersonal choices. Take a look at the first Interpersonal Choice Point which also explains the feature’s purpose and format.

## INTERPERSONAL CHOICE POINT

### Communicating an Image

The *Interpersonal Choice Point* feature is designed to help you apply the text material to real-life situations by first considering your available choices and then making a communication decision. For each choice point, try to identify, as specifically as possible, the advantages and disadvantages of your available choices. Of all your choices, ask yourself which response is likely to work best for you.

You're taking a course in interpersonal communication at a new college and you want to be liked by your fellow students. *What might you do to appear likeable and be accepted as an approachable person? What would you be sure to avoid doing?*

- a. smile and make eye contact
- b. compliment others frequently even for no reason
- c. dress a level above the average student
- d. speak in class—regularly asking and answering questions
- e. other

## The Elements of Interpersonal Communication

**1.2** Define *interpersonal communication* and its essential elements including *source–receiver*, *messages*, *channels*, *noise*, *context*, *effects*, and *ethics*.

Although this entire text is, in a sense, a definition of interpersonal communication, a working definition is useful at the start.

**Interpersonal communication** is *the verbal and nonverbal interaction between two (or sometimes more than two) interdependent people*. This relatively simple definition implies a variety of elements which we discuss in this section. But, first, let's look at some of the myths about interpersonal communication that can get in the way of a meaningful understanding and mastery of this area.

Examine your beliefs about interpersonal communication by responding to the following questions with T if you believe the statement is usually true or F if you believe the statement is usually false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Good communicators are born, not made.
- \_\_\_ 2. The more you communicate, the better you will be at it.
- \_\_\_ 3. In your interpersonal communication, a good guide to follow is to be as open, empathic, and supportive as you can be.
- \_\_\_ 4. When communicating with people from other cultures, it's best to ignore the differences and treat the other person just as you'd treat members of your own culture.
- \_\_\_ 5. Fear of meeting new people is detrimental and must be eliminated.
- \_\_\_ 6. When there is conflict, your relationship is in trouble.

As you probably figured out, all six statements are generally false. As you read this text, you'll discover not only why these beliefs are false but also the trouble you can get into when you assume they're true. For now, and in brief, here are some of the reasons each of the statements is generally false:

- 1. Effective communication is a learned skill; although some people are born brighter or more extroverted, everyone can improve their abilities and become more effective communicators.
- 2. It's not the amount of communication people engage in but the quality that matters; if you practice bad habits, you're more likely to grow less effective than more effective, so it's important to learn and follow the principles of effectiveness (Greene, 2003; Greene & Burleson, 2003).
- 3. Each interpersonal situation is unique, and therefore the type of communication appropriate in one situation may not be appropriate in another.
- 4. This assumption will probably get you into considerable trouble because people from different cultures often attribute different meanings to a message; members of different cultures also follow different rules for what is and is not appropriate in interpersonal communication.
- 5. Many people are nervous meeting new people, especially if these are people in authority; managing, not eliminating, the fear will enable you to become effective regardless of your current level of fear.
- 6. All meaningful relationships experience conflict; relationships are not in trouble when there is conflict, though dealing with conflict ineffectively can often damage the relationship.



The model presented in Figure 1.1 is designed to reflect the circular nature of interpersonal communication; both persons send messages simultaneously rather than in a linear sequence, where communication goes from Person 1 to Person 2 to Person 1 to Person 2 and on and on.

Each of the concepts identified in the model and discussed here may be thought of as a universal of interpersonal communication in that it is present in all interpersonal interactions: (1) **source–receiver** (including competence, encoding–decoding, and code-switching), (2) messages (and the metamesages of feedback and feedforward), (3) channels, (4) noise, (5) contexts, (6) effects, and (7) ethics (though not indicated in the diagram), is an overriding consideration in all interpersonal communication.

## Source–Receiver

Interpersonal communication involves at least two people. Each individual performs source functions (formulates and sends messages) and also performs receiver functions (perceives and comprehends messages). The term source–receiver emphasizes that both



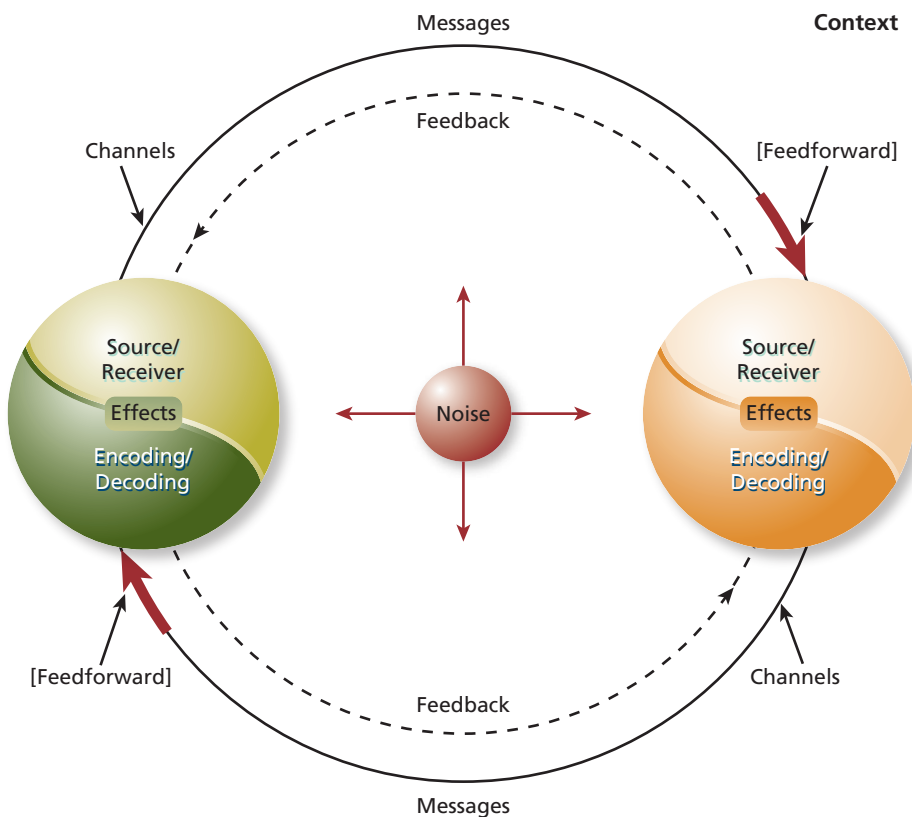
### VIEWPOINTS

#### Interpersonal Metaphors

Metaphors—figures of speech in which two unlike things are compared—are useful for providing different perspectives on interpersonal communication; they help you to look at interpersonal communication from different perspectives and help highlight different aspects of the interpersonal process. *How would you explain interpersonal communication in terms of metaphors such as a seesaw, a ball game, a television sitcom, a recliner, the weather, an opera, a good book, or a tug of war?*

**Figure 1.1 A Model of Interpersonal Communication**

After you read the section on the elements of interpersonal communication, you may wish to construct your own model of the process. In constructing this model, be careful that you don't fall into the trap of visualizing interpersonal communication as a linear or simple left-to-right, static process. Remember that all elements are interrelated and interdependent. *After completing your model, consider, for example: (1) Could your model also serve as a model of intrapersonal communication (communication with oneself)? Is the model applicable to both face-to-face and online communication? (2) What elements or concepts other than those noted here might be added to the model?*





functions are performed by each individual in interpersonal communication. This, of course, does not mean that people serve these functions equally. As you've no doubt witnessed, some people are (primarily) talkers and some people are (primarily) listeners. And some people talk largely about themselves and others participate more in the give and take of communication. In an interesting analysis of Twitter messages, two major types of users were identified (Bersin, 2013; Dean, 2010a):

- **Informers** were those who shared information and also replied to others; these made up about 20 percent.
- **Meformers** were those who mainly gave out information about themselves; these made up about 80 percent.

Who you are, what you know, what you believe, what you value, what you want, what you have been told, and what your attitudes are all influence what you say, how you say it, what messages you receive, and how you receive them. Likewise, the person you're speaking to and the knowledge that you think that person has greatly influences your interpersonal messages (Lau, Chiu, & Hong, 2001). Each person is unique; each person's communications are unique.

To complicate matters just a bit, we need to recognize that although interpersonal communication may take place between two close friends, for example, there is generally what might be called a **remote audience**. For example, you update your status on Facebook for your friends (your intended audience) to see. This is your intended audience and the audience to whom you're directing your message. But, it's likely (even probable) that your prospective employers will also see this as will others who may receive it from a member of your intended audience. These are your remote audiences. The important practical implication is to be aware of both your audiences and know that the dividing line between your intended and your remote audiences is getting thinner every day.

**Interpersonal Competence** Your ability to communicate effectively (as source and receiver) is your interpersonal **competence** (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989; Wilson & Sabee, 2003). Your competence includes, for example, the knowledge that, in certain contexts and with certain listeners, one topic is appropriate and another isn't. Your knowledge about the rules of nonverbal behavior—for example, the appropriateness of touching, vocal volume, and physical closeness—is also part of your competence. In short, interpersonal competence includes knowing how to adjust your communication according to the context of the interaction, the person with whom you're interacting, and a host of other factors discussed throughout this text.

You learn communication competence much as you learn to eat with a knife and fork—by observing others, by explicit instruction, and by trial and error. Some individuals learn better than others, though, and these are generally the people with whom you find it interesting and comfortable to talk. They seem to know what to say and how and when to say it.

A positive relationship exists between interpersonal competence on the one hand and success in college and job satisfaction on the other (Rubin & Graham, 1988; Wertz, Sorenson, & Heeren, 1988). So much of college and professional life depends on interpersonal competence—meeting and interacting with other students, teachers, or colleagues; asking and answering questions; presenting information or argument—that you should not find this connection surprising. Interpersonal competence also enables you to develop and maintain meaningful relationships in friendship, love, family, and work. Such relationships, in turn, contribute to the lower levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness observed in interpersonally competent people (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989).

**Encoding–Decoding** **Encoding** refers to the act of producing messages—for example, speaking or writing. **Decoding** is the reverse and refers to the act of understanding messages—for example, listening or reading. By sending your ideas via sound waves (in the case of speech) or light waves (in the case of writing), you're putting these ideas into a code, hence *encoding*. By translating sound or light waves into ideas, you're taking them out of a code, hence *decoding*. Thus, speakers and writers are called encoders,

and listeners and readers are called decoders. The term *encoding–decoding* is used to emphasize that the two activities are performed in combination by each participant. For interpersonal communication to occur, messages must be encoded and decoded. For example, when a parent talks to a child whose eyes are closed and whose ears are covered by stereo headphones, interpersonal communication does not occur because the messages sent are not being received.

**Code-Switching** Technically, code switching refers to using more than one language in a conversation, often in the same sentence (Bullock & Toribio, 2012; Thompson, 2013; Esen, 2016). And so a native Spanish speaker might speak most of a sentence in English and then insert a Spanish term or phrase. More popularly, however, **code-switching** refers to using different language styles depending on the situation. For example, you probably talk differently to a child than to an adult—in the topics you talk about and in the language you use. Similarly, when you text or tweet, you use a specialized language consisting of lots of abbreviations and acronyms that you discard when you write a college term paper or when you’re interviewing for a job.

The ability to code-switch serves at least two very important purposes. First, it identifies you as one of the group; you are not an outsider. It’s a way of bonding with the group. Second, it often helps in terms of making your meaning clearer; some things seem better expressed in one language or code than in another.

Code switching can create problems, however. When used to ingratiate yourself or make yourself seem one of the group when you really aren’t—and that attempt is obvious to the group members—code switching is likely to work against you. You risk being seen as an interloper, as one who tries to gain entrance to a group to which one really doesn’t belong. The other case where code switching creates problems is when you use the code appropriate to one type of communication in another where it isn’t appropriate, for example, when you use your Facebook or Twitter grammar during a job interview. Communication competence, then, involves the ability to code-switch when it’s appropriate—when it makes your message clearer and when it’s genuine.

## Messages

**Messages** are signals that serve as stimuli for a receiver and are received by one of our senses—auditory (hearing), visual (seeing), tactile (touching), olfactory (smelling), gustatory (tasting), or any combination of these senses. You communicate interpersonally by gesture and touch as well as by words and sentences. The clothes you wear communicate to others and, in fact, to yourself as well. The way you walk communicates, as does the way you shake hands, tilt your head, comb your hair, sit, smile, or frown. Similarly, the colors and types of cell phones, the wallpaper and screen savers on your computer, and even the type and power of your computer communicate messages about you. The photo and background theme you choose for your Twitter page reveals something about yourself beyond what your actual tweets reveal. Tweeters with the generic white bird photo and standard background communicate something quite different from the Tweeters who customize their pages with clever photos, original backgrounds, and sidebars. The same is true of Facebook pages. All of these signals are your interpersonal communication messages.



### VIEWPOINTS

#### On-Screen Competence

*What characters in television sitcoms or dramas do you think demonstrate superior interpersonal competence? What characters demonstrate obvious interpersonal incompetence? What specifically do they say or do—or don’t say or don’t do—that leads you to judge them as being or not being interpersonally competent?*

Interpersonal communication can take place by phone, through prison cell walls, through webcams, or face-to-face. Increasingly, it's taking place through computers, through Facebook and Twitter. Some of these messages are exchanged in real time. This is **synchronous communication**; the messages are sent and received at the same time, as in face-to-face and phone messages. Other messages do not take place in real time. This is **asynchronous communication**; the messages are sent at one time and received at another and perhaps responded to at still another time. For example, you might poke someone on Facebook today, but that person may not see it until tomorrow and may not poke you back until the next day. Similarly, you might find a tweet or a blog post today that was actually written weeks or even years ago.

Messages may be intentional or unintentional. They may result from the most carefully planned strategy as well as from the unintentional slip of the tongue, lingering body odor, or nervous twitch. Messages may refer to the world, people, and events as well as to other messages (DeVito, 2003a).

Messages that are about other messages are called **metamessages** and represent many of your everyday communications; they include, for example, "Do you understand?," "Did I say that right?," "What did you say?," "Is it fair to say that . . .?," "I want to be honest," "That's not logical." Two particularly important types of metamessages are feedback and feedforward.

## VIEWPOINTS

### Feedback and Relationships

If we were to develop a feedback theory of relationships, it would hold that satisfying friendships, romantic relationships, or workplace relationships may be characterized by feedback that is positive, person-focused, immediate, low in monitoring (not self-censored), and supportive—and that unsatisfying relationships are characterized by feedback that is negative, self-focused, non-immediate, high in monitoring, and critical. *How effective is this "theory" in explaining the relationships with which you're familiar?*

**Feedback Messages** Throughout the interpersonal communication process, you exchange feedback—messages sent back to the speaker concerning reactions to what is said (Sutton, Hornsey, & Douglas, 2012). **Feedback** tells the speaker what effect she or he is having on listeners. On the basis of this feedback, the speaker may adjust, modify, strengthen, deemphasize, or change the content or form of the messages.

Feedback may come from yourself or from others. When you send a message—say, in speaking to another person—you also hear yourself. That is, you get feedback from your own messages: You hear what you say, you feel the way you move, you see what you write. In addition to this self-feedback, you get feedback from others. This feedback can take many forms. A frown or a smile, a yea or a nay, a pat on the back or a punch in the mouth are all types of feedback.

Feedback, of course, has significant effects on the receiver. For example, in one study, positive feedback on social networking sites, complimenting, say, the photo or profile, enhanced self-esteem and the sense of well-being whereas negative feedback (criticism, for example) resulted in a decrease in self-esteem and well-being (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

Sometimes feedback is easy to identify, but sometimes it isn't (Skinner, 2002). Part of the art of effective communication is to discern feedback and adjust your messages on the basis of that feedback.

**Feedforward Messages** **Feedforward** is information you provide before sending your primary message (Richards, 1968). Feedforward reveals something about the message to come. Examples of feedforward include the preface or table of contents of a book, the opening paragraph of a chapter or post, movie previews, magazine covers, e-mail subject headings, and introductions in public speeches. Feedforward may serve a variety of functions. For example, you might use feedforward to express your wish to chat a bit, saying something like "Hey, I haven't





seen you the entire week; what's been going on?" Or you might give a brief preview of your main message by saying something like "You'd better sit down for this; you're going to be shocked." Or you might ask others to hear you out before they judge you.

## Channel

The communication **channel** is the medium through which messages pass. It's a kind of bridge connecting source and receiver. Communication rarely takes place over only one channel; two, three, or four channels are often used simultaneously. For example, in face-to-face interaction, you speak and listen (vocal–auditory channel), but you also gesture and receive signals visually (gestural–visual channel), and you emit odors and smell those of others (chemical–olfactory channel). Often you communicate through touch (cutaneous–tactile channel). When you communicate online, you often send photo, audio, or video files in the same message or links to additional files and sites. In most situations, a variety of channels are involved.

Another way to think about channels is to consider them as the means of communication: for example, face-to-face contact, telephone, e-mail and snail mail, Twitter, instant messaging, news postings, Facebook, film, television, radio, smoke signals, or fax—to name only some.

Note that the channel imposes different restrictions on your message construction. For example, in e-mail you can pause to think of the right word or phrase, you can go on for as short or as long a time as you want without any threat of interruption or contradiction, and you can edit your message with ease. In face-to-face communication, your pauses need to be relatively short. You don't have the time to select just the right word or to edit, though we do edit a bit when we review what we said and put it in different words.

In this text, face-to-face communication and online/social media communication are integrated for a number of important reasons:

1. **It's the way we communicate today.** We interact face-to-face and online. Some interactions are likely exclusively face-to-face, while others are exclusively online. Increasingly, our interactions are with people with whom we communicate both online and offline.
2. **Online and offline communication are related.** The research and theory discussed here on face-to-face and on online communication inform each other. Most of the interpersonal theories discussed here were developed for face-to-face interaction but have much to say about online relationships as well.
3. **Employers expect employees to have both offline and online communication skill sets.** The ability to communicate orally and in writing (both online and offline) is consistently ranked among the most important qualities employers are looking for in new employees. For example, your employability will depend, in great part, on how effectively you communicate in your e-mails, in your phone conferences, in your Skype interviews, and in your in-person interviews.
4. **Both forms of communication are vital to current-day communication.** We increasingly develop, and maintain, relationships online with many of them moving to face-to-face interactions if the online interaction proves satisfying. And increasingly, relationships are dissolved through email and Facebook and Twitter posts.

Throughout this text, face-to-face and online communication are discussed, compared, and contrasted. Table 1.1 presents a brief summary of some communication concepts and some of the ways in which these two forms of communication are similar and different.

### INTERPERSONAL CHOICE POINT

#### Channels

You want to ask someone for a date and are considering how you might go about this. You regularly communicate with this person on Facebook as well as face-to-face at school. *How would you ask for a date?*

- a. on Facebook
- b. face-to-face
- c. phone
- d. e-mail
- e. other

**Table 1.1** Face-to-Face and Online Communication

	Face-to-Face Communication	Online Communication
<b>Sender</b>		
• Presentation of self and impression management	• Personal characteristics (sex, approximate age, race, etc.) are open to visual inspection; receiver controls the order of what is attended to; disguise is difficult.	• Personal characteristics are hidden and are revealed when you want to reveal them; anonymity is easy.
• Speaking turn	• You compete for the speaker's turn and time with the other person(s); you can be interrupted.	• It's always your turn; speaker time is unlimited; you can't be interrupted.
<b>Receiver</b>		
• Number	• One or a few who are in your visual field.	• Virtually unlimited.
• Opportunity for interaction	• Limited to those who have the opportunity to meet; often difficult to find people who share your interests.	• Unlimited.
• Third parties	• Messages can be overheard by or repeated to third parties but not with complete accuracy.	• Messages can be retrieved by others or forwarded verbatim to a third party or to thousands.
• Impression formation	• Impressions are based on the verbal and nonverbal cues the receiver perceives.	• Impressions are based on text messages and posted photos and videos.
<b>Context</b>		
• Physical	• Essentially the same physical space.	• Can be in the next cubicle or separated by miles.
• Temporal	• Communication is synchronous; messages are exchanged at the same (real) time.	• Communication may be synchronous (as in chat rooms) or asynchronous (where messages are exchanged at different times, as in e-mail).
<b>Channel</b>		
	• All senses participate in sending and receiving messages.	• Visual (for text, photos, and videos) and auditory.
<b>Message</b>		
• Verbal and nonverbal	• Words, gestures, eye contact, accent, vocal cues, spatial relationships, touching, clothing, hair, etc.	• Words, photos, videos, and audio messages.
• Permanence	• Temporary unless recorded; speech signals fade rapidly.	• Messages are relatively permanent.

## Noise

Technically, **noise** is anything that distorts a message—anything that prevents the receiver from receiving the message as the sender sent it. At one extreme, noise may prevent a message from getting from source to receiver. A roaring noise or line static can easily prevent entire messages from getting through to your receiver. At the other extreme, with virtually no noise interference, the message of the source and the message received are almost identical. Most often, however, noise distorts some portion of the message a source sends as it travels to a receiver. Four types of noise (**physical noise**, **physiological noise**, **psychological noise**, and **semantic noise**) are especially relevant and will help you identify sources of noise you'd want to lessen.

- **Physical noise** is interference that is external to both speaker and listener; it impedes the physical transmission of the signal or message. Examples include the screeching of passing cars, the hum of a computer, sunglasses, extraneous messages, illegible handwriting, blurred type or fonts that are too small or difficult to read, misspellings and poor grammar, and pop-up ads. Still another type of physical noise is extraneous information that makes what you want to find more difficult, for example, spam or too many photos on Facebook.
- **Physiological noise** is created by barriers within the sender or receiver, such as visual impairments, hearing loss, articulation problems, and memory loss.
- **Psychological noise** is mental interference in the speaker or listener and includes preconceived ideas, wandering thoughts, biases and prejudices, closed-mindedness, and extreme emotionalism. You're likely to run into psychological noise when you talk with someone who is closed-minded or who refuses to listen to anything he or she doesn't already believe.

- **Semantic noise** is interference that occurs when the speaker and listener have different meaning systems; examples include language or dialectical differences, the use of jargon or overly complex terms, and ambiguous or overly abstract terms whose meanings can be easily misinterpreted. You see this type of noise regularly in the medical doctor who uses “medicalese” without explanation or in the insurance salesperson who speaks in the jargon of the insurance industry.

A useful concept in understanding noise and its importance in communication is **signal-to-noise ratio**. **Signal** refers to information that you find useful; *noise* refers to information that is useless (to you). For example, a blog post that contains lots of useful information would be high on signal and low on noise; messages that contain lots of useless information are high on noise and low on signal. Spam, pop-ups, and advertisements for products you’re not interested in are good examples. When you do an online search for information, the advertisements and the irrelevant sites are noise; the information you’re looking for is the signal.

All communications contain noise. Noise cannot be totally eliminated, but its effects can be reduced. Making your language more precise, sharpening your skills for sending and receiving nonverbal messages, and improving your listening and feedback skills are some ways to combat the influence of noise.

## Context

Communication always takes place in a **context** or environment that influences the form and content of your messages. At times this context isn’t obvious or intrusive; it seems so natural that it’s ignored—like background music. At other times the context dominates, and the ways in which it restricts or stimulates your messages are obvious. Compare, for example, the differences among communicating in a funeral home, football stadium, formal restaurant, and a rock concert. The context of communication has at least four dimensions, all of which interact with and influence each other.

**Physical Dimension** The *physical dimension* is the tangible or concrete environment in which communication takes place—the room, hallway, or park; the boardroom; or the family dinner table. The size of the space, its temperature, and the number of people present in the physical space are also part of the physical dimension. In print media, such as magazines or newspapers, context includes the positioning of stories and news articles; an article on page 37 is identified as less important than an article on page 1 or 2. Twitter’s restriction of messages to 140 characters or fewer is an especially good example of the physical dimension influencing the message; Twitter requires you to abbreviate your message, while having coffee at Starbucks seems to encourage the opposite.

**Temporal Dimension** The *temporal dimension* has to do not only with the time of day and moment in history but also with where a particular message fits into the sequence of communication events. For example, a joke about illness told immediately after the disclosure of a friend’s sickness will be received differently than the same joke told in response to a series of similar jokes. Also, some channels (for example, face-to-face, chat rooms, and instant messaging) allow for synchronous communication in which messages are sent and received simultaneously. Other channels (for example, letter writing, e-mail, and social networking postings) are asynchronous; messages are sent and received at different times.

**Social–Psychological Dimension** The *social–psychological dimension* includes, for example, status relationships among the participants; roles and games that people play; norms of the society or group; and the friendliness, formality, or gravity of the situation. Social networks such as Facebook are informal and largely for fun communication; LinkedIn and Plaxo, on the other hand, are primarily for serious, business-oriented communication.



### VIEWPOINTS

#### **Signal and Noise Online**

Social media users are advised to be brief in their profiles and even in responding (Conniff & Nicks, 2014). Similarly, recruiters find that too much information on, say, Facebook, detracts from the candidate’s résumé (Bersin, 2013). *How would you explain this in terms of signal and noise?*



## THE CULTURAL MAP

Because of the importance of culture in all aspects of interpersonal communication, we return to culture and especially cultural differences in “The Cultural Map” feature. Consider these as reminders of the tremendous influence of culture on all aspects of interpersonal communication.



**Cultural Dimension** The *cultural context* includes the cultural beliefs and customs of the people communicating. When you interact with people from different cultures, you may each follow different rules of communication. This can result in confusion, unintentional insult, inaccurate judgments, and a host of other miscommunications. Similarly, communication strategies or techniques that prove satisfying to members of one culture may prove disturbing or offensive to members of another. In fact, research shows that you lose more information in an intercultural situation (approximately 50 percent) than in an intracultural situation (approximately 25 percent) (Li, 1999).

## Effects

Interpersonal communication always has some **effect** on one or more persons involved in the communication act. For every interpersonal interaction, there is some consequence, some effect. Generally, three types of effects are distinguished.

- **Cognitive effects** Cognitive effects are changes in your thinking. When you acquire information from a friend’s Facebook post about the time of the concert, for example, the effect is largely intellectual.
- **Affective effects** Affective effects are changes in your attitudes, values, beliefs, and emotions. Thus, when you become frightened hearing about the increase in gun violence, its effect is largely affective. Similarly, after a great experience with, say, a person of another culture, your feelings about that culture may change. Again, the effect is largely affective (but perhaps also intellectual).
- **Behavioral effects** Behavioral effects are changes in behaviors such as, for example, learning new dance movements, to throw a curve ball, to paint a room, or to use different verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

These effects are not separate; rather, they interact. In many cases, a single message—say, a conversation on homelessness—may inform you (intellectual effect), move you to feel differently (affective effect), and lead you to be more generous when you come upon a homeless person (behavioral effect).

In addition to effects on others, your interpersonal communications also have effects on you. Part of this effect is from your self-evaluation; you might smile after posting a really clever comment or feel bad after criticizing a friend. In addition, however, the reactions of others will have effects on you. For example, your clever comment may be retweeted 30 or 40 times (which is likely to have effects on your self-esteem and perhaps on your future tweeting) and your criticism of your friend may result in a broken relationship (which will have affective and behavioral effects).

## Ethics

Largely because interpersonal communication has effects on others, it also involves questions of **ethics**, the study of good and bad, of right and wrong, of moral and immoral. Ethics is concerned with actions, with behaviors; it's concerned with distinguishing between behaviors that are moral (ethical, good, and right) and those that are immoral (unethical, bad, and wrong). There's an ethical dimension to any interpersonal communication act (Neher & Sandin, 2007; Bok, 1978).

Consider some of the popular beliefs about ethics, perhaps one or more of which you hold personally. For each of the following statements, place a T (for true) if you feel the statement accurately explains what ethical behavior is and an F (for false) if you feel the statement does not accurately explain what ethical behavior is.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. My behavior is ethical when I feel (in my heart) that I'm doing the right thing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. My behavior is ethical when it is consistent with my religious beliefs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. My behavior is ethical when it is legal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. My behavior is ethical when the majority of reasonable people would consider it ethical.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. My behavior is ethical when the effect of the behavior benefits more people than it harms.

These statements are based on responses given to the question, "What does ethics mean to you?" discussed on the website of the Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. The following "answers" are intended to stimulate discussion and the formation of your own ethical code for interpersonal communication; they are not "answers" in the traditional sense. All five of these statements are (generally) false; none of them state a useful explanation of what is and what is not ethical.

- Statement 1 is false simply because people often do unethical things they feel are morally justified. Jack the Ripper killing prostitutes is a good historical example, but there are many current ones such as stalking (*I'm so in love I need to be with this person.*) or insurance scams (*My family needs the money more than the insurance company.*). Even though Jack, the stalker, and the scam artist may feel justified in their own minds, it doesn't make their behavior moral or ethical.
- Statement 2 must be false when you realize that different religions advocate very different kinds of behavior, often behaviors that contradict one another. Examples abound in almost every issue of a daily newspaper.
- Statement 3 must be false when you realize so much discrimination against certain people is perfectly legal in many parts of the world, and, in many countries, war (even "preemptive" war) is legal.
- Statement 4 is false because the thinking of the majority changes with the times and has often proven to be extremely immoral. The burning of people supposed to be witches or of those who spoke out against majority opinion (as in the Inquisition) are good examples.

- Statement 5 comes the closest to being possibly and sometimes true, but it's more generally false. The reason it's more false than true is that the burning of witches, for example, was in the interest of the majority, as was slavery and discrimination against gay men and lesbians, certain religions, or different races. But despite this majority interest, we'd readily recognize these actions as immoral.

So, when is behavior ethical, and when is it unethical? Lots of people have come up with lots of theories. If you take an *objective view*, you'd claim that the ethical nature of an act—any act—depends on standards that apply to all people in all situations at all times. If lying, advertising falsely, using illegally obtained evidence, and revealing secrets, for example, are considered unethical, then they'd be considered unethical regardless of the circumstances surrounding them or of the values and beliefs of the culture in which they occur.

If you take a *subjective view*, you'd claim that the morality of an act depends on a specific culture's values and beliefs as well as on the particular circumstances. Thus, from a subjective position, you would claim that the end might justify the means—a good result can justify the use of unethical means to achieve that result. You would further argue that lying is wrong to win votes or to sell cigarettes but that lying can be ethical if the end result is positive (such as trying to make someone who is unattractive feel better by telling them they look great or telling a critically ill person that they'll feel better soon).

In addition to this introductory discussion, ethical dimensions of interpersonal communication are presented in each chapter in Ethics in Interpersonal Communication boxes.

## ETHICS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

### Ethical Standards

Each field of study defines what is not ethical to its concerns. Here are just a few to highlight some communication-oriented codes:

- The National Communication Association Ethical Credo
- Blogger's Ethics
- The Twitter Rules
- Online Journalism
- Radio-Television News Directors Association and Foundation Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

### Ethical Choice Point

You'll also find it interesting to look up the code of ethics for the profession you're in or planning on entering. Before you do so, however, think about what you consider ethical communication. *What ethical standards do you follow in your own communication (online and face-to-face)? What ethical principles do you, even if only rarely, violate?*

Table 1.2 presents a brief summary of the essential elements of interpersonal communication.

**Table 1.2 In a Nutshell** The Elements of Interpersonal Communication

Elements	Meaning
Source–receiver	The sender–receiver, the person who both sends and receives messages during communication.
Messages	The verbal and nonverbal signals that are sent by the source/encoder and received by the receiver/decoder.
Channels	The media through which the signals are sent.
Noise	Disturbances that interfere with the receiver receiving the message sent by the source.
Context	The physical, social-psychological, temporal, and cultural environment in which the communication takes place.
Effects	Interpersonal communication can have cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects on others and on yourself.
Ethics	The morality, the rightness-wrongness aspect of communication behavior.

## UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

### Mindfulness: A State of Mental Awareness

**Mindfulness** is a state of mental awareness; in a mindful state, you're conscious of your reasons for thinking or communicating in a particular way. You're conscious of the uniqueness of the situation and of the many choices you have for interacting (Beard, 2014). And, especially important in interpersonal communication, you become aware of your choices. You act with an awareness of your available choices.

Its opposite, **mindlessness**, is a lack of conscious awareness of your thinking or communicating (Langer, 1989). To apply interpersonal skills appropriately and effectively, you need to be mindful of the unique communication situation you're in, of your available communication options or choices, and of the reasons why one option is likely to prove better than the others. You can look at this text and this course in interpersonal communication as a means of awakening your mindfulness about the way you engage in interpersonal communication. After you complete this course and this text, you should be much more mindful about all your interpersonal interactions (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004; Sagula & Rice, 2004). In addition, mindfulness has been found to improve scores on verbal reasoning tests, increase short-term memory, and decrease mind wandering (Mrazek, Franklin, Phillip, Baird, & Schooler, 2013). It has also been found to reduce depression in adolescents (Raes, Griffith, Van der Gucht, & Williams, 2013).

None of this is to argue that you should be mindful always and everywhere. Certainly, there are times when mind wandering may help you develop a great idea (Hurley, 2014). But, generally, it's mindfulness that needs to be practiced.

### Communicating with Mindfulness

To increase mindfulness in general, try the following suggestions (Langer, 1989; Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000):

- **Create and re-create categories.** Learn to see objects, events, and people as belonging to a wide variety of categories. Try to see, for example, your prospective romantic partner in a variety of roles—child, parent, employee, neighbor, friend, financial contributor, and so on. Avoid storing in memory an image of a person with only one specific label; if you do, you'll find it difficult to re-categorize the person later.
- **Be open to new information and points of view,** even when these contradict your most firmly held stereotypes. New information forces you to reconsider what might be outmoded ways of thinking. New information

can help you challenge long-held but now inappropriate beliefs and attitudes. Be willing to see your own and others' behaviors from a variety of viewpoints, especially from the perspective of people very different from yourself.

- **Beware of relying too heavily on first impressions** (Langer, 1989; Beard, 2014). Treat your first impressions as tentative—as hypotheses that need further investigation. Be prepared to revise, reject, or accept these initial impressions.
- **Be aware of possible misinterpretations in the message.** Make sure it's interpreted correctly. For example, you can paraphrase or restate the message in different ways or you can ask the person to paraphrase.
- **Become conscious of unproductive communication patterns.** For example, in a conflict situation, one common pattern is that each person brings up past relationship injustices. If you notice this happening, stop and ask yourself if this pattern is productive. If not, consider what you can do to change it. For example, in this conflict example, you can refuse to respond in kind and thereby break the cycle.
- **Remind yourself of the uniqueness of this communication situation.** Consider how you can best adapt your messages to this unique situation. For example, you may want to be especially positive to a friend who is depressed but not so positive to someone who betrayed a confidence.
- **Identify and evaluate your communication choices.** Especially in delicate situations (for example, when expressing anger or communicating commitment messages), it's wise to pause, think over the situation mindfully, and identify and evaluate your choices (DeVito, 2003b).

### Working with Mindfulness

As you think about mindfulness, reflect on your own tendencies to communicate mindlessly and mindfully. *Do you regularly examine your choices before you send your message? In which situations are you more apt to communicate mindlessly? For example, when compared to face-to-face communication, are you more or less mindful when communicating on Facebook, Twitter, or other social network sites? If there is a difference, why do you suppose it exists? Do you communicate mindfully with certain people and mindlessly with others?*

# The Principles of Interpersonal Communication

## 1.3 Paraphrase the principles of interpersonal communication.

Now that the nature of interpersonal communication and its elements are clear, we can explore some of the more specific axioms or principles that are common to all or most interpersonal encounters. These principles are the work of a wide variety of researchers (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, 1977, 1978; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 2011).

## Interpersonal Communication Exists on a Continuum

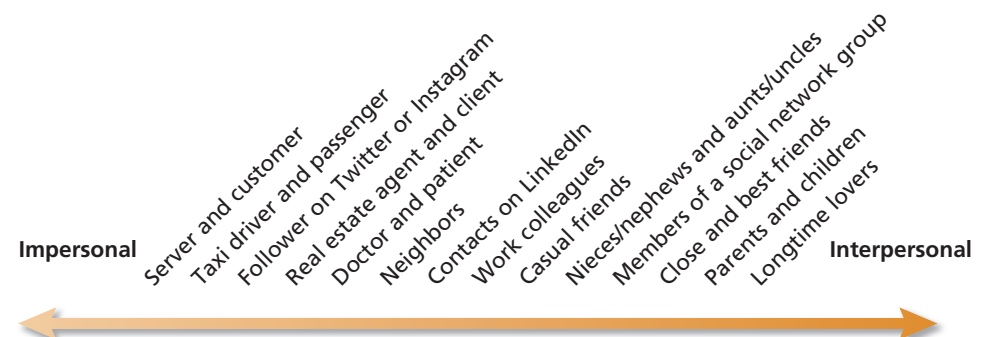
Interpersonal communication exists along a continuum that ranges from relatively impersonal to highly personal (Miller, 1978, 1990). At the impersonal end of the spectrum, you have simple conversation between people who really don't know each other—the server and the customer, for example. At the highly personal end is the communication that takes place between people who are intimately interconnected—a father and son, two longtime lovers, or best friends, for example. A few characteristics distinguish the impersonal from the personal forms of communication.

- **Social role versus personal information.** Notice that, in the impersonal example, the individuals are likely to respond to each other according to the *roles* they are currently playing; the server treats the customer not as a unique individual but as one of many customers. And the customer, in turn, acts toward the server not as a unique individual but as he or she would act with any server. The father and the son, however, react to each other as unique individuals. They act on the basis of *personal information*.
- **Societal versus personal rules.** Notice too that the server and the customer interact according to the *rules of society* governing the server–customer interaction. The father and the son, on the other hand, interact on the basis of *personally established rules*. The way they address each other, their touching behavior, and their degree of physical closeness, for example, are unique to them and are established by them rather than by society.
- **Social versus personal messages.** Still another difference is found in the messages exchanged. The messages that the server and customer exchange, for example, are themselves *impersonal*; there is little personal information exchanged and there is little emotional content in the messages they exchange. In the father–son example, however, the messages may run the entire range and may at times be *highly personal*, with lots of personal information and lots of emotion.

Figure 1.2 depicts one possible interpersonal continuum.

### Figure 1.2 An Interpersonal Continuum

Here is one possible interpersonal continuum. Other people would position the relationships differently. What would your interpersonal continuum look like? Try constructing one for both your face-to-face and online relationships.





## Interpersonal Communication Involves Interdependent Individuals

Interpersonal communication is the communication that takes place between people who are in some way “connected.” Interpersonal communication thus includes what takes place between a son and his father, an employer and an employee, two sisters, a teacher and a student, two lovers, two friends, and so on. Although largely dyadic (two-person) in nature, interpersonal communication is often extended to include small intimate groups such as the family or group of friends. Even within a family, however, the communication that takes place is often dyadic—mother to child, father to mother, daughter to son, and so on.

Not only are the individuals simply “connected”—they are also interdependent: What one person does has an impact on the other person. The actions of one person have consequences for the other person. In a family, for example, a child’s trouble with the police affects the parents, other siblings, extended family members, and perhaps friends and neighbors.

In much the same way that Facebook may have changed the definition of friendship, it may also have changed the definition of interpersonal communication. Sending a message to your closest 15 friends who then respond to you and the others would be considered interpersonal communication by some theorists and not by others. Online chats and phone and Skype conferences, on the other hand, are also considered interpersonal by some and not by others. Still another issue is the blurring of the lines between what is interpersonal and what is public. When you send a message to a friend on any of the social media sites, that message is, potentially at least, a public message. Although your intended message may be interpersonal—between you and a close friend, say—that message can (and often does) become a public one—between you and people with whom you have absolutely no connection.

## Interpersonal Communication Is Inherently Relational

Because of this interdependency, interpersonal communication is inevitably and essentially relational in nature. Interpersonal communication takes place within a relationship—it has an impact on the relationship; it defines the relationship.

The communication that takes place in a relationship is in part a function of that relationship. That is, the way you communicate is determined in great part by the kind of relationship that exists between you and the other person. You interact differently with your interpersonal communication instructor and your best friend; you interact with a sibling in ways very different from the ways in which you interact with a neighbor, a work colleague, or a casual acquaintance. You interact on Facebook and Twitter in ways very different from the way you interact in a face-to-face situation.

But also notice that the way you communicate, the way you interact, influences the kind of relationship you develop. If you interact with a person in friendly ways, you’re likely to develop a friendship. If you regularly exchange hateful and hurtful messages, you’re likely to develop an antagonistic relationship. If you regularly express respect and support for each other, a respectful and supportive relationship is likely to develop. This is surely one of the most obvious observations you can make about interpersonal communication. And yet many people seem not to appreciate this very clear relationship between what they say and the relationships that develop (or deteriorate).

At the same time that interpersonal communication is relational, it also says something about you. Regardless of what you say, you are making reference, in some way, to yourself—to who you are and to what you’re thinking and feeling, to what you value. Even your “likes” on Facebook, research shows, can reveal, for example, your sexual

orientation, age, intelligence, and drug use; and photos—depending on the smile—can communicate your level of personal well-being (Entis, 2013).

## Interpersonal Communication Is a Transactional Process

A **transactional perspective** views interpersonal communication as (1) a process with (2) elements that are *interdependent* and (3) participants who are mutually influential. Figure 1.3 visually explains this transactional view and distinguishes it from an earlier, linear view of how interpersonal communication works.

**Interpersonal Communication Is a Process** Interpersonal communication is best viewed as an ever-changing, circular process. Everything involved in interpersonal communication is in a state of flux: you're changing, the people you communicate with are changing, and your environment is changing. Sometimes these changes go unnoticed and sometimes they intrude in obvious ways, but they're always occurring.

One person's message serves as the stimulus for another's message, which serves as a stimulus for the first person's message, and so on. Throughout this circular process, each person serves simultaneously as a speaker *and* a listener, an actor *and* a reactor. Interpersonal communication is a mutually interactive process.

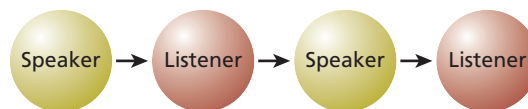
This circular process seems more true of face-to-face interactions than of social media interactions. For example, in an analysis of tweets, one researcher found that a full 80 percent of users simply sent out information about themselves (Dean, 2010a). Only 20 percent replied to the tweets of others. In face-to-face interactions, you have to respond in some way—even if you choose to say nothing.

**Elements are Interdependent** In interpersonal communication, not only are the individuals interdependent, as noted earlier, but the varied elements of communication are also interdependent. Each element—each part—of interpersonal communication is intimately connected to the other parts and to the whole. For example, there can be no source without a receiver; there can be no message without a source; there can be no feedback without a receiver. Because of interdependency, a change in any one element causes changes in the others. For example, you're talking with a group of fellow

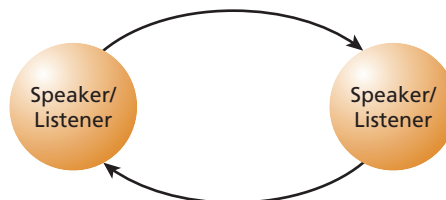
### Figure 1.3 The Linear and Transactional Views of Interpersonal Communication

The top figure represents a linear view of communication in which the speaker speaks and the listener listens. The bottom figure represents a transactional view, the view favored by most communication theorists, in which each person serves simultaneously as speaker and listener; at the same time that you send messages, you also receive messages from your own communications as well as from the reactions of the other person(s).

**Linear View**



**Transactional View**



students about a recent examination, and your professor joins the group. This change in participants leads to other changes—perhaps in the content of what you say, perhaps in the manner in which you express it. But regardless of what change is introduced, other changes result.

**Mutual Influence** In a transaction process, each individual influences the other, to some extent. For example, in face-to-face conversation, what you say influences what the other person says, which influences what you say, and so on. This mutual influence is the major characteristic distinguishing traditional media from social media. In traditional media—for example, newspapers, magazines, television, and film—the communication goes in one direction—from the media to you, as depicted in Figure 1.4(a). It’s basically a linear view of communication, which was depicted in Figure 1.3. In social media—for example, photo and video sharing, social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and wikis—the communication goes in both directions, as depicted in Figure 1.4(b). Over the last decade or so, traditional media—most notably television—have been moving in the direction of social media, of mutual interaction with, for example, news shows inviting tweets and reading them on air, voting for your favorite couple on *Dancing with the Stars*, or rating movies on Netflix. Of course, you can interact—but to a very limited extent—with traditional media such as newspapers and magazines by, for example, writing letters to the editor, asking for advice from columnists such as Dear Abby, or renewing or not renewing your subscription. With the move of newspapers and magazines (and textbooks) to a digital platform, traditional media will come to resemble—to a large extent—social media.

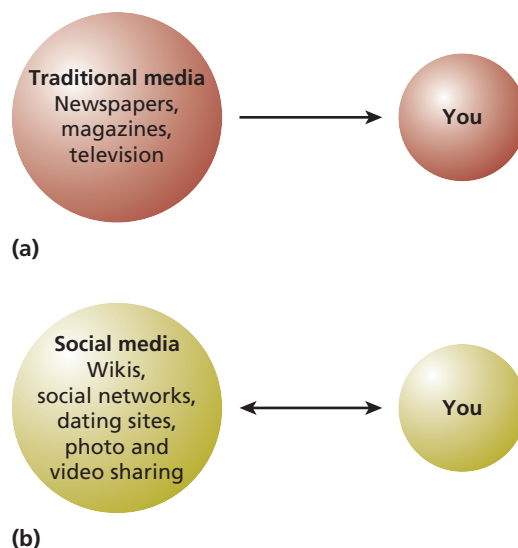
## Interpersonal Communication Serves a Variety of Purposes

Interpersonal communication, whether face-to-face or online, is purposeful and serves a variety of purposes. Five such purposes can be identified: to learn, to relate, to influence, to play, and to help.

**To Learn** Interpersonal communication enables you to learn, to better understand the external world—the world of objects, events, and other people. When you read the tweets from your followers, you’re learning about them but also about the world they live in—whether it’s down the road or across an ocean. Although a great deal of

**Figure 1.4** Traditional and Social Media

In traditional media (a), the messages flow from the media to the individual with little opportunity for interaction. In social media (b), the messages go in both directions: from the media to the individual and from the individual to the media.



information comes from the media, you probably discuss and ultimately learn or internalize information through interpersonal interactions. In fact, your beliefs, attitudes, and values are probably influenced more by interpersonal encounters than by the media or even by formal education.

Most important, however, interpersonal communication helps you learn about yourself. By talking about yourself with others, you gain valuable feedback on your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Through these communications, you also learn how you appear to others—who likes you, who dislikes you, and why. This function, you'll note, is written into the very fabric of Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, where commenting, recommending, and liking for a post can be indicated so easily.

**To Relate** Interpersonal communication helps you relate. You communicate your friendship or love through your interpersonal communication; at the same time, you react and respond to the friendship and love messages of others. When you poke someone on Facebook, you're indicating your desire to relate to that person, to communicate with him or her. Such communication is at the heart of one of the greatest needs people have: to establish and maintain close relationships. You want to feel loved and liked, and in turn you want to love and like others. Such relationships help to alleviate loneliness and depression, enable you to share and heighten your pleasures, and generally make you feel more positive about yourself.

**To Influence** Very likely, you influence the attitudes and behaviors of others in your interpersonal encounters. You may wish others to vote a particular way, try a new diet, buy a new book, listen to a record, see a movie, take a specific course, think in a particular way, believe that something is true or false, or value some idea—the list is endless. A good deal of your time is probably spent in interpersonal persuasion. Some researchers, in fact, would argue that all communication is persuasive and that all our communications seek some persuasive goal.

This influencing function is seen on social media sites in at least two different ways: (1) direct influence attempts (advertisements or friends urging you to sign up for a cause or to join a group) and (2) indirect influence attempts (reading that your friends have seen a particular movie and enjoyed it, or a newsfeed announcing that one of your friends has joined a cause or bought a ticket to a play or concert, or is signing up for a particular group or cause).

## VIEWPOINTS

### Blogs, Etc.

Blogs and social networking websites are among the chief means by which people express themselves interpersonally but also to a broader audience. *How would you compare the typical blog post and the typical Facebook status update in terms of the five purposes of interpersonal communication identified here?*

**To Play** Talking with friends about your weekend activities, discussing sports or dates, telling stories and jokes, tweeting, and posting a clever joke or photo on some social media site and in general just passing the time are play functions. Far from frivolous, this extremely important purpose gives your activities a necessary balance and your mind a needed break from all the seriousness around you. In online communication, perhaps the most obvious forms of play are the interactive games in a real or virtual reality environment. In the process, players develop useful skills such as the ability to take the perspective of another person (Tynes, 2007). And even certain forms of cyberflirting may be viewed as play (Whitty, 2003b).

**To Help** Therapists of various kinds serve a helping function professionally by offering guidance through interpersonal interaction. But everyone interacts to help in everyday encounters: you console a friend who has broken off a love affair, counsel another student about courses to take, or offer advice to a colleague about work. Social media websites such as LinkedIn and Plaxo and even Facebook and Twitter are used extensively for securing the help of others and giving help to others. Success in accomplishing this helping function, professionally or



otherwise, depends on your knowledge and skill in interpersonal communication.

## Interpersonal Communication Is Ambiguous

An ambiguous message is a message that can be interpreted as having more than one meaning. Sometimes **ambiguity** occurs because people use words that can be interpreted differently. Informal time language offers good examples; for example, the expressions *soon*, *right away*, *in a minute*, *early*, and *late*, can easily be interpreted very differently by different people.

Some degree of ambiguity exists in all interpersonal communication: all messages are ambiguous to some degree. When you express an idea, you never communicate your meaning exactly and totally; rather, you communicate your meaning with some reasonable accuracy—enough to give the other person a reasonably clear idea of what you mean. Sometimes, of course, you're less accurate than you anticipated. Perhaps your listener "gets the wrong idea" or "gets offended" when you only meant to be humorous, or the listener "misunderstands your emotional meaning." Because of this inevitable uncertainty, you may qualify what you're saying, give an example, or ask, "Do you know what I mean?" These additional explanations help the other person understand your meaning and reduce uncertainty (to some degree).

This quality of ambiguity makes it extremely important to resist jumping to conclusions about the motives of a speaker. For example, if someone doesn't poke you back, it may mean that the person is not interested in communicating with you, or it may be a function of information overload or a lack of knowledge in how to poke back or being away from the computer. Similarly, if someone stops following you on Twitter or unfriends you on Facebook, it may simply be a mistake. Meaning is in the person, not in the words or in the photos posted.

All relationships contain uncertainty. Consider one of your own close interpersonal relationships and answer the following questions; use a 6-point scale, with 1 meaning that you are completely or almost completely uncertain about the answer and 6 meaning that you are completely or almost completely certain of the answer.

- \_\_\_ 1. What can or can't you say to each other in this relationship?
- \_\_\_ 2. Do you and this person feel the same way about each other? How closely would your descriptions match?
- \_\_\_ 3. How would you and this person describe this relationship?
- \_\_\_ 4. What is the future of the relationship? Do you both see the relationship's future in the same way?

It's very likely that you were not able to respond with sixes for all four questions, and equally likely that the same would be true for your relationship partner. Your responses to these questions—adapted from a relationship uncertainty scale (Knoblock & Solomon, 1999)—and similar other questions illustrate that you probably experience some degree of uncertainty about (1) the norms that govern your relationship communication (question 1), (2) the degree to which you and your partner see the relationship in similar ways (question 2), (3) the definition of the relationship (question 3), and (4) the relationship's future (question 4).

A different kind of ambiguity—called **strategic ambiguity**—is used when you want to be ambiguous, and it is seen in a variety of situations (Eisenberg, 2007). The interviewer who compliments you on your interview (without actually offering you the job) may be acting strategically ambiguous to keep you interested in the position while the

### INTERPERSONAL CHOICE POINT

#### Reducing Relationship Ambiguity

You've gone out with someone for several months. At this point, you want to reduce ambiguity about the future of the relationship and discover your partner's level of commitment. But you don't want to scare your partner. *What would you do to reduce this ambiguity?*

- a. ask the person directly
- b. ask a mutual friend
- c. just act as if the relationship were at the level you desire
- d. make a joke about it by saying something like: "So, when do we get married?"
- e. other





### VIEWPOINTS

#### **Relationship Ambiguity**

*How would you describe the ambiguity that exists in your friendships or romantic relationships? Are there some things you'd like to be more certain about? Are there some things you'd like to remain ambiguous?*

company interviews more and perhaps better candidates. The romantic partner who avoids moving in together but who professes a desire to do so may be giving ambiguous signals in order to leave open both possibilities—to move in together or not.

## Interpersonal Relationships May Be Symmetrical or Complementary

Interpersonal relationships can be described as either symmetrical or complementary (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). In a **symmetrical relationship**, the two individuals mirror each other's behavior (Bateson, 1972). If one member nags, the other member responds in kind. If one member is pas-

sionate, the other member is passionate. If one member expresses jealousy, the other member also expresses jealousy. If one member is passive, so is the other. The relationship is one of equality, with the emphasis on minimizing the differences between the two individuals.

Note the problems that can arise in this type of relationship. Consider the situation of a couple in which both members are very aggressive. The aggressiveness of one person fosters aggressiveness in the other, which fosters increased aggressiveness in the first individual. As this cycle escalates, the aggressiveness can no longer be contained and the relationship is consumed by the aggression.

In a **complementary relationship**, the two individuals engage in different behaviors. The behavior of one serves as the stimulus for the other's complementary behavior. In complementary relationships, the differences between the parties are maximized. The people occupy different positions, one superior and the other inferior, one passive and the other active, one strong and the other weak. At times, cultures establish such relationships—for example, the complementary relationship between teacher and student or between employer and employee.

## Interpersonal Communication Refers to Content and Relationship

Messages may refer to the real world (content messages); for example, to the events and objects you see before you. At the same time, however, they also may refer to the relationship between the people communicating (relationship messages). For example, a judge may say to a lawyer, "See me in my chambers immediately." This simple message has both a content aspect, which refers to the response expected (namely, that the lawyer will see the judge immediately), and a relationship aspect, which says something about the relationship between the judge and the lawyer and, as a result of this relationship, about how the communication is to be dealt with. Even the use of the simple command shows that there is a status difference between the two parties. This difference can perhaps be seen most clearly if you imagine the command being made by the lawyer to the judge. Such a communication appears awkward and out of place because it violates the normal relationship between judge and lawyer.

In any two communications, the **content dimension** may be the same, but the relationship aspect may be different, or the relationship aspect may be the same and the content dimension different. For example, the judge could say to the lawyer, "You had better see me immediately." or "May I please see you as soon as possible?" In both cases, the content is essentially the same; that is, the message about the expected response is the same. But the **relationship dimension** is quite different. The first message signifies

a definite superior–inferior relationship; the second signals a more equal relationship, one that shows respect for the lawyer.

At times the content is different but the relationship is essentially the same. For example, a daughter might say to her parents, “May I go away this weekend?” or “May I use the car tonight?” The content of the two questions is clearly very different. The relationship dimension, however, is the same. Both questions clearly reflect a superior–inferior relationship in which permission to do certain things must be secured.

Problems between people can easily result from the failure to recognize the distinction between the content and relationship dimensions of communication. Consider the following interchange:

<i>Dialogue</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>He:</i> I’m going bowling tomorrow. The guys at the plant are starting a team.	He focuses on the content and ignores any relationship implications of the message.
<i>She:</i> Why can’t we ever do anything together?	She responds primarily on a relationship level, ignores the content implications of the message, and expresses her displeasure at being ignored in his decision.
<i>He:</i> We can do something together anytime; tomorrow’s the day they’re organizing the team.	Again, he focuses almost exclusively on the content.

This example reflects research findings that men generally focus more on the content while women focus more on the relationship dimensions of communication (Ivy & Backlund, 2000; Pearson, West, & Turner, 1995; Wood, 1994). Once you recognize this difference, you may be better able to remove a potential barrier to communication between the sexes by being sensitive to the orientation of the opposite sex. Here is essentially the same situation but with added sensitivity:

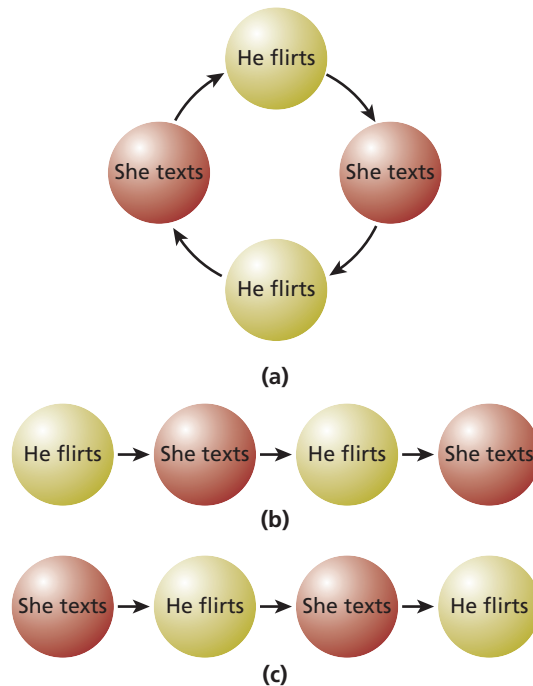
<i>Dialogue</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>He:</i> The guys at the plant are organizing a bowling team. I’d sure like to be on the team. Would it be a problem if I went to the organizational meeting tomorrow?	Although focused on content, he is aware of the relationship dimensions of his message and includes both in his comments—by acknowledging their partnership, asking if there would be a problem, and expressing his desire rather than his decision.
<i>She:</i> That sounds great, but I was hoping we could do something together.	She focuses on the relationship dimension but also acknowledges his content orientation. Note, too, that she does not respond as though she has to defend her emphasis on relationship aspects.
<i>He:</i> How about you meet me at Joe’s Pizza, and we can have dinner after the organizational meeting?	He responds to the relationship aspect—without abandoning his desire to join the bowling team—and incorporates it.
<i>She:</i> That sounds great. I’m dying for pizza.	She responds to both messages, approving of his joining the team and their dinner date.

Arguments over the content dimension are relatively easy to resolve. Generally, you can look up something in a book or ask someone what actually took place. It is relatively easy to verify disputed facts. Arguments on the relationship level, however, are much more difficult to resolve, in part because you may not recognize that the argument is in fact a relational one. Once you realize that it is, you can approach the dispute appropriately and deal with it directly.



**Figure 1.5 Punctuation and the Sequence of Events**

(a) Shows the actual sequence of events as a continuous series of actions with no specific beginning or end. Each action (texting and flirting) stimulates another action, but no initial cause is identified. (b) Shows the same sequence of events as seen by the wife. She sees the sequence as beginning with the husband's flirting and her texting behavior as a response to that stimulus. (c) Shows the same sequence of events from the husband's point of view. He sees the sequence as beginning with the wife's texting and his flirting as a response to that stimulus. Try using this three-part figure, discussed in the text, to explain what might go on when a supervisor complains that workers are poorly trained for their jobs and when the workers complain that the supervisor doesn't know how to supervise.



an interactional situation, all behavior is potentially communication. Any aspect of your behavior may communicate if the other person gives it message value. On the other hand, if the behavior (for example, the assistant's looking out the window) goes unnoticed, then no communication has taken place.

When you are in an interactional situation, your responses all have message value. For example, if you notice someone winking at you, you must respond in some way. Even if you don't respond openly, that lack of response is itself a response and it communicates (assuming it is perceived by the other person).

**Irreversibility** Interpersonal communication is irreversible. This quality of **irreversibility** means that what you have communicated remains communicated; you cannot *uncommunicate*. Although you may try to qualify, negate, or somehow reduce the effects of your message, once it has been sent and received, the message itself cannot be reversed. In interpersonal interactions (especially in conflict), you need to be especially careful that you don't say things you may wish to withdraw later. Similarly, commitment messages, such as "I love you," must be monitored lest you commit yourself to a position you may be uncomfortable with later.

Face-to-face communication is evanescent; it fades after you have spoken. There is no trace of your communications outside the memories of the parties involved or of those who overheard your conversation. In computer-mediated communication, however, the messages are written and may be saved, stored, and printed. Both face-to-face and computer-mediated messages may be kept confidential or revealed publicly. But computer messages may be made public more easily and spread more quickly than face-to-face messages. Also, in communicating on Facebook, for example, it's relatively easy to intend to send a message to one person but actually send it to an entire group. Written messages provide clear evidence of what you have said and when you said it.

Because electronic communication is often permanent, you may wish to be cautious when you're e-mailing, posting your profile, or posting a message. Consider the following:

- **Electronic messages are virtually impossible to destroy and can easily be made public.** Your post on your blog or on a social networking site can be sent to anyone. And even e-mails you thought you deleted or a post you wrote in anger will remain on servers and workstations and may be retrieved by a clever hacker or may simply be copied and distributed to people you'd rather not have seen what you wrote.
- **Electronic messages can be used against you.** Electronic messages are not privileged communication; they can easily be accessed by others and be used against you. Your rant about a former employer may reach a prospective employer, who may see you as a complainer and reject your job application. In fact, employers regularly search such sites for information about job candidates. And you'll not be able to deny saying something; it will be there in black and white.

Despite these frequent warnings and despite the fact that online users are aware of the privacy issues, they still disclose (and often overdisclose) online, revealing things that may eventually affect them negatively (Taddicken, 2013).

**Unrepeatability** In addition to being inevitable and irreversible, interpersonal communication is unrepeatability. The reason for this quality of **unrepeatability** is simple: everyone and everything is constantly changing. As a result, you can never recapture the exact same situation, frame of mind, or relationship dynamics that defined a previous interpersonal act. For example, you can never repeat the experience of meeting a particular person for the first time, comforting a grieving friend, or resolving a specific conflict. And, as you surely know, you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

You can, of course, try again, as when you say, "I'm sorry I came off so forward; can we try again?" But notice that even when you say this, you don't erase the initial impression. Instead, you try to counteract the initial (and perhaps negative) impression by going through the motions once more. In doing so, you try to create a more positive impression, which you hope will lessen the original negative effect—and which often does.

Table 1.3 summarizes the major principles of interpersonal communication and their basic ideas.

**Table 1.3 In a Nutshell** Some Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Principle	Basic Idea
Interpersonal communication exists on a continuum	Interpersonal communication can range from relatively impersonal to extremely intimate.
Interpersonal communication involves interdependent individuals	In interpersonal communication, the behavior of one person has an impact on the other person.
Interpersonal communication is inherently relational	Interpersonal communication takes place within a relationship.
Interpersonal communication is a transactional process	The elements in communication are (1) always changing and (2) interdependent (each influences the other), (3) communication messages depend on the individual for their meaning and effect, and (4) each person is both speaker and listener.
Interpersonal communication serves a variety of purposes	Communication may serve a variety of purposes, for example, to learn, to relate, to help, to influence, to play.
Interpersonal communication is ambiguous	All messages and all relationships contain some uncertainty, some ambiguity.
Interpersonal relationships may be symmetrical or complementary	In some relationships, individuals mirror each other's behavior and in others, they engage in different behaviors.
Interpersonal communication refers to content and relationship	Messages may refer to the real world, to something external to both speaker and listener (the content), <i>and</i> to the relationships between the parties.
Interpersonal communication is a series of punctuated events	Communication events are continuous transactions, divided into causes and effects for convenience.
Interpersonal communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatability	Messages are (almost) always being sent, cannot be uncommunicated, and are always unique (one-time) occurrences.



# Summary

*This chapter introduced the importance and benefits of interpersonal communication, its elements, and some of its major principles.*

## The Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Communication

**1.1** Identify the personal and professional benefits of studying interpersonal communication.

1. Personal benefits include a deeper understanding of yourself and others and of relationships.
2. Professional benefits include the increased ability to interact effectively in the work environment, from interviewing for the job to interacting with those from all levels of the organization.

## The Elements of Interpersonal Communication

**1.2** Define *interpersonal communication* and its essential elements including *source–receiver*, *messages*, *channels*, *noise*, *context*, *effects*, and *ethics*.

3. The source–receiver concept emphasizes that you send and receive interpersonal messages simultaneously through encoding and decoding (the processes of putting meaning into verbal and nonverbal messages and deriving meaning from the messages you receive from others), with competence and code-switching.
4. Messages are the signals that serve as stimuli for a receiver; metamessages are messages about other messages. Feedback messages are messages that are sent back by the receiver to the source in response to the source's messages. Feedforward messages are messages that preface other messages and ask that the listener approach future messages in a certain way.
5. Channels are the media through which messages pass and which act as a bridge between source and receiver; for example, the vocal–auditory channel used in speaking or the cutaneous–tactile channel used in touch.
6. Noise is the inevitable physical, physiological, psychological, and semantic interference that distorts messages.
7. Context is the physical, social–psychological, temporal, and cultural environment in which communication takes place.
8. Interpersonal communication always has effects which may be cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral.

9. Ethics is the moral dimension of communication, the study of what makes behavior moral or good as opposed to immoral or bad.

## The Principles of Interpersonal Communication

**1.3** Paraphrase the principles of interpersonal communication.

10. Interpersonal communication exists on a continuum ranging from mildly connected to intimately connected.
11. Interpersonal communication involves interdependent people; one person's behavior influences the other's behavior.
12. Interpersonal communication is inherently relational; the individuals are connected.
13. Interpersonal communication is a transactional process. Interpersonal communication is a process, an ongoing event, in which the elements are interdependent; communication is constantly occurring and changing. Don't expect clear-cut beginnings or endings or sameness from one time to another.
14. Interpersonal communication is purposeful. Five purposes may be identified: to learn, relate, influence, play, and help.
15. Interpersonal communication is ambiguous. All messages are potentially ambiguous; different people will derive different meanings from the "same" message. There is ambiguity in all relationships.
16. Interpersonal relationships may be symmetrical or complementary; interpersonal interactions may stimulate similar or different behavior patterns.
17. Interpersonal communication refers both to content and to the relationship between the participants.
18. Interpersonal communication is punctuated; that is, everyone separates communication sequences into stimuli and responses on the basis of his or her own perspective.
19. Interpersonal communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable. When in an interactional situation, you cannot not communicate, you cannot uncommunicate, and you cannot repeat exactly a specific message.

## Key Terms

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*These are the key terms discussed in this chapter. If you're in doubt about the definition of any of these terms, review the concept in this chapter, look up the definitions in the glossary at the end of the book, or search the term in the index.*

ambiguity	feedback	psychological noise
asynchronous communication	feedforward	punctuation
channel	inevitability	relationship dimension
choice points	interpersonal communication	remote audience
code-switching	irreversibility	semantic noise
competence	messages	signal
complementary relationship	metamessages	signal-to-noise ratio
content dimension	metaphors	source–receiver
context	mindfulness	strategic ambiguity
decoding	mindlessness	symmetrical relationship
effect	noise	synchronous communication
encoding	physical noise	transactional perspective
ethics	physiological noise	unrepeatability

# Culture and Interpersonal Communication



*You live and interact in a multicultural world. Being mindful of that will make interpersonal interactions and relationships a lot easier.*

## Chapter Topics

Culture

Cultural Differences

Principles for Effective Intercultural Communication

## Learning Objectives

- 2.1** Define *culture*, *enculturation*, and *acculturation* and explain the relevance of culture to interpersonal communication.
- 2.2** Explain the seven cultural differences identified here and how these impact on interpersonal communication.
- 2.3** Define *intercultural communication* and explain the principles for making intercultural communication more effective.

**T**his chapter discusses one of the foundation concepts of interpersonal communication, culture—an often-misunderstood concept. More specifically, this chapter explains the nature of culture and its relationship to

interpersonal communication, the major differences among cultures and how these differences affect interpersonal communication, and the ways you can improve your own intercultural communication.

## Culture

**2.1** Define *culture*, *enculturation*, and *acculturation* and explain the relevance of culture to interpersonal communication.

**Culture** may be defined as (1) the relatively specialized lifestyle of a group of people (2) that is passed on from one generation to the next through communication, not through genes.

Included in “culture” is everything that members of that group have produced and developed—their values, beliefs, artifacts, and language; their ways of behaving; their art, laws, religion; and, of course, communication theories, styles, and attitudes.

Culture is passed from one generation to the next through communication, not through genes. Culture is not synonymous with race or nationality. The term *culture* does not refer to skin color or the shape of one’s eyes because these characteristics are passed on through genes, not communication. Of course, because members of a particular ethnic or national group are often taught similar beliefs, attitudes, and values, it’s possible to speak of “Hispanic culture” or “African American culture.” It’s important to realize, however, that within any large group—especially a group based on race or nationality—there will be enormous differences. The Kansas farmer and the Wall Street executive may both be, say, German American, but they may differ widely in their attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyles. In many ways, the Kansas farmer may be closer in attitudes and values to a Chinese farmer than to the New York financier.

*Sex* and *gender*, although often used synonymously, are quite different. **Sex** refers to the biological distinction between male and female; sex is determined by genes, by biology. **Gender**, on the other hand, refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that a culture assigns to *masculine* and to *feminine*. Gender (masculinity and femininity) is what boys and girls learn from their culture; it’s the ways of behaving, communicating, and relating to one another that boys and girls learn as they grow up. It is from these teachings that you develop a **gender identity**, a concept of who you are, whether masculine, feminine, both, or neither. In any one individual, sex and gender may be the same or different. When sex and gender are the same, the person is referred to as **cisgender**. When sex and gender are different, the person is referred to as **transgender**.

Although sex is transmitted genetically and not by communication, gender may be considered a cultural variable—largely because cultures teach boys and girls different attitudes, beliefs, values, and ways of communicating and relating to others. Thus, you act like a man or a woman in part because of what your culture has taught you about how men and women should act. This does not, of course, deny that biological differences also play a role in the differences between male and female behavior. In fact, research continues to uncover biological roots of male/female differences we once thought were entirely learned (McCroskey, 1998).

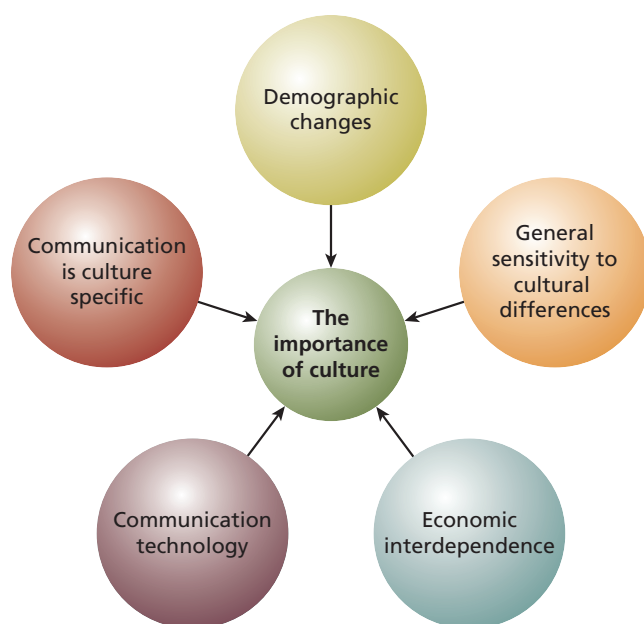
An interesting perspective on culture can be gained by looking at some of the popular metaphors for culture. Table 2.1 identifies seven metaphors for culture which provide other ways of looking at the nature of culture. These insights are taken from a variety of sources (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; and the websites of Culture at Work and Culturally Teaching: Education across Cultures).

## The Importance of Cultural Awareness

Because of (1) demographic changes, (2) increased sensitivity to cultural differences, (3) economic and political interdependence, (4) advances in communication technology, and (5) the culture-specific nature of interpersonal communication (what works in one culture does not necessarily work in another), it’s impossible to communicate effectively without being aware of how culture influences human communication (Figure 2.1).

**Table 2.1** Seven Metaphors of Culture

Metaphor	Metaphor's Claim/Assumption
Salad	Cultures are made up of many individual components, yet they work together with other cultures to produce an even better combination.
Iceberg	It may be that only a small part of culture is visible in a person's behavior and communication; but other facets of culture and its influences are hidden below the surface of a person's outward presentation.
Tree	Different cultures may originate from a strong trunk with branches and leaves, but the root system, which gives the tree its structure and function, is hidden from view.
Melting pot	When different cultures encounter one another, they can blend into one amalgam and lose their individuality, but the blend is often better than any one of the ingredients.
Software	A person's reactions and behavior can be "programmed" by their cultural upbringing. People are taught, often without awareness, how they should think and behave by their culture.
Organism	Culture, like a living thing, grows and changes with the environment and other cultural influences.
Mosaic	Culture is made up of pieces of different shapes, sizes, and colors; the whole, the combination, can be a piece of art more beautiful than any individual piece.

**Figure 2.1** Factors Contributing to the Importance of Culture in Interpersonal Communication

**Demographic Changes** Perhaps the most obvious reason for the importance of culture is the vast demographic changes taking place throughout the United States. At one time, the United States was a country largely populated by Europeans, but it's now a country greatly influenced by the enormous number of new citizens from Latin and South America, Africa, and Asia. The same demographic shift is noticeable on college campuses. These changes have brought different interpersonal customs and the need to understand and adapt to new ways of communicating.

Internet dating encourages dating diversity, largely because it enables you to meet people outside of your immediate circle or daily life and because so many people around the world are now online (Dean, 2010b). Not surprisingly, interracial and inter-ethnic marriages are increasing. In 1970, fewer than 1 percent of the marriages in the



United States were interracial. In 1980, that percentage climbed to 6.7 percent; and, in 2010, 14.6 percent of the marriages were interracial (Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010; Wang, 2015). In 2010, 24 percent of the people surveyed thought that marriages among different races was a good thing for society; in 2014, the percentage rose to 37 percent. So, although a majority of people still interact with (and marry) those who are similar to them in race and religion, the number of interracial relationships and the positive attitudes toward them are growing.

Corporations are recognizing that a culturally diverse workforce is beneficial to their bottom line and are moving in the direction of greater diversity. Understanding the role of culture in interpersonal communication will enable you to function more effectively in this newly diverse environment (Hewlett, Marshall, & Sherbin, 2013).

**Sensitivity to Cultural Differences** As a people, we've become increasingly sensitive to cultural differences. American society has moved from an assimilationist attitude (people should leave their native culture behind and adapt to their new culture—a process known as **cultural assimilation**) to a perspective that values cultural diversity (people should retain their native cultural ways). We have moved from the metaphor of the melting pot, in which different cultures blended into one, to a metaphor of a tossed salad, in which there is some blending but specific and different tastes and flavors still remain. In this diverse society, and with some notable exceptions—hate speech, racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism come quickly to mind—we are more concerned with saying the right thing and ultimately with developing a society where all cultures coexist and enrich one another. As a bonus, the ability to interact effectively with members of other cultures often translates into financial gain and increased employment opportunities and advancement prospects as well.

## VIEWPOINTS

### Cultural Imperialism

The theory of cultural imperialism claims that certain developed countries, such as those of North America and Western Europe, impose their cultural values—largely through the use of their products; exposure to their music, films, and television; and their Internet dominance—on other cultures. *What do you think of the influence that media and the Internet are having on native cultures throughout the world? How do you evaluate this trend?*

**Economic and Political Interdependence** Today, most countries are economically dependent on one another. Our economic lives depend on our ability to communicate effectively across different cultures. Similarly, our political well-being depends in great part on that of other cultures. Political unrest in any place in the world—South Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, to take a few examples—affects our own security. Intercultural communication and understanding seem more crucial now than ever before.

**Advances in Communication Technology** The rapid spread of technology has made intercultural communication as easy as it is inevitable. News from foreign countries is commonplace. You see nightly—in vivid detail—what is going on in remote countries, just as you see what's happening in your own city and state. Of course, the Internet has made intercultural communication as easy as writing a note on your computer. You can

now communicate just as easily by e-mail or any social network site with someone thousands of miles away in a different country, for example, as you can with someone living a few blocks away or in the next dorm room.

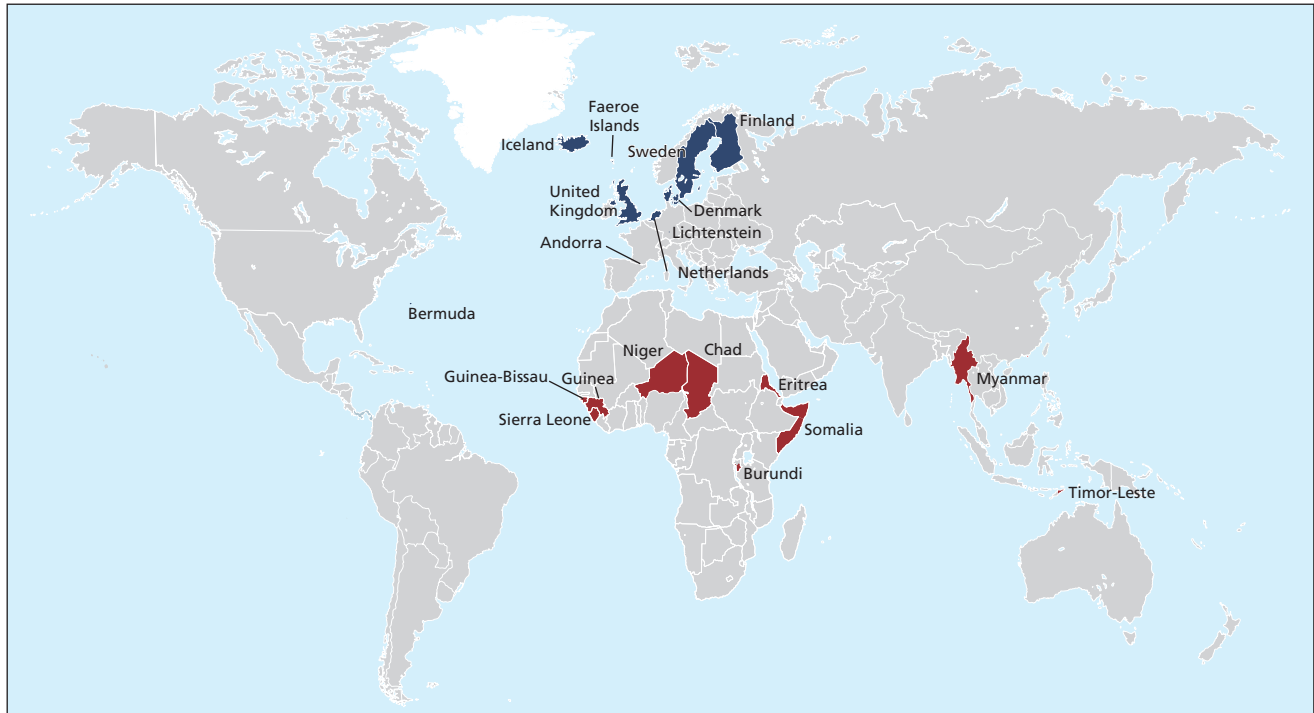
### Culture-Specific Nature of Interpersonal Communication

Still another reason why culture is so important is that interpersonal competence is culture-specific; what proves effective in one culture may prove ineffective in another. Many Asians, for example, often find that the values they were taught—values that promote cooperation and face-saving but discourage competitiveness and assertiveness—work against them in cultures that value competition



## THE CULTURAL MAP Internet Access

The widespread use of the Internet in much of the Western world and in the United States (89% of the population has Internet access)—as a means of communication and as a means for learning about and engaging with the world—should not lead us to think that such access is global; it isn't.



■ In these countries with **lower numbers of internet users**, less than 4 percent of the populations have access to the internet.

■ In these countries with **higher numbers of internet users**, at least 92 percent of the populations have access to the internet.

*What are some of the interpersonal communication differences that you might predict would exist between those cultures with widespread Internet access and those with little?*

and outspokenness (Cho, 2000). The same would be true for executives from the United States working in Asia. An example of these differences can be seen in business meetings. In the United States, corporate executives get down to business during the first several minutes of a meeting. In Japan, business executives interact socially for an extended period and try to find out something about one another. Thus, the communication principle influenced by U.S. culture would advise participants to get down to the meeting's agenda during the first five minutes. The principle influenced by Japanese culture would advise participants to avoid dealing with business until everyone has socialized sufficiently and feels well enough acquainted to begin negotiations.

Another example involves cultural differences based on religious beliefs. Giving a birthday gift to a close friend would be appreciated by many, but Jehovah's Witnesses would frown on this act because they don't celebrate birthdays (Dresser, 2005). Neither principle is right, neither is wrong. Each is effective within its own culture and ineffective outside its own culture.

## The Transmission of Culture

Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through **enculturation**, the process by which you learn the culture into which you're born (your native culture). Parents, peer groups, schools, religious institutions, and government agencies are your main teachers of culture.

Through enculturation, you develop an **ethnic identity**, a commitment to the beliefs and philosophy of your culture that, not surprisingly, can act as a protective shield against discrimination (Ting-Toomey, 1981; Chung & Ting-Toomey, 1999; Lee, 2005). Ethnic identity refers to the degree to which you identify with your cultural group and see yourself as a member of your culture. As you can imagine, you acquire your ethnic identity from family and friends who observe ethnic holidays, patronize ethnic parades, and eat ethnic foods; from your schooling where you learn about your own culture and ethnic background; and from your own media and Internet exposure. If you begin looking at your culture's practices as the only right ones or look upon the practices of other cultures as inferior, ethnic identity can turn into ethnocentrism.

Ethnic identity is often confused with race. Whereas ethnic identity is based on a social and cultural identification with a specific group, **race** is a classification of humans on the basis of their physical and biological characteristics. Hair type, skin color, and the shape of such facial features as the nose and lips were generally used in this classification. As you can imagine, there is much overlap and variation within any individual or group.

A different process of learning culture is **acculturation**, the process by which you learn the rules and norms of a culture different from your native culture. In acculturation, your original or native culture is modified through direct contact with or exposure to a new and different culture. For example, when immigrants settle in the United States (the host culture), their own culture becomes influenced by the host culture. Gradually, the values, ways of behaving, and beliefs of the host culture become more and more a part of the immigrants' culture. At the same time, of course, the host culture changes, too, as it interacts with the immigrants' cultures. Generally, however, the culture of the immigrant changes more. The reasons for this are that the host country's members far outnumber the immigrant group and that the media are largely dominated by and reflect the values and customs of the host cultures (Kim, 1988).

New citizens' acceptance of the new culture depends on many factors (Kim, 1988). Immigrants who come from cultures similar to the host culture will become acculturated more easily. Similarly, those who are younger and better educated become acculturated

more quickly than do older and less educated people. Personality factors also play a part. Persons who are risk takers and open-minded, for example, have greater acculturation potential. Also, persons who are familiar with the host culture before immigration—through interpersonal contact or through media exposure—will be acculturated more readily.

## The Aim of a Cultural Perspective

Because culture permeates all forms of communication, it's necessary to understand its

### VIEWPOINTS

#### What's in a Name?

Some researchers prefer to use the term *subculture* to refer to smaller cultures within larger cultures; other researchers do not use the term, feeling that it implies that some cultures are less important than others. Some researchers prefer to use the term *co-culture* to refer to a variety of cultures coexisting side by side, whereas others think this term is imprecise because all cultures coexist (Lustig & Koester, 2018); these theorists prefer simply to refer to all cultures as cultures. *How do you feel about the terms subculture, co-culture, and just plain culture?*

