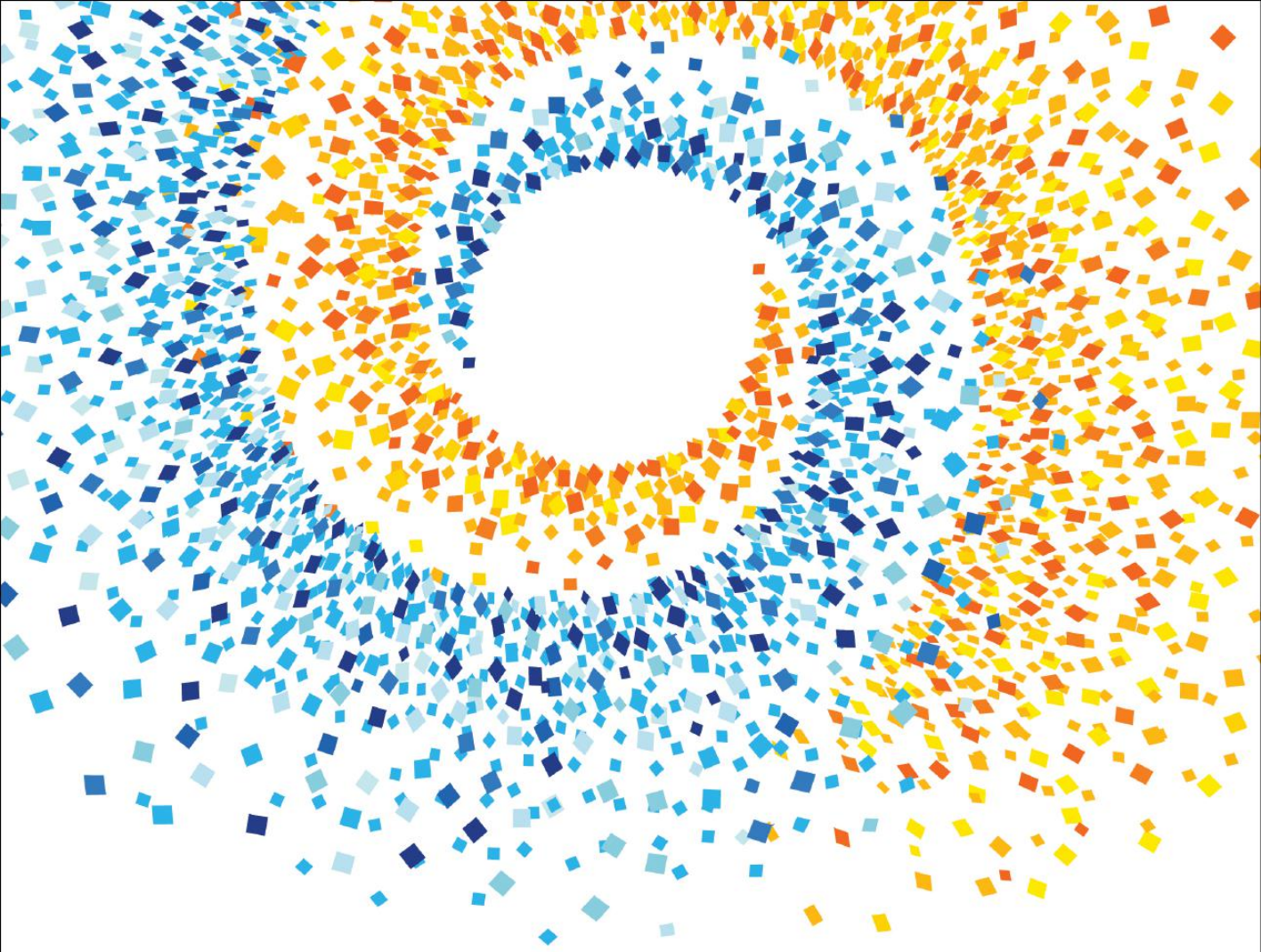

Close Encounters

COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

6 EDITION

Laura K. Guerrero | Peter A. Andersen | Walid A. Afifi

Close Encounters

Sixth Edition

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To our daughters—Gabrielle, Kristiana, Kirsten, Leila, and Rania
And to Peter's grandchildren—Elise and Jack
Our relationships with them bring us great joy.

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PREFACE

We are pleased and privileged to release the sixth edition of *Close Encounters.* It's hard to believe that we wrote the first edition of this book almost 20 years ago. At that time, the number of upper division courses on relational communication and advanced interpersonal communication being taught at colleges and universities across the country was rapidly increasing. Much has changed since then, but one thing has stayed the same—courses on relationships are still popular on college campuses across the country. The research on relationships has also continued to flourish. Indeed, it is challenging to update the content in this book because there is so much new research on relational communication published each year. Because of space limitations, we can never include everything we want to include. Nonetheless, we believe that this edition aligns with our continued goal of including an appropriate mix of recent and classic research related to communication in relationships.

Our goal in writing *Close Encounters* has always been to produce an informative yet readable textbook that will help students understand their relationships better and be more critical consumers of information about relationships. This book is research based. We strive to present concepts and theories in more depth than the average textbook on interpersonal communication while writing in an accessible style. For us, writing this textbook is a rewarding experience; it lets us reach beyond the pages of scholarly journals to share information with students who are excited to learn more about relationships and gain new perspective on some of their personal experiences.

APPROACH

The book takes a relational approach to the study of interpersonal communication by focusing on issues that are central to describing and understanding close relationships, particularly between romantic partners and friends. One of the most exciting trends in the field of personal relationships is the interdisciplinary nature of research and theory. Scholars from fields such as communication, family studies, psychology, and sociology, among other disciplines, have all made important contributions to scholarly knowledge about relationships. This book reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the field of personal relationships while focusing strongly on interpersonal communication.

ORGANIZATION

Close Encounters is still organized loosely around the concept of relationship trajectories. All relationships are different, and no two follow exactly the same path. Nonetheless, from a developmental perspective, it is helpful to think of how relationships progress from initial meetings toward farewells. Of course, interesting and important communication

occurs throughout the course of a relationship. For example, conflict can be studied in terms of a couple's first big fight, the mundane disagreements that people have on a fairly regular basis, the conflicts that enhance relational functioning, or the argument that ultimately marks the destruction of a relationship. There are also various perspectives on how relationships change and develop over time. Thus, we include a chapter on relational stages, turning points, and dialectics to show students how these different perspectives complement one another. Some topics are also related to one another in important ways that guided our organization of *Close Encounters.* For example, relationship researchers have argued that both disclosure and privacy are important in relationships. Thus, information on "revealing and hiding ourselves" is included in the same chapter. Similarly, relational scholars have long recognized that conflict is not inherently good or bad, but rather it is how conflict is managed that determines positive or negative outcomes. Accordingly, the conflict management chapter now follows the relational maintenance chapter so instructors can emphasize that both relational maintenance behaviors and constructive conflict management are key ingredients in happy relationships. The three chapters that focus on relational transgressions, relationship repair, and disengagement are packaged at the end of the book to showcase how people deal with challenges in their relationships. Although these chapters may be considered to reflect the "dark side" of interpersonal communication, we believe most topics covered in this book have a dark side and a bright side. For example, affection is generally seen as a positive behavior, but too much affection can be smothering; breakups are usually considered as negative actions, but ending a bad relationship can pave the way for a better one in the future. These are examples of the types of complexities highlighted throughout this book.

FEATURES IN THIS EDITION

For this edition, we retained the features that have made *Close Encounters* successful while adding additional research and features. As has been the case since the second edition, all chapters start with a scenario that features fictional characters dealing with communication issues, and each chapter ends with a section called Summary and Application. These chapter endings tie back to the scenarios at the beginning of each chapter so that students can see how the information they learned can be applied to a specific situation. Throughout each chapter, we refer to the opening scenarios at various times to provide examples of how the concepts we discuss relate to real-life situations. With the exception of Chapter 1, all chapters include at least one Put Yourself to the Test box that enables students to find out how they rate on a particular concept. Our students have told us that they find these boxes very helpful in identifying their communication style as well as some of the characteristics of their relationships. Some instructors incorporate these self-tests into their course assignments. For example, students may complete some of these tests and then write self-reflection papers about their own communication style.

All of the chapters also include Tech Talk boxes, which highlight research that shows how various aspects of communication using technology and social media function within close relationships. This edition also still includes Highlights boxes that provide definitions and details for key concepts. New to the this edition is the inclusion of figures that visually display important information about relationships, such as percentages

related to different types of breakups, changes in how people meet, sex differences in ways people show affection, and trends showing more interracial marriage in the United States, among many others.

This edition also includes Discussion Board Questions at the end of each chapter, which we have used successfully in our classes to generate discussion both in class and online. Rather than just having students answer a question and then respond to a student or two on a discussion board, we have had students answer the questions and then a couple days later read their classmates' posts and write a "postscript." The postscripts are summaries of what their fellow students wrote that can take various forms, including pointing out aspects that were different than their own posts, identifying trends, or discussing what they would change in their post after having read their classmates' posts. These types of discussion boards can be beneficial in showing students different perspectives on relationships. This edition also includes a glossary of key terms that students find helpful both as they read through the chapters and as they prepare for exams.

As with every new edition, fresh content has been added throughout the book to reflect current research as well as trends in relationships. Some of the biggest changes in this edition include a substantial revision of the sex chapter that includes current research on the college hookup culture; revised descriptions of relational dialectics theory 2.0, relational pursuit theory, relational turbulence theory, and face theory; a revamped discussion of breakups that includes strategies commonly used today, such as ghosting and the one-way fade; a new discussion about diversity in the opening chapter; and inclusion of more generations in the identity chapter. The figures mentioned earlier are also new to this edition and will be helpful visuals to highlight important data about relationships. As always, new research was added throughout all the chapters to reflect the ever-changing ways that people in the 21st century are communicating in their relationships and, perhaps just as importantly, in their potential relationships. As with past editions, our goal is to present topics that are at the forefront of relational communication research and are of high interest to students.

FEATURES

In addition to the features already discussed, *Close Encounters* is designed to appeal to students and professors alike based on the following features:

Current, interdisciplinary research: The research in *Close Encounters* reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the study of personal relationships and draws from across the social science disciplines while maintaining a focus on communication. This edition has been carefully updated to include recent cutting-edge research on interpersonal communication.

High-interest topics: Intriguing subjects, such as long-distance relationships, cross-sex friendships, friends with benefits, flirting, sexual interaction, cohabitation, breakups, and the "dark side" of relational communication are explored in depth.

Put Yourself to the Test boxes: These exercises, found throughout the book, assess various aspects of students' own relationships and communication styles.

Highlights boxes: These boxes highlight some of the main ideas in the text by summarizing or expanding on key issues in relationship research.

Figures: There are various figures throughout the book, some of which present information visually in graphs so students can see trends, sex differences, or rankings of categories in a memorable way.

Tech Talk boxes: These boxes, which complement the other ways electronic communication is featured in *Close Encounters,* take an in-depth look at specific research issues related to technology and social media—such as cell phones, social networking sites, and online dating sites—in relationships.

Discussion Board Questions: These questions, which are found at the end of each chapter, can help students prepare for class, or they can be used for online discussion boards or classroom discussion. Some instructors also have students write position papers in response to some of the discussion questions.

Instructor's Resources: The new instructor's resources include resources, class activities, suggestions for film and TV clips that can be used during class, test bank questions, PowerPoint slides, lecture notes, and student flashcards. This material can be found at www.sagepub.com/guerrero6e.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a textbook is an exciting challenge as well as a daunting task. As we worked on this edition of *Close Encounters,* our families had to listen to the click-click-click of our computer keyboards even more than usual. The support of our families and colleagues was critical in helping us complete this project, and we owe them our sincere gratitude. We are especially indebted to our partners—Vico, Janis, and Tammy—and our daughters—Gabrielle, Kristiana, Kirsten, Leila, and Rania. These special people not only provided us with invaluable social support but also examples and feedback that cross generational boundaries.

We would also like to thank the many people who helped during the writing and editing process. We are especially grateful to our editors, Lily Norton and Jennifer Jovin-Bernstein, and our editorial assistant, Sarah Wilson, who guided us through many aspects of the publication process. We would also like to thank our copy editor, Colleen Brennan; production editor, Kelle Clarke; and to acknowledge two other people who we consider to be part of the *Close Encounters* family—Holly Allen and Todd Armstrong. Holly Allen was the editor for the first edition; a conversation between Laura and Holly back in 1998 started the *Close Encounters* ball rolling. Todd Armstrong stepped in to publish a second and third edition of the book for SAGE, and he was always enthusiastic and supportive regarding our work.

Many of our colleagues across the discipline also deserve a word of praise. We have received formal and informal feedback from many valued colleagues throughout the years, including (but not limited to) Katherine Adams, Shae Adkins, Jess Alberts, Christine K. Anzur, Buy Bachman, Dawn Braithwaite, Leah E. Bryant, Brant Burleson, Daniel Canary, John Caughlin, Scott Christopher, Colleen Warner Colaner, Victoria DeFrancisco, Kathryn Dindia, Norah Dunbar, Renee Edwards, Lisa Farinelli, Cara Fisher, Kory Floyd, Anasheh Gharabighi, Michael Hecht, Daniel White Hodge, Susanne Jones, Carrie D. Kennedy-Lightsey, Leanne Knobloch, Kimberly L. Kulovitz, Brianna L. Lane, Pamela Lannutti, Tara McManus, Sandra Metts, Claude Miller, Paul Mongeau, Larry Nadler, Sylvia Niehuis, Donna Pawlowski, Sue Pendall, Sandra Petronio, Pam Secklin, Denise Solomon, Brian Spitzberg, Susan Sprecher, Laura Stafford, Glen Stamp, Claire Sullivan, Paul Turman, Zuoming Wang, Richard West, Christina Yoshimura, and Stephen Yoshimura. A special thanks goes to Judee Burgoon (Laura and Walid's PhD adviser and an exceptional role model) who suggested that we use the term *close encounters* as part of the title.

Finally, we would like to thank all the students we have had in our classes over the years. We use some of their examples in this book, and we have incorporated their feedback into every new edition. Just as importantly, lively dialogue with students has helped sustain our enthusiasm for teaching courses on interpersonal communication and relationships. We hope this book contributes to spirited discussions about relationships in your classrooms as well.

—L. K. G.
—P. A. A.
—W. A. A.

1 CONCEPTUALIZING RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Definitions and Principles

People accomplish a lot by communicating with others. For example, take these three situations. Jake is having trouble with his statistics homework, which is due tomorrow. His friend and roommate, Dave, is amazing at math, so Jake tries to persuade Dave to stay home (rather than go to a party) and help him. Meanwhile, Su-Lin recently arrived in the United States as an international student and feels a lot of uncertainty about the university and student life. However, after joining a couple of student clubs and getting to know some of her classmates, she starts to feel more comfortable in her new surroundings. Kristi's husband moves out of the house and tells her he wants a divorce. Rather than sitting at home alone, moping around and feeling sorry for herself, Kristi drives over to her parents' house where she receives comfort and support from her mother.

Personal relationships are central to being human. As Fitness (2006) suggested, "Human beings are fundamentally social animals who depend utterly upon one another for their survival and well-being. Little wonder, then, that such a large proportion of people's thoughts and feelings—their cognitions and emotions—concern their relationships with others" (p. 285). People are born into relationships and live their lives in webs of friendships, family networks, romances, marriages, and work relationships. In fact, research shows that when people talk, the most common topics are relationship problems, sex, family, and romantic (or potential romantic) partners (A. Haas & Sherman, 1982). The capacity to form relationships is innate and biological—a part of the genetic inheritance that has enabled humans to survive over time. Humans have less potential for survival, creativity, and innovation as individuals than they do in relationships. Personal relationship experts have begun to unlock the mysteries of these universal human experiences, to assist people with problematic relationships, and to help people achieve greater satisfaction in their close encounters.

As Jake, Su-Lin, and Kristi illustrate, communication plays a central role in relationships. When we need help, comfort, or reassurance, communication is the tool that helps us accomplish our goals. Relationships cannot exist unless two people communicate with each other. "Bad" communication is often blamed for problems in relationships, whereas "good" communication is often credited with preserving relationships, although as we will learn throughout this book, communication and its effects on relationships

Relationships: Ongoing interactions between people that result in interpersonal, affective, and behavioral connections.

Interpersonal communication: The exchange of nonverbal and/or verbal messages between two people, regardless of the relationship they share (a broader term than *relational communication*).

Relational communication: A subset of interpersonal communication that focuses on the expression and interpretation of messages within close relationships. Relational communication includes the gamut of interactions from vital relational messages to mundane everyday interactions.

are much more complex than that. In this introductory chapter, we take a close look at what constitutes both communication and relationships. First, however, we provide a brief history of the field of personal relationships. Then we define and discuss three important terms that are central to this book: (1) **relationships**, (2) **interpersonal communication**, and (3) **relational communication**. The chapter ends with principles of interpersonal and relational communication.

THE FIELD OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: A BRIEF HISTORY

People have been curious about their relationships for thousands of years, but the formal study of personal relationships is a relatively recent phenomenon. Today we take the study of personal relationships for granted, but until the latter part of the 20th century the scholarly investigation of relationships was often considered unscientific and a waste of resources. In 1975 Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin publicly criticized two of the finest and earliest relationship researchers, Ellen Berscheid and Elaine Hatfield (formerly Elaine Walster), for their research on love. Proxmire gave the "golden fleece award" for wasteful government spending to the National Science Foundation for supporting Berscheid and Walster's research on love with an $84,000 grant. The senator's objections to "squandering" money on love research were twofold: (1) Scientists could never understand the mystery of love, and (2) even if they did, he didn't want to hear it and was confident that no one else did either (E. Hatfield, personal communication, August 20, 1999). Months of harassing phone calls and even death threats to Berscheid and Walster followed (E. Hatfield, personal communication, August 20, 1999).

Today most people, including politicians, realize that close relationships are as important to study as earthquakes or nutrition, especially since having good relationships is associated with better mental and physical health (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017; Ryff, Singer, Wing, & Dienberg Love, 2001; S. E. Taylor et al., 2006). People today find social scientific knowledge compatible with personal political and religious beliefs. In fact, some churches conduct premarital workshops and marriage encounters based on relationship research. Bookstores and newsstands are crammed with books and magazines that focus on every aspect of relationships, providing advice (of variable quality) on topics such as the "These Are the Qualities Men *Actually* Look for in Women" (Keong, 2016) and why "My Husband and I Text More Than We Talk—and That's OK" (K. Wright, 2015), as well as offering "11 Things You Need to Do to Have a Lasting Relationship" (L. Moore, 2016), "20 Body Language Signs That Mean He's Into You" (Narins, 2015), and "10 Things You Should Never, Ever Say In a Fight With Your Girlfriend or Wife" (Walgren, 2016), just to name some of the books with relationship advice in the popular press. One critical function of scientific research on relationships is to provide checks-and-balances for the popular advice given in the media. Critical consumers can compare the scientific literature to the popular, often inaccurate, advice in magazines, best-selling books, and television shows.

The field of personal relationships is unusual because it is truly interdisciplinary and has the power to impact people's everyday lives (Duck, 1988). Scholars from disciplines such as communication, social psychology, child development, family studies, sociology, and anthropology are all in the business of studying human relationships. In particular, research in interpersonal communication, social psychology, and other disciplines has contributed to the establishment and evolution of the field of personal relationships.

Contributions of Interpersonal Communication Research

The earliest research in this area dates to the 1950s, but interpersonal communication research began in earnest in the 1960s and 1970s (Andersen, 1982). Previously, communication scholars were preoccupied mainly with public speeches, political rhetoric, and mass communication. In the 1960s scholars realized that most communication takes place in small groups and dyads consisting of close friends, family members, and romantic partners (G. R. Miller, 1976). In the early 1970s, the first books on interpersonal communication emerged (e.g., McCroskey, Larson, & Knapp, 1971). The study of interpersonal communication thus began with a focus on how people communicate in dyads and small groups.

Scholars also realized that interpersonal communication differs based on the type of relationship people share. G. R. Miller and Steinberg (1975) proposed that the defining characteristics of an **interpersonal relationship** are that it is unique, irreplaceable, and requires understanding of the partner's psychological makeup. By contrast, "role relationships," like those with store clerks or tech helpline staff, possess few unique qualities, are replaceable, and are relatively impersonal. These shifts in communication scholarship reflected broader societal changes. The youth movement of the 1960s represented a rebellion against a society thought to be impersonal and manipulative. Sensitivity training, encounter groups, and other personal growth movements of the 1960s and 1970s turned people's attention inward to the dyad and to close relationships.

Interpersonal relationship: A connection between two people who share repeated interactions over time, can influence one another, and who have unique interaction patterns.

The evolution of interpersonal communication as a primary emphasis in the communication discipline was an outcome of the recognition that relationships are the primary locus for communication. Scholars also realized that relationships are an inherently communicative phenomenon. It is difficult to imagine how human relationships might exist in the absence of communication. Social interaction is what brings and keeps people together, whether it's through meeting someone in a class, online, or at work. By the 1980s, interpersonal and relational communication research had become increasingly sophisticated and theoretically driven (Andersen, 1982).

Contributions of Social Psychology

Early research in social psychology laid the groundwork for the scientific investigation of interpersonal relationships, with much of this work focused on social development and personality. From the late 1950s through the mid-1970s, however, social psychologists increasingly began studying interaction patterns related to group and dyadic processes. (For some of the major early works, see Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berscheid & Walster, 1969; Heider, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959.) This movement was not limited to social psychologists in the United States; in Great Britain, Argyle and his associates spent several decades studying aspects of relationships (see Argyle & Dean, 1965; Argyle & Henderson, 1985).

During the mid-20th century, several highly influential books were published. For example, Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) *The Social Psychology of Groups* eventually led to an explosion of research on social exchange processes in groups and dyads, bringing issues such as rewards (the positive outcomes people get from relationships) and reciprocity (the way one person's behavior leads to similar behavior in another) to the forefront. Berscheid and Walster's (1969) *Interpersonal Attraction* also had a major impact on both interpersonal communication research and the study of dyadic behavior in social psychology. This book

focused on emerging relationships between strangers, as did much of the early research in social psychology (see Altman & Taylor, 1973). A short time later, however, relational research began to focus on love, and the study of close relationships began to flourish (see Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Z. Rubin, 1970, 1973). Finally, Altman and Taylor's (1973) *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships,* which examined the role of self-disclosure in relationships, helped generate research in communication, relationship development, and relationship disengagement.

The prestigious *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* also included a section on "Interpersonal Processes"; this peer-reviewed journal still publishes some of the best research on relationships. However, until the mid-1980s there were no journals that focused exclusively on relationships. In fact, the first professional conference devoted entirely to interpersonal relationships was held in 1982, again indicating the youthfulness of the field of personal relationships compared to other academic disciplines (see H. H. Kelley, 1986). This conference, called the International Conference on Personal Relationships, was founded and organized by Robin Gilmour and Steve Duck. The conference laid the groundwork for scholars from different disciplines to come together to promote and collaborate on relationship research. Two scholarly associations on relationships were also formed, with these organizations later merging into the International Association for Relationship Research (IARR). Two journals, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships,* also emerged as a result of these efforts.

Roots in Other Disciplines

Disciplines such as family studies, sociology, developmental and child psychology, clinical psychology, humanistic psychology, and anthropology also have made important contributions to the field of personal relationships. By the end of the 20th century, 37% of the research on personal relationships came from social psychologists, another 37% from communication scholars, and much of the rest from sociologists and family studies scholars (Hoobler, 1999). Sociologists often focus on issues such as cultural values, class, religion, secularization, divorce, marriage, gender equality, political attitudes, and generational differences—with an eye toward determining how relationships are embedded within the larger society. Family studies scholars examine relationships from a different lens, looking more at the internal dynamics of relationships between family members, either as a family system or as an interpersonal dyad within the broader family structure (e.g., parent–child or spousal relationships). Family scholars also examine developmental issues, such as determining how relationships within one's family of origin influence later relationships in adulthood.

Personal relationship research draws from these different disciplines, so a level of richness and diversity that is often absent in other fields characterizes the field of personal relationships. It is precisely because scholars in these various disciplines—communication, social psychology, sociology, family studies, and so on—have different theoretical and methodological approaches that the field of personal relationships has been so vital and evolved so quickly (Duck, 1988). Although this book draws on knowledge from various fields, the primary focus is on communication in close relationships, with three central terms: (1) relationships, (2) interpersonal communication, and (3) relational communication (see Highlights for definitions of these terms). Relationships can be broken down into three

general types—role relationships, interpersonal relationships, and close relationships. This book focuses primarily on relationships that fall under the latter two categories or have the potential to be close.

HIGHLIGHTS
DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

1. *Relationships:*
   a. *Role relationships*: Two people who share some degree of behavioral interdependence—although people in such relationships are usually interchangeable and are not psychologically or behaviorally unique. One person in a role relationship can easily replace another.
   b. *Interpersonal relationships*: Two people who share repeated interactions over time, can influence one another, and have unique interaction patterns.
   c. *Close relationships*: Two people in an interpersonal relationship characterized by enduring bonds, emotional attachment, personal need fulfillment, and irreplaceability.
2. *Interpersonal communication:* The exchange of nonverbal and verbal messages between people, regardless of the relationship they share.
3. *Relational communication:* A subset of interpersonal communication focused on the expression and interpretation of messages within close relationships. Relational communication includes the gamut of interactions from vital relational messages to mundane everyday interactions.

RELATIONSHIPS

Think about the various people you interact with in a given day. Do you have relationships with all of them or only some of them? With how many of these people do you have close or personal relationships? Defining the term *relationship* can be tricky. When do we cross the line from interacting with someone to having a relationship? And when do we move from having a casual or functional relationship to having a **close relationship**?

Close relationship: Two people in an interpersonal relationship characterized by enduring bonds, emotional attachment, and personal need fulfilment.

General Types of Relationships

Take a moment to think of all the different relationships you have. Now imagine a piece of paper with a circle representing you in the middle of the page. If you draw additional circles that represent each of the people with whom you have a relationship, where would you place those circles in comparison to yourself? You would likely place some individuals nearer to yourself than others based on the closeness you share with each person. How many people would be really close to you, and how many would be near the margins of the paper? Would anyone's circle overlap with yours? Research suggests that among the many relationships most of us have with friends, coworkers, family members, romantic partners, and others,

only a select few of those relationships become truly close. Most of these relationships stay at an interpersonal level, and others may never really progress beyond a role relationship.

Role Relationships

Behavioral interdependence: One person's behavior affects another person's behavior, beliefs, or emotions, and vice versa. The basic requirement for all relationships.

Role relationship: Two people who share some degree of behavioral interdependence, although people in such relationships are usually interchangeable and are not psychologically or behaviorally unique.

According to many relationship scholars, the basic ingredient for having a relationship is that two individuals share some degree of **behavioral interdependence** (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983). This means one person's behavior somehow affects the other person's behavior and vice versa. Based on this definition, we have relationships with a variety of people, including the salesclerk who helps us make a purchase, the waiter who takes our orders and serves us dinner, and the boss we may rarely see but depend on for leadership, direction, and a paycheck. These basic role relationships are not true interpersonal relationships. Rather, **role relationships** are functional or casual and often are temporary; also, people in such relationships are usually interchangeable and not unique. An interpersonal or close relationship with someone requires more than simple behavioral interdependence.

Interpersonal Relationships

Mutual influence: Two people affect one another in meaningful ways. Mutual influence increases as relationships move beyond role relationships to become interpersonal or close.

Unique interaction patterns: Communicating in ways that reflect a relationship's special history, including shared experiences, inside jokes, and knowledge of private information. Unique interaction patterns help differentiate interpersonal (and close) relationships from role relationships.

In addition to basic behavioral independence, interpersonal relationships require that two individuals influence each other in meaningful ways. This type of **mutual influence** goes beyond basic tasks such as exchanging money for coffee at Starbucks or thanking your hygienist after she cleans your teeth. In interpersonal relationships, influence extends to activities that create connection at a social or emotional level rather than a task level. For example, while helping Jake with his statistics homework, Dave might offer words of encouragement to boost his confidence. After the homework is finished, they may start talking about a political issue and in doing so affect one another's thinking. Knowing that Dave dreads public speaking, Jake may later reciprocate by offering to listen to a speech that Dave is preparing. These tasks take extensive time and effort and include providing emotional support and engaging in self-disclosure rather than just getting something done. Thus, these activities imply that Dave and Jake have moved beyond a simple role relationship.

Interpersonal relationships also have repeated interaction over time. Because they interact with one another frequently, Jake has the time and opportunity to reciprocate by helping Dave, which can strengthen their friendship further. Interactions that are limited in length or frequency rarely develop into interpersonal relationships. Finally, interpersonal relationships are characterized by **unique interaction patterns**. This means that the way Jake communicates with Dave will be different in some ways from how he communicates with other friends. They have a unique relational history, including shared experiences, inside jokes, and knowledge of private information; this history shapes how they communicate with each other.

Close Relationships

Close relationships have all the features of interpersonal relationships plus three more: (1) **emotional attachment**, (2) **need fulfillment**, and (3) **irreplaceability**. In a close relationship, we feel emotionally connected; the relationship is the basis of why we feel happy or sad, proud or disappointed. Similarly, close relational partners fulfill critical interpersonal needs, such as the need to belong to a social group, to feel loved and appreciated, or to care

for and nurture someone. When a relationship is irreplaceable, the other person has a special place in our thoughts and emotions, as well as in our social network. For example, you may have only one first love and one best friend, and there may be one person you feel most comfortable reaching out to in times of crisis.

Of course, distinctions between these three types of relationships are often blurred. Our close relationships contain some of the same features as interpersonal and role relationships. For instance, Kristi's close relationship with her mother is partially defined by her role as a daughter. Behavioral interdependence also characterizes all relationships, but as people move from role to interpersonal to close relationships, interdependence becomes more enduring (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983). Partners can also become interdependent in diverse ways, such as needing each other for emotional support, striving to reach shared goals, and influencing each other's beliefs and attitudes. In role relationships, such as those we have with salesclerks or waiters, behavioral interdependence is temporary and defined by the situation. Need fulfillment is also part of all three relationship types, but the needs that our closest relationships fulfill are more central and personal than the needs other relationships fulfill. It is important to keep in mind that every interaction has the potential for impact. Just because you are engaging with someone else in a particular role (e.g., server) doesn't mean that you each might not say or do something that leaves a lasting impact on the other.

Emotional attachment: The feeling in close relationships of being emotionally connected to someone, where the relationship is a primary source of one's emotions.

Need fulfillment: When a partner fulfills critical interpersonal needs, such as the need to belong to a social group, to feel loved and appreciated, or to care for and nurture someone.

Irreplaceability: The perception that a person has a special place in your thoughts and emotions, as well as in your social network, such that no one else can take that person's place. Irreplaceability helps distinguish close relationships from other types of relationships.

Relationship Categories

Another way to think about relationships is to categorize them based on type. We do this every day; in our ordinary talk, we refer to some relationships as "friendships" and to others as "romances" or "marriages." We introduce someone as our "best friend," "brother-in-law," "wife," and so forth. These categorizations, although simple, help people understand and define the relationships we share. Within the broad category of romantic relationships, there are also many subtypes. Indeed, sometimes partners are unsure about which of these subtypes their relationships fall under, especially if their relationship is not "official." When partners are officially dating, other labels, such as "boyfriend," "girlfriend," and "significant other," come with the designation of being an official couple. But sometimes partners just "have a thing" or end up in an "almost relationship" where they repeatedly talk, flirt, and maybe even spend time together or have sexual activity but never actually date. These types of unclearly defined relationships can be ambiguous, leading to uncertainty (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019).

When college students think about what constitutes a close relationship, they typically think about dating or romantic relationships. However, as the categories just listed suggest, we live in a network of relationships that includes family members, lovers, acquaintances, coworkers, employers, and so forth. We also have blended relationships, such as having a friend with benefits or a sibling who is also your best friend. Some relationships fit into neat categories such as boyfriend, coworker, wife, or student, but others fit into overlapping categories. As Wilmot (1995) put it, "Relational types are not necessarily mutually exclusive—their boundaries are often fuzzy" (p. 28). Moreover, relationships often move from one category to another, such as when a coworker becomes a friend, a friend becomes a dating partner, or a fraternity brother becomes an employee. In these blended relationships, people can be uncertain about how to behave appropriately, especially if two people define a relationship differently.

Recognizing Diversity

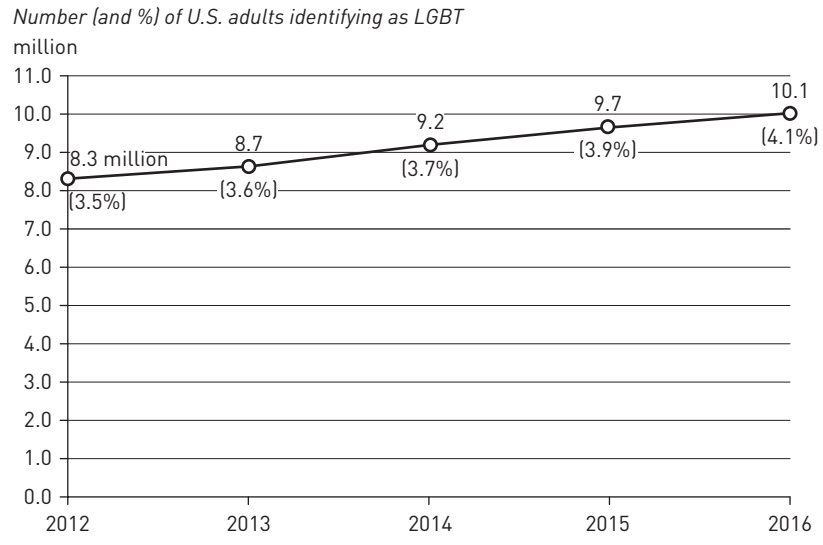
Of course, no one set of categories could capture the wide range of close relationships. Researchers have studied same-sex romantic couples (Feinstein, McConnell, Dyar, Mustanski, & Newcomb, 2018; M. Huston & Schwartz, 1995), polygamy (Altman & Ginat, 1996), consensual nonmonogamy (E. C. Levine, Herbenick, Martinez, Fu, & Dodge, 2018), cohabitation between unmarried individuals (M. J. Rosenfeld & Roesler, 2019), single-parent families (Royal, Eaton, Smith, Cliette, & Livingston, 2017), stepfamilies (Metts, Schrodt, & Braithwaite, 2017), interracial couples (S. Williams & Andersen, 1998), cross-generational relationships (Fernández-Reino & González-Ferrer, 2018), long-distance relationships (Belus, Pentel, Cohen, Fischer, & Baucom, 2019), and cross-sex friendships (see Chapter 10), among many others.

Yet, the balance of attention given by relationship scientists remains very uneven. For example, we know a lot more about heterosexual romantic relationships than those between members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex, or asexual or allied (LGBTQIA+) communities; we know more about the relationships of individuals (especially college students) in the United States than anywhere else in the world; we know more about "traditional" families (with a husband, wife, and two biological children) than "nontraditional" family types (an especially problematic label since "traditional" families are now fewer in some parts of the world than "nontraditional" ones); and the literature often perpetuates an assumption that marriages are voluntary associations that grow through a series of courtship steps, despite the fact that arranged marriages, or courtship set up by the social network, are the norm for some communities around the world. To elaborate, we will take a closer peak at the first two of these biases in research knowledge. You will notice that progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go for us to know about all relationships as much as we do about heterosexual romantic relationships in the United States.

The Heterosexual Bias

Despite advances, research on the romantic relationships of the LGBTQIA+ community lags far behind research on heterosexual romantic relationships. Peplau and Spalding (2000) reported that of 312 articles published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* from 1980 to 1993, only three examined any aspect of sexual orientation. Similarly, Wood and Duck (1995) noted that most research focused on the relationships of young, white, middle-class heterosexuals. To determine if the situation has improved, we conducted a search of articles published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships* from 2000 to 2016, using the keywords *gay, lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, same-sex couple,* and *sexual orientation*. This search produced 43 articles that with those keywords, which is a significant improvement compared to the 1980s and early 1990s, but still only about 2% of the 1,700 or so articles published in those two journals during that time. That means that approximately 98% of the knowledge produced in the primary two journals that examine relationship science was focused on relationships among individuals with a heterosexual orientation. Compare that to between 3.5% and 4.5% of the U.S. population, which equates to about 10 million people, who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ (Newport, 2018). Moreover, younger generations are more accepting of diverse sexual and gender identities than are older individuals, so younger individuals are more likely to identify as LGBTQIA+ than are older individuals, as shown in Figure 1.1 (A. Brown, 2017).

FIGURE 1.1 ■ The Number of Americans Identifying as LGBT Is Rising



Source: A. Brown (2017).

While it's important not to overstate the impact that sexual orientation or gender identity has on relationships, Chevrette (2013) argues that this bias in research has blinded scientists to ways of communicating in relationships other than those found in relationships between heterosexuals. She asks researchers to "[shift] focus to populations frequently omitted from dominant conceptions of relationships and families" (p. 184).

THE UNITED STATES AND COLLEGE BIAS Another way in which the research on relationships is biased is that it is primarily about the relationships of white college students in the United States. Soliz and Phillips (2018), in reviewing the literature on family communication, concluded that research knowledge in that domain "is predominantly about Western families (primarily in the United States) and also, very limited in the understanding of family functioning and relationships and processes in ethnic-racial minority families" (p. 6). That analysis is consistent with summaries of the discipline of social psychology. For example, Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) noted that "a randomly selected American undergraduate is more than 4000 times more likely to be a research participant [in social psychology journals] than is a randomly selected person from outside of the West" (p. 63). Finally, an analysis that one of us did of interpersonal communication studies published between 2013 and 2018 in communication journals (W. A. Afifi & Cornejo, in press) showed that white college students in the United States appeared as participants in that research at a rate 20,000% higher than they are represented in the world population. No, that's not a typo. That group represents 0.13% of the world population but made up 27% of the interpersonal communication samples across those six years. More broadly, the U.S. population makes up about 8% of the world population but 69% of the samples. Not a single study was conducted in either Mexico or India, a country of nearly 1.4 billion people.

There is no doubt that our knowledge of relationships is exceedingly uneven in terms of cultural representation. As a result, the conclusions we reach about relationship norms and patterns based on relationship research may not apply in some parts of the world. Relationship scientists must do better on this front.

In this book we endeavor to include research about various types of understudied relationships. However, because this book is based on existing research, the majority of the discussion necessarily revolves around heterosexual romantic relationships in the United States. So, as you read this book, keep in mind that so-called traditional models of relationships do not apply to all relationships. Nonetheless, many types of relationships have elements in common: connection and conflict, joy and grief, meetings and departures; most relationships are patches in the same quilt.

Characteristics Distinguishing Different Relationship Types

Relationships vary on many characteristics or dimensions. For example, some relationships are more satisfying or committed than others, and some families are traditional whereas others have more liberal values. When it comes to putting relationships into categories, such as friend, romantic partner, or family member, at least five characteristics are relevant: (1) how voluntary the relationship is, (2) the degree to which people are genetically related, (3) whether the relationship is sexual or platonic, (4) whether the relationship is romantic, and (5) the sex or gender of the partners.

Voluntary Versus Involuntary

Relationships can be voluntary or involuntary. People make a conscious choice to be involved in some relationships, but they enter other relationships without volition. For instance, children cannot choose their family; rather, they are born or adopted into relationships with parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and other relatives. People also have little choice in choosing steprelations and in-laws; these relationships often emerge based on other people's choices (e.g., your father or brother gets married).

By contrast, people usually choose their friends. In most Western cultures, people also choose their romantic partners, whereas in other cultures spouses are selected through arranged marriages, thus making them less voluntary. In many ways, voluntary and involuntary relationships develop differently. When developing friendships and other involuntary relationships, we often use communication to determine whether we want to be in the relationship in the first place. If the conversation flows, similarities are uncovered, trust develops, and then a friendship may emerge. With family relationships, the relationship is there regardless of the type of communication we share, although communication will have an enormous impact on the quality of that relationship.

Genetically Related Versus Nonrelated

The degree to which two people are genetically related also defines the type of relationship they share. Unless someone has an identical twin, people share the most genes (around 50%) with their biological parents, children, and siblings; followed by their biological grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews (around 25%); and their biological first cousins (at around 12.5%). Some researchers have suggested people communicate somewhat

differently depending on how genetically related they are. For example, some studies have shown that people are more likely to give affectionate communication to relatives than nonrelatives, beyond what is predicted by relational closeness (Floyd, 2018; see also Chapter 7). To some extent, the degree of genetic relatedness is also associated with how voluntary or involuntary a relationship is. For instance, even if you do not get along with your cousin, your cousin is still your cousin for life, making the relationship involuntary. Genetic relatedness also differentiates biological children from adopted children or stepchildren and helps researchers better understand the dynamics of blended families such as those that include stepsiblings.

Sexual Versus Platonic

Relationships are also characterized by their sexual versus platonic nature. Typically, friendships and relationships with nonspousal family members are platonic, which means they do not include sexual involvement. Dating and marital relationships, by contrast, are usually marked by sexual activity. Of course, friendships can also include sexual activity, as is the case with friends-with-benefits relationships (M. Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005, see chapter 9). Sexual activity is an important component of many relationships, but it is helpful to remember that platonic relationships can be just as close and satisfying as sexual relationships. Indeed, many people rank their relationships with their children, parents, siblings, and best friends as especially close and satisfying (Argyle & Furnham, 1983).

Romantic Versus Nonromantic

As the case of friends with benefits illustrates, there is an important distinction between having a sexual relationship and having a romantic relationship. Friends with benefits have sex but not romance. So what does it mean to be in a romantic relationship? Mongeau, Serewicz, Henningsen, and Davis (2006) noted that both romantic relationships and friendships can contain sexual activity and high levels of emotional involvement. The difference is in how the partners define the relationship. Generally, partners in a romantic relationship view themselves as a couple, which may include the possibility of marriage in the future (if they are not already married), and usually sexual exclusivity.

The distinction between emotional closeness and sexual intimacy is reflected in how various relationships develop. Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) suggested that there are three general trajectories or pathways toward developing a romantic relationship. The "traditional" trajectory is acquaintanceship to romantic relationship. Here, two people meet, are physically attracted to one another, start talking, form an emotional attachment, and eventually become a romantic couple. In this case, the sexual and emotional aspects of the relationship tend to develop together. Other times, people follow a trajectory that moves from platonic relationship to romantic relationship. These individuals develop emotional closeness first as friends; later they add sexual intimacy, which often leads them to redefine their relationship as romantic. The third trajectory moves from being a friends-with-benefits relationship to having a romantic relationship. In this trajectory, sexual activity and emotional closeness are usually present in the friends-with-benefits relationship. Thus, these aspects of the relationship are not what changes when the relationship turns romantic. Instead, it is the definition of the relationship that changes. It is noteworthy, however, that most friends-with-benefits relationships do not turn into romances (see Chapter 9).

Male Versus Female or Masculine Versus Feminine

Some scholars label sex or gender as a component that defines types of relationships (Wood, 1996). Sex refers to an individual's biological makeup as male or female, whereas gender refers to how masculine, feminine, or androgynous a person is; androgynous individuals possess both feminine and masculine traits (Bem, 1974). Sex is biologically determined, whereas gender is socially and culturally constructed. Sex helps define family relationships into categories such as father–son or father–daughter, or romantic relationships into categories such as lesbian, gay, or heterosexual. Most research on friendship makes these distinctions by comparing male friendships to female friendships, or same-sex friendships to cross-sex friendships (see Chapter 10). Other research focuses on gender by looking at how masculine, feminine, or androgynous individuals are. For example, a romantic couple consisting of a feminine person and a masculine person functions differently from a romantic couple consisting of two androgynous individuals. In this book, we use the term *sex* to refer to biology (male, female, or intersex) and the term *gender* to refer to culturally constructed images of men and women as being either masculine or feminine.

In the United States, approximately between .6% of individuals (or 1.4 million people) define themselves as transgender (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016), almost double what it was about a decade ago. Although definitions for what it means to be transgender are still emerging in the literature, one of the most commonly cited definitions comes from Stryker's (2008) book, *Transgender History.* She defines **transgender** as describing "people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain gender" (p. 1). The most critical part of this definition is that people move from an "unchosen starting place" to creating their own definition of gender.

Transgender: A term used to describe people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth and cross over cultural boundaries regarding what traditionally constitutes gender.

In the 1990s, a biologist developed the term *cisgender* to identify individuals whose gender identity (e.g., male) matches with the biological sex they were given at birth (e.g., male). The term was officially added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2015 (see Brydum, 2015, for discussion of the origins and meaning of the term). With that in mind, we might now clarify what we wrote earlier: When we use the term *male*, we are referring to cis-male, and when we use the term *female,* we are referring to cis-female, unless we note otherwise. We do so mostly because the literature on transgendered individuals (the opposite of cisgender in definition) is, unfortunately, woefully small.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Having defined various relationship types, we turn to a discussion of the kinds of communication that occur in those relationships. The terms *interpersonal communication* and *relational communication* describe the process whereby people exchange messages in different types of relationships. The goal of message exchange is to cocreate meaning, although—as we shall see shortly—not all message exchanges are effective and **miscommunication** occurs frequently. A broader concept than relational communication, interpersonal communication refers to the exchange of messages, verbal and nonverbal, between two people, regardless of the relationship they share. These people could be strangers, acquaintances, coworkers, political candidate and voter, teacher and student, superior and subordinate, friends, or lovers, to name just a few relationship types. Thus, interpersonal communication includes

Miscommunication: The result of someone sending an intentional message that is misinterpreted by the receiver.

the exchange of messages in all sorts of relationships, ranging from functional to casual to close. Relational communication, by contrast, is narrower in that it typically focuses on messages exchanged in close, or potentially close, relationships, such as those between good friends, romantic partners, and family members. In this section, we focus on six specific principles related to interpersonal communication.

Verbal and Nonverbal Messages

The first principle is that *interpersonal communication consists of a variety of nonverbal and verbal messages that can be exchanged through various channels, including face-to-face and computer-mediated channels.* Although much of our communication consists of verbal messages, nonverbal communication is at least as important as verbal communication (Andersen, 2008). In fact, some studies suggest that 60% to 65% of the meaning in most interactions comes from nonverbal behavior. Indeed, when emotional messages are exchanged, even more of the meaning may be gleaned from nonverbal behaviors (see Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2010). Words are not always to be trusted. For example, someone can say "I love you" and not really mean it. But the person who spends time with you, gazes into your eyes, touches you lovingly, tunes into your moods, interprets your body language, synchronizes with your behavior, and uses a loving tone of voice sends a much stronger message. Nonverbal actions often do speak louder than words.

Nonverbal communication includes a wide variety of behaviors. In fact, nonverbal behavior is particularly powerful because people can send messages using numerous nonverbal behaviors all at once. For example, Kristi's lip might tremble while she wipes a tear from her cheek, gazes downward, slumps back in her chair, and lets out a sigh. These actions prompt Kristi's mom to reach over and hug her. Similarly, in Photos 1.1 and 1.2, several nonverbal cues are being emitted simultaneously. Nonverbal behaviors such as these have been studied within the context of relationships and have been classified into the following categories (Burgoon et al., 2010):

- ***Kinesics:*** Facial expressions, body and eye movements, including posture, gestures, walking style, smiling, and pupil dilation, among other kinesic cues
- ***Vocalics:*** Silence and the way words are pronounced, including vocal pitch, loudness, accent, tone, and speed, as well as vocalizations such as crying and sighing
- ***Proxemics:*** The interpersonal use of space, including conversational distances and territory
- ***Haptics:*** The use of touch, ranging from affectionate to violent touch
- ***Appearance and adornment:*** Physical attributes such as height, weight, fitness, hair, and attractiveness, as well as adornments such as clothing, perfume, and tattoos
- ***Artifacts and environmental cues***: Objects such as candles and soft music used to set a romantic mood, and ways the environment affects interaction through cues such as furniture arrangement and the size of a room
- ***Chronemic cues:*** The use of time, such as showing up for a date early or late, dominating a conversation, or waiting a long or short time for someone

Photo 1.1

Photo 1.2: Take a close look at the nonverbal cues in these photos. How do these cues influence your perception of this couple, including the emotions they are experiencing and the type of relationship they share? How is technology affecting their interaction in the second picture?

Which of these categories of nonverbal behavior are represented in Photo 1.1? The kinesic and haptic cues should be easy to pick out. His hand is on her knee and around her back, so you may guess that they are emotionally close. She is closed off and her facial expression is hidden, but it is easy to imagine that she looks sad or upset given that her hands are over her face and he is comforting her. His facial expression is a bit difficult to read. He looks calm. Is there a hint of a smile? Is he trying to be empathetic or act concerned? Kinesic and haptic behavior are also evident in Photo 1.2. The couple is in an intimate position. She is leaning against him and his leg is around her. Environmental cues and artifacts (such as the computer and phone) provide contextual information. It looks like they may be purchasing something online since he is holding a credit card and she has a computer on her lap. She looks caught up in her phone conversation, whereas he looks amused about something. There is also a pillow behind his back, which suggests that he may want to be comfortable while engaging in tasks. From these cues, one might guess these individuals are a young romantic couple (perhaps in their 20s), that they live together, and that they get along well and are quite comfortable with one another. This guess may be right or wrong—the point is that we infer a lot about people based on their nonverbal behavior.

Nonverbal communication is not limited to face-to-face interactions. For example, when texting, Snapchatting, or commenting on someone's social media, nonverbal elements are often inserted. These nonverbal elements can change the meaning of a message. In one study, people were asked to think about how they would react to seeing a message on their partner's Facebook page (Fleuriet, Cole, & Guerrero, 2014). In one case, the message consisted only of the words "It was good to see you last night." In other cases, a winky face emoji was added or the words were in all capital letters. Not surprisingly, the participants who saw the message with the winky face emoji thought they would get more upset and suscipious than did those who saw the plain text.

Interpersonal communication also consists of many forms of verbal behavior, including verbal content and self-disclosure. Self-disclosure, a vital form of interpersonal communication, is used to reveal personal information to others (see Chapter 6). The use of formal or informal language, nicknames, and present or future tense are also examples of verbal behavior that affect interpersonal interactions. For example, when dating partners first talk about sharing a future, such communication is likely to reflect a shift toward a more committed relationship.

Finally, various channels are used to exchange interpersonal communication. Traditionally, research on interpersonal communication focused on face-to-face interaction. But in the 21st century, communication occurs in a variety of channels that utilize

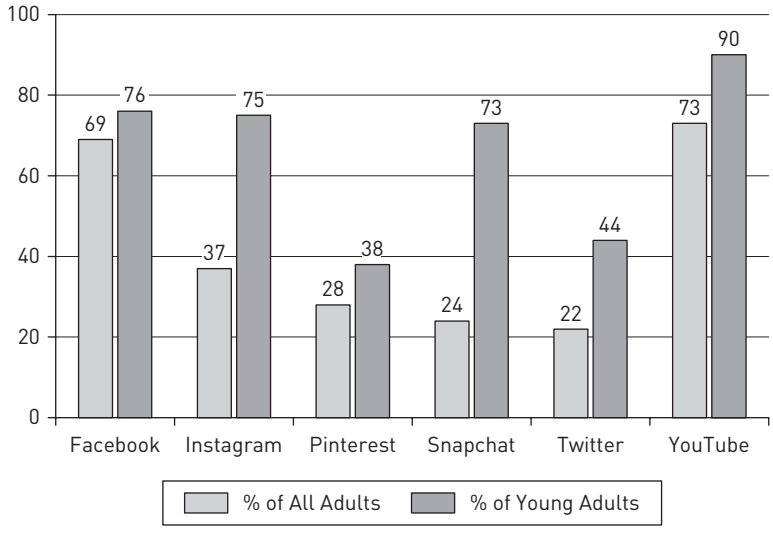
technology. Think of all the various ways you communicated with people yesterday. You likely used your cell phone to call or text someone, visited your social media, sent and received e-mail, and used apps like Snapchat to keep in touch with others. As Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) noted at the beginning of this century, "The digital and information revolution has merged into a communications revolution" that has changed the way people interact (p. 72). One implication of this revolution is that people are more accessible to one another. Indeed, individuals can reach each other by cell phone throughout much of the day no matter where they are. Gone are the days when people waited to call someone until they were home. Another implication is that computer-mediated communication can easily be substituted for face-to-face and voice-to-voice communication. Two people can text each other on and off all day without ever seeing each other or hearing each other's voices.

Computer-mediated communication is different from face-to-face communication in some respects. When people communicate via e-mail and text messaging, for example, nonverbal cues are different and usually reduced. People can insert emoticons, type in all caps, italicize certain words, and use initialisms such as lol (laugh out loud) to add a nonverbal component, but inserting these nonverbal elements is different than viewing them in person or over channels such as Snapchat or Skype that allow people to see each other in real time. When texting, e-mailing, direct messaging, or commenting on someone's social media, people can think about the nonverbal elements before adding them. In real time, nonverbal displays are typically more spontaneous. Computer-mediated channels also afford communicators more opportunity to plan and control their messages. During face-to-face interaction, it may be difficult to think of an intelligent-sounding answer to a question or a witty response to flirtation or sarcasm. In contrast, when sending a text or e-mail, there is more time to construct, edit, and revise a well-thought-out message. Some computer-mediated channels of communication, such as social networking sites, allow people to communicate in ways that they could not have prior to the digital revolution. For example, people can simultaneously send the same message to many different people using Twitter or e-mail, post pictures on their Instagram or Snapchat story that all their followers can open, and meet people through dating apps that they might never have had the opportunity to interact with otherwise. As these examples show, technology has opened up new ways for people to relate to and interact with one another.

Smartphones and other technology change drastically from generation to generation. In 2015, Lenhart (2015a, 2015b) from the Pew Research Institute reported that 88% of U.S. teens had cell phones, the vast majority of which were smartphones. The preferred online platforms also change. As Figure 1.2 shows, younger adults (aged 18 to 24 years old) differ from the general adult population in their use of various social media platforms. Compared to the general population, a higher percentage of young adults report using each platform. Whereas YouTube and Facebook are favorite online destinations for many people across generations, Instagram and Snapchat are by far more popular among younger than older adults.

Instagram was launched in 2010. By 2016 it had more than 300 million daily users, with over 80% of those users residing outside the United States. More than 95 million photos and videos are posted on Instagram every day (Instagram Press News, n.d.). The average user has around 150 followers (Lenhart, 2015a). Snapchat became available in 2011 and by 2016 boasted 150 million daily users worldwide. Snapchat is the fastest growing social media platform, and it is especially popular with teens and young adults (Statista, n.d.).

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Use Various Online Platforms



Note: Young adults include those 18 to 25 years old. Data taken from a 2019 Pew Center Report (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

These statistics demonstrate how fast new technologies can become popular and change how people interact on a daily basis. Despite declining popularity among U.S. teens and young adults, Facebook remains a top social networking platform worldwide. By 2016, Facebook had more than 1.3 billion daily users, with 84.5% of these users residing outside North America ("Company Info | Facebook"). The typical Facebook user averages about 20 minutes per day on the social networking site; approximately 66% of users log in at least once per day (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007).

Communication as Inevitable

The second principle is that *one cannot not communicate in face-to-face settings.* In one of the important early works on communication, Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) stated, "Activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and thus are themselves communicating" (p. 49). Unless two people simply do not notice each other, some communication is inevitable. Even if someone does not intend to send a message, something that person says or does is often interpreted as meaningful by the other person. This does not mean, however, that everything people do is communication. For communication to occur, a person has to send a message intentionally *or* a receiver has to perceive and assign meaning to a behavior. For example, if you are blinking while interacting, your friend is unlikely to attach any meaning to such an ordinary, involuntary behavior. Similarly, not all body movements are communication since many go unnoticed. But some movements you make and most words you say will be received and interpreted by others, making it impossible not to communicate at some level (Andersen, 1991).

To illustrate, recall the last time you sat next to a stranger—perhaps at the mall, at the movies, or on a plane. What did you notice about the person? Did you check to see if the person looked friendly, or did you notice the stranger's appearance? Did the person look older or younger than you? If you can answer any of these questions, scholars such as Andersen (1991) believe communication took place because you perceived and interpreted the stranger's behavior. In our relationships, our partners interpret much of what we do as meaningful. For example, a smile might be perceived as heartfelt or condescending, while a neutral facial expression might be perceived as reflecting boredom or anger. Even silence can communicate a message. For instance, if a close friend stops calling you and fails to return your messages, you will likely suspect that something is wrong. Think about being left "on read." This inaction can cause anxiety and confusion when people wonder what they did wrong and if or when the person they were talking to will start up the conversation again. You could attribute a friend's silence leaving you "on read" a number of ways. In any case, the way you interpret your friend's silence will probably lead you to communicate in particular ways that will further influence the exchange of messages between you and your friend.

Although this principle is most applicable to face-to-face situations, it can also apply to computer-mediated communication. Sometimes people do not realize that an individual has seen a post and not responded to it, but other times a lack of communication communicates a strong message. As mentioned previously, people can put someone "on read". They can also stop liking someone's Instagram pictures, end a Snapchat streak, or fail to respond to a direct message. These are just some of many examples of how not communicating is communicating in mediated contexts. One of our students once noted that her phone broke when she was in the process of moving. Her computer was packed up, so she wasn't able to access her Facebook or e-mail accounts either. After not hearing from her for about 48 hours, a group of friends came looking for her (first at her old place, then at her new place) to make sure that she was all right.

Interpersonal Communication Goals

The third principle is that *people use interpersonal communication to fulfill goals.* This does not mean that all communication is strategic. As discussed earlier, people often send spontaneous messages that are interpreted by others as meaningful. In addition, much of our communication is relatively mindless and routine (Burgoon & Langer, 1995; Langer, 1989). However, interpersonal communication likely developed as a way to help people meet their everyday goals. Communication helps people make good impressions, connect with others on a social level, and get things done. Even mundane communication, such as saying "hi" to acquaintances when passing by them on campus, fulfills goals related to being civil and polite. Although communication fulfills numerous specific goals, many of those goals fall under one of three overarching categories: self-presentational, relational, or instrumental goals (Canary & Cody, 1994).

Self-presentational goals relate to the image we convey. Andersen (2008) claimed that the most common objective of persuasion is selling ourselves. Other scholars contend that people resemble actors on a stage, presenting themselves in the most favorable light (see Chapter 2). Indeed, a central set of communication principles suggests we are only as attractive, credible, competent, or honest as others think we are. Objective personal qualities have little to do with our image, especially when we first meet people. From an interpersonal

Self-presentational goals: Motivations that relate to the image we want to convey.

standpoint, we are what people think we are. Predictably, people spend a lot of time trying to look and act just right for that big date or that important interview. For example, before attending her first student club meeting, Su-Lin might purposely dress like a student from the United States so she will fit in.

Relational goals: Relational objectives or states that we pursue and that often motivate our communication choices.

Relational goals have to do with the social ties we desire with others. As Canary and Cody (1994) maintained, "nothing brings us more joy than our personal relationships. We spend significant amounts of time, energy and emotion in the pursuit of quality relationships" (p. 6). At every stage in a relationship, we have goals and plans for the future of that relationship. For example, you might want to meet that attractive student in your class, impress your date, avoid the person who won't leave you alone, or spend time with your sister whom you haven't seen all year. Some of our relational goals have to do with wanting to feel a sense of belonging and social connection. For example, being invited to parties, having friends to travel with, and having a family with whom to spend holidays all highlight the importance of our social connections. Moreover, people have needs for affection and intimacy that can only be fulfilled in close relationships (see Chapter 8). When Kristi reaches out to her parents for love and support while going through her divorce, they provide her with much needed affection during a time when she has lost intimacy from her husband.

Instrumental goals: Goals related to tasks, such as making money, getting good grades, buying a car, getting a ride to school, and completing a homework assignment.

Instrumental goals are task oriented. For example, making money, getting good grades, buying a car, getting a ride to school, and completing a homework assignment are all instrumental goals. People often facilitate attainment of instrumental goals by asking for assistance from a friend, getting permission from a parent or boss, eliciting support from a friend, or influencing someone's attitudes or behaviors (Canary & Cody, 1994). In close relationships, people often share tasks and support each other in instrumental ways, such as Dave helping Jake with his math homework. Sharing tasks is also an important part of maintaining relationships when people live together (Canary & Stafford, 1994). Roommates who work together to keep their place clean and parents who divide up the household chores and child-care responsibilities in ways that are seen as helpful and fair report having happier relationships. Achieving instrumental goals together fosters a sense of accomplishment and teamwork.

Effectiveness and Shared Meaning

The fourth principle is that *interpersonal communication varies in effectiveness, with the most effective messages leading to shared meaning between a sender and a receiver.* Understanding occurs when a receiver attaches approximately the same meaning to the message as the sender intended. Of course, such perfectly effective communication may never occur since people typically attach somewhat different meanings to the same messages. It is impossible to get inside people's heads to think their thoughts and feel their emotions. Thus, it is difficult to truly and completely understand "where someone is coming from." Nonetheless, communication is most effective when the sender and receiver attach very similar meanings to a behavior. Less effective (or less accurate) communication occurs when a sender and receiver attach different meanings to a behavior.

Unattended behavior: A behavior (such as a blink) that goes unnoticed by either the sender or the receiver. (This is considered behavior but not communication.)

Successful communication: A sender's message is interpreted correctly by a receiver. (This is the most effective form of communication.)

Guerrero and Floyd (2006) provided a way to think about how different types of messages are more or less effective. In their model (see Figure 1.3), communication necessitates that a sender encode a message or a receiver decode a message. Therefore, behaviors falling in the box labeled **unattended behavior** do not qualify as communication. The exchanges in the other boxes are all relevant to interpersonal communication, but the most effective form of communication—**successful communication**—occurs when a sender's message is

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Types of Communication and Behavior

	Behavior Not Interpreted	*Behavior Interpreted Inaccurately*	*Behavior Interpreted Accurately*
Behavior Sent With Intention	Attempted communication	Miscommunication	Successful communication
Behavior Sent Without Intention	Unattended behavior	Misinterpretation	Accidental communication

interpreted correctly by a receiver. For example, Jake may ask Dave to stay home and help him with his statistics homework, and Dave may understand what Jake wants him to do.

Other exchanges are less effective. Miscommunication occurs when someone sends an intentional message that is misinterpreted by the receiver. For example, you might teasingly say "I hate you" to someone who takes your message literally. **Attempted communication** occurs when someone sends an intentional message that the receiver fails to receive. For example, you might hint that you want to leave a boring party, but your partner fails to get the message and keeps on partying. **Misinterpretation** occurs when someone unintentionally sends a message that is misconstrued by the receiver. You may be scowling because you are in a bad mood after a trying day at work, but your roommate misinterprets your facial expression as showing anger toward her or him. Finally, **accidental communication** occurs when someone does not mean to send a message, but the receiver observes the behavior and interprets it correctly. For example, you might try to hide your joy at acing an exam when a classmate who studied harder than you did performed poorly on that exam, but your classmate sees your nonverbal reaction and correctly assumes you did well. Although such communication is an authentic representation of your feelings, your emotional expression is ineffective because it communicates a message you do not intend (or want) to send. Of course, some forms of accidental communication can be beneficial. Imagine that Su-Lin feels uncomfortable interacting in her new cultural environment. She tries not to show her discomfort, but one of her classmate's picks up on it and tries to put her at ease. In this case, Su-Lin's communication is effective without her intentionally sending a message. All these forms of communication can impact the communication process and people's relationships.

Attempted communication: When someone sends an intentional message that the intended receiver fails to receive.

Misinterpretation: The result of someone unintentionally sending a message that is misinterpreted by the receiver.

Accidental communication: Occurs when a message is unintentionally sent but the receiver nonetheless observes the behavior and interprets it correctly.

Content Versus Relational Information

Another factor influencing whether communication is effective is the extent to which partners have the same relational interpretations of messages. This leads into a fifth principle of interpersonal communication, namely, that *every message contains both content and relational information.* This is a long-standing principle of interpersonal communication, going back to when Bateson (1951) observed that messages, whether verbal or nonverbal, send more than just literal information. Messages also tell people something about the relationship people share. Building on Bateson's work, Watzlawick and colleagues (1967) discussed two levels of communication. The **content level** of a message conveys information at a literal level, whereas the **relational level** provides a context for interpreting the message of a relationship. Both the type of relationship people share and the nonverbal behaviors people use influence the relational level of a message.

Content level: This part of a message conveys information at a literal level. "What are we doing tonight?" is a question about tonight's activities at the content level.

Relational level: The relational level of a message provides a context for interpreting communication within the broader context of a relationship. Nonverbal cues are a primary part of the relational level of a message.

The content or literal level of the message is the same for most people within a given situation. For example, a simple statement such as "Hand me your book" contains both a content (namely, the request to hand over the book) and a relational message or messages. The relational message depends on whether the request is delivered in a harsh, polite, sarcastic, bored, or warm vocal tone. It also depends on the communicator's facial expressions, posture, gestures, use of touch, attire, eye contact, and a host of other nonverbal behaviors. Finally, the context or situation can affect how the relational information in a message is interpreted. Thus, a message can have multiple meanings at the relational level as well as various interpretations.

Another example may be helpful. Suppose that late on Friday night the person you have been talking to sends you a message and says, "So what are we doing tonight?" At the content level, this seems to be a fairly simple question. But at the relational level, this question could be interpreted a variety of ways. You might think, "Wow, I was hoping we would get together tonight, so it's nice to know we are on the same wavelength." Or you could think, "Why is this person assuming we are going out when nothing was planned in advance?" or worse yet, "Oh great, calling this late is certainly code for a booty call." All, or none, of these interpretations could be correct in a given situation, showing that the same message can be interpreted many different ways at the relational level.

Symmetry in Communication

Finally, *interpersonal communication can be symmetrical or asymmetrical.* This sixth principle of communication, from Watzlawick and fellow researchers (1967), emphasizes the dyadic nature of communication. That is, communication unfolds through a series of messages and countermessages that contribute to the meaning people attach to a given interaction. Symmetrical communication occurs when people exchange similar relational information or similar messages. For instance, a dominant message may be met with another dominant message. (Jake says, "Help me with my homework," and Dave responds, "Do it yourself!") Or an affectionate message may be met with another affectionate message. (Kristi's mother says, "I love you," and Kristi says, "I love you, too.") Nonverbal messages can also be symmetrical, as when someone smiles at you and you smile back, or when your date gazes at you lovingly and you touch her or him gently on the arm.

Asymmetrical communication occurs when people exchange different kinds of information. One type of asymmetry arises when people exchange messages that are opposite in meaning. For example, a dominant message such as "I need you to help me with my homework now!" might be met with a submissive message such as "Okay, I'll cancel my plans and help you." Or Kristi's declaration of love to her soon-to-be–ex-husband might be met with a guilt-ridden silence and shuffling of feet, after which he says something like "I'm so sorry that I don't love you anymore." Another type of asymmetry occurs when one person uses more of a certain behavior than another person. For instance, imagine that Su-Lin is from an Asian culture where people generally touch less than do people from the United States. During a social gathering, a new friend of Su-Lin's might casually touch her arm five times, whereas Su-Lin might only initiate touch once. Although there is some symmetry because both Su-Lin and her new friend engage in some touch, the difference in the amount of touch each person initiates constitutes a source of asymmetry. As these examples suggest, the verbal and nonverbal messages that two people send and receive work together to create a unique pattern of communication that reflects their relationship.

PRINCIPLES OF RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

As mentioned previously, relational communication is a subset of interpersonal communication that focuses on messages exchanged within relationships that are, were, or have the potential to become close. Thus, all of the principles of interpersonal communication apply to communication in relationships. Relational communication includes the entire range of communicative behaviors from vital relational messages to mundane everyday interactions. Relational communication reflects the nature of a relationship at a particular time. Communication constitutes and defines relationships. In other words, communication is the substance of close relationships. Communication is dynamic. Change and contradictions are constant in relationships. Five principles of relational communication are consistent with these ideas.

Relationships Emerge Across Ongoing Interactions

Relationships form not from thin air but across repeated interactions (Wilmot, 1995). In part, relationships represent collections of all the communication episodes in which two partners have engaged over time, and each episode adds new information about the relationship. In new relationships, each episode may add considerably to the definition of the relationship. Even in well-developed relationships, critical turning points such as a declaration of love, a heated argument, or an anniversary can alter the course of the relationship. The bottom line is this: Without communication, there is no relationship.

Relationships Contextualize Messages

In various relationships, messages have different meanings (Wilmot, 1995). For example, a frown from your partner has a different meaning than a frown from a stranger, a touch from your mom does not mean the same thing as a touch from your date, and disclosure from a coworker communicates something different from disclosure from a good friend. In Wilmot's (1995) words, "Relationship definitions 'frame' or contextualize communication behavior" (p. 27). Thus, the context and relationship are critical to understanding the message. According to Andersen (1989), "It has become axiomatic that no human action can be successfully interpreted outside of its context. The term 'out of context' has become synonymous with meaningless or misleading" (p. 27). This statement reflects the interpersonal principle that every message contains both a content and a relational meaning.

Communication Sends a Variety of Relational Messages

People send a variety of messages to one another about their relationships. After reviewing the literature from a range of disciplines, Burgoon and Hale (1984, 1987) outlined seven types of relational messages that people communicate to one another: (1) dominance/submission, (2) level of intimacy, (3) degree of similarity, (4) task–social orientation, (5) formality/informality, (6) degree of social composure, and (7) level of emotional arousal and activation. These messages, which have been referred to as the **fundamental relational themes** of communication, all reflect the nature of a relationship at a given point in time. Of these seven dimensions, dominance/submission and level of intimacy are the two main themes that characterize relationships (Burgoon & Hale, 1987). (See following Highlights for further information on each of these seven themes.)

Fundamental relational themes: Messages that reflect the nature of a relationship, such as dominance/submission, intimacy, degree of similarity, task/social orientation, formality/informality, social composure, and emotional activation.

The seven message themes are important within all types of interpersonal interaction but especially in close relationships. In role relationships, relational messages stay fairly constant; people generally follow prescribed rules and scripts. For instance, in manager–employee relationships, a certain level of formality, friendliness, dominance, and task orientation usually prevails across most interactions. By contrast, in close relationships the range and impact of relational messages typically is much greater. For example, a romantic couple might be hostile during an argument and then be intimate when making up, a parent might act with an unusual level of formality and dominance during a serious talk with a child, or friends might have a hard time switching gears and moving from a conversation to a task. Such messages can have a powerful impact on how relational partners view each other and their relationship.

HIGHLIGHTS
SEVEN FUNDAMENTAL THEMES OF RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

1. ***Dominance/submission***: Dominance is often defined as the actual degree to which a person influences someone and submission as the actual degree to which a person gives up influence and yields to the wishes of someone else. Dominance is communicated verbally and nonverbally in a variety of ways (see Chapter 12).
2. ***Level of intimacy***: Intimacy is a multidimensional construct related to the degree to which people communicate affection, inclusion, trust, depth, and involvement. Intimacy is conveyed in a variety of ways, including through self-disclosure and nonverbal displays of affection and immediacy (see Chapters 6 and 7).
3. ***Degree of similarity***: Similarity is achieved through a wide array of verbal cues, such as expressing similar opinions and values, agreeing with each other, reciprocating self-disclosure, and communicating empathy and understanding. Nonverbal cues such as adopting the same posture, laughing together, dressing alike, and picking up someone's accent also communicate similarity.
4. ***Task–social orientations***: This message reflects how much people are focused on tasks versus having fun and socializing. People are generally rated as more task oriented when they seem sincere, reasonable, and more interested in completing the task at hand than participating in off-the-topic conversation.
5. ***Formality/informality***: When an interaction is formal, people maintain their distance, and the overall tone of the interaction is serious. They are also more likely to feel and look nervous. By contrast, less distance and a more casual approach, including feeling and looking more relaxed, characterize informal interactions.
6. ***Degree of social composure***: Social composure relates to the level of calmness and confidence people show in a given interaction. When people are socially composed, they appear sure of themselves. Social composure is conveyed through verbal cues such as making strong, convincing arguments and saying the appropriate words at the right time, as well as nonverbal behaviors such as direct eye contact and fluent speech.
7. ***Level of emotional arousal and activation***: This message theme refers to the degree to which an interaction is emotionally charged. It addresses the types of emotion a person experiences and expresses, as well as how much arousal the person feels. Emotional states such as distress, anger, and sadness can sometimes impede communication, whereas emotions such as happiness, excitement, and interest can lead to more effective interpersonal communication.

Relational Communication Is Dynamic

Relationships constantly change, as does relational communication. Successful relational partners—whether they are family members, friends, or lovers—learn how to adjust their communication to meet the challenges and changes that they face. For example, a parent's communication style often becomes less dominant as a child gets older, friends learn to interact with new people in each other's social networks, and spouses may need to find new ways to show affection to each other when they are preoccupied with their children and careers. Long-distance relationships provide a great example of the dynamic nature of relational communication. Partners in long-distance relationships sometimes idealize each other—in part because they are always on their best behavior when they spend time together. When the relationship becomes proximal, however, their communication may not always be as positive, leading many couples to break up (Stafford & Merolla, 2007).

Dialectic theory also highlights the dynamic nature of relational communication by emphasizing contradictions in messages (see Chapter 5). For example, a person might say, "I'm glad we both had time apart this week to focus on our own stuff, but I can't wait to see you tomorrow." This seemingly contradictory message ("It's good to be apart sometimes but together other times") reflects the changing needs within a relationship. Therefore, rather than thinking of relationships as hitting a plateau or becoming completely stable, it is better to conceptualize stability as a relative concept. In other words, relationships can be committed and they can include a lot of routine communication, but they are still ever-changing entities.

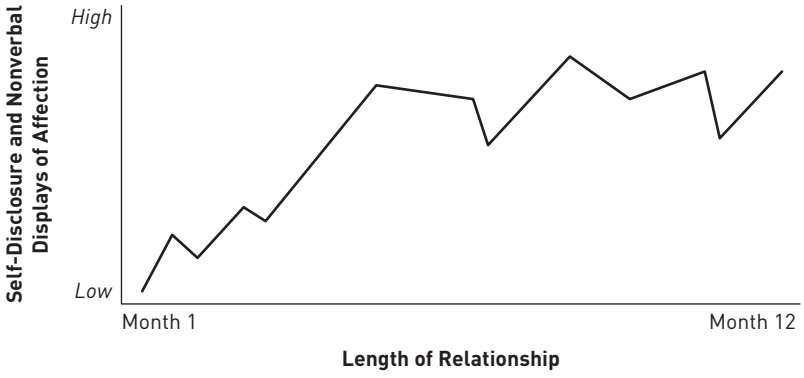
Relational Communication Follows Both Linear and Nonlinear Patterns

Considerable research has examined how relationships develop over time. In fact, early research on interpersonal communication focused much more on how people begin and end relationships than on how they maintain relationships once they have developed. Some researchers believe that communication follows a linear trajectory (see Chapter 5 for more detail). This means that communication is characterized by increasing self-disclosure and nonverbal affection as a relationship gets closer. Think of this like a diagonal line going upward with the line representing the degree of closeness that is communicated as a relationship moves from being casual to close. If the relationship is ending, the linear approach would predict that there would be a similar line going downward, meaning that closeness is communicated less and less as the relationship de-escalates.

Other researchers believe that relational communication follows a nonlinear trajectory characterized by ups and downs (see Figure 1.4 and the turning point approach discussed in Chapter 5). For example, you might show increasing levels of affection to a new romantic partner until you get into your first big fight. When the fight is over, affection might increase again to a new and even higher level. And sometimes, your communication may be affectionate and distant at the same time, as would be the case if you say, "I like you a lot, but I need some time with my friends this weekend." These types of events would not coalesce to create a nice smooth linear pattern; instead, displays of closeness would spike upward and downward at different times depending on what was being communicated.

Most relationships include communication that reflects both linear and nonlinear patterns of development. Take Su-Lin as an example. Figure 1.4 depicts the trajectory that her relationship with a new roommate might take over the first 12 months of their emerging

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Possible Trajectory of a New Relationship



friendship. Notice that the relationship starts out rather low in terms of self-disclosure and affection but that this type of communication increases as they get to know one another, which is consistent with the linear approach. However, rather than consistently displaying more positive communication with each other, there are times when Su-Lin and her new roommate communicate relatively high and low levels of self-disclosure and affection. One relatively low point may occur during final exam week when they are both studying so hard that they don't talk as much to each other. A high point may occur when they have mutual friends over to their dorm room. Looking at the overall pattern of Su-Lin's relationship with her new roommate, it is clear that self-disclosure and affection have increased somewhat linearly, although there is also some nonlinearity (or up-and-down patterns) embedded within the trajectory.

Of course, relationships do not always follow the pattern depicted for Su-Lin and her roommate. Some relationships take more linear or nonlinear paths than others, but it is difficult to conceive of a relationship where all progress is all linear or where the relationship is all peaks and valleys with no stability. The point is that every relationship has a unique trajectory that reflects the dynamic nature of the communication that occurs between two people.

SUMMARY AND APPLICATION

This chapter introduced you to the field of personal relationships and provided information on key concepts that will be discussed throughout this book. After reading this chapter, you should have a better appreciation for the complexity of your relationships and the communication that occurs within them. Communication does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, communication is shaped by contextual and relational factors, and communication both reflects and influences the nature of a given relationship. In the scenarios that opened this chapter, Jake's communication with Dave reflects his expectation that a good friend should help him in a time of need. Su-Lin's communication

is shaped by the context of being in a new cultural environment, and Kristi's communication is embedded within a social network that includes her husband and her family.

Communication is essential for accomplishing personal and relational goals, as well as for fulfilling the basic human needs of affection, inclusion, and control. Only through communication can Jake persuade Dave to help him, and only through communication can Dave give Jake the knowledge that he needs to do well on his statistics assignment. It is through communication that Su-Lin will learn about and adapt to the U.S. culture, and it is through communication that her new friends will learn more about her and her culture. The scenario involving Kristi and her husband also highlights how communication reflects people's goals and needs—Kristi's husband used communication to inform her that he wanted a divorce; in turn, Kristi searched for comfort by communicating with her mother. While the importance of communication in these scenarios and in everyday life may be obvious to you, it is amazing to think about how much we rely on communication every day in so many ways. As this chapter has shown, being able to communicate effectively is a key to good relationships, and having good relationships is a key to a happy life.

KEY TERMS

accidental communication (p. 19)
attempted communication (p. 19)
behavioral interdependence (p. 6)
close relationship (p. 5)
content level (p. 19)
emotional attachment (p. 6)
fundamental relational themes (p. 21)
instrumental goals (p. 18)
interpersonal communication (p. 2)
interpersonal relationship (p. 3)
irreplaceability (p. 6)
miscommunication (p. 12)
misinterpretation (p. 19)
mutual influence (p. 6)
need fulfillment (p. 6)
relational communication (p. 2)
relational goals (p. 18)
relational level (p. 19)
relationships (p. 2)
role relationship (p. 6)
self-presentational goals (p. 17)
successful communication (p. 18)
transgender (p. 12)
unattended behavior (p. 18)
unique interaction patterns (p. 6)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What qualities distinguish your close relationships from your casual relationships? How is communication different in close versus casual relationships?
2. In addition to communicating in person, much of our communication is through computer-mediated channels such as texting, messaging, and FaceTiming someone. What channels of communication do you use most often in your daily life and with whom? Are there some types of communication that are likely to be more successful or effective in certain channels versus others? If so, explain.
3. What are some experiences of yours that help shed light on how cultural norms and expectations influence relationships? Experiences within families? Within romantic relationships? Friendships? What are some of the cultural values or other factors that help explain these differences from the experience of relationships within white communities in the United States (also shaped by cultural norms and values)?

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2 COMMUNICATING IDENTITY
The Social Self

Carolina is active on social media. She posts pictures on Instagram often and has around 700 followers. Her pictures are split about evenly between selfies and photos with friends. She also has a few old pictures up with her ex-boyfriend, although she took most of those down when they broke up a few months ago. At that time, she also changed her caption from his name with a heart next to it to her favorite quote, "carpe diem." Carolina's dad is Italian and she visits her relatives in Rome almost every summer, so her Instagram also features many photos taken in Italy. She is proud of her ethnic background, so she often captions these pictures with Italian flags or positive comments about the country. Carolina also has a Finsta (fake Instagram account) with only about 50 followers on it. Here she posts more candid and often funny photos that she would not want everyone to see. She is also active on Twitter where she retweets funny posts, direct messages tweets to friends, and posts an occasional subtweet. Her Twitter timeline goes back several years, showing who she went to school dances with, friends who wished her happy birthday over the years, and her activities in sports and her college sorority.

What does Carolina's social media say about her? It lets people know if she is dating or not (though the information she posts may or may not be true), gives others a sense of how popular she is (from her number of followers and pictures with people), her physical appearance (though some pictures are photoshopped), gives strangers a glimpse of who she is, provides a peek into her personal and social life, and facilitates interaction with acquaintances and friends. Whether her **self-presentation** is effective depends on who views her page. Carolina's social media accounts communicate to her friends in important ways; through her pictures and wall, she identifies herself as a good friend to certain people. Her social media accounts also send messages to classmates and potential friends; if they view her profile on Instagram or Twitter, it will help shape their impressions of her. But what if potential employers, professors, or her parents look at her page? Putting our identity out there for everyone to see raises questions about appropriateness, audience analysis, and privacy. Unlike everyday interactions, social networking sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are less nimble in creating multiple identities. Perhaps that is why some people like Carolina have Finsta accounts where they can share parts of themselves that are more candid and perhaps less flattering with a smaller set of friends.

Self-presentation: The things we do to portray a particular image of self.

The Internet is but one venue where people present and manage their identities. Identity management occurs in face-to-face interaction, in social networking, on the telephone, in text messages, and even in letters and gifts. Research most often focuses on face-to-face contexts that offer a glimpse into how people create and present their identities. Identity management is chiefly important at the beginning of relationships when people try to make a good initial impression, but it is even important in well-developed relationships. Once we are close to someone, we usually want to make good impressions on other people in their social networks, such as their friends and family.

In this chapter, we explore how people use communication to manage their identities in social interaction. First, we briefly discuss the development of personal identities and the role that relationships play in their development. Second, we discuss general principles of identity management, such as whether trying to make a good impression is deceptive and manipulative or is simply a natural, often unconscious process. Finally, we review literature on three perspectives on identity management, including Goffman's (1959) **dramaturgical perspective**, P. Brown and Levinson's (1987) **politeness theory**, and research on facework.

Dramaturgical perspective: A perspective suggesting that the world is a stage, people are actors, and we enact performances geared for particular audiences, with performances enacted to advance beneficial images of ourselves.

Politeness theory: Brown and Levinson's extension of Goffman's work, which focuses on the specific ways that people manage and save face using communication.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

Communication scholars, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and family researchers, among others, study how personal identities affect our lives. People are increasingly concerned about many aspects of their identity: popularity, education, relational partners, cars, résumés, homes, income, bodies, attractiveness, styles, sororities, occupations, health, mental well-being, and happiness. But identity is more than a personal experience: It is inherently social, communicative, and relational. Identity is inextricably interwoven with messages (verbal and nonverbal) we send about ourselves and with how other people respond to those messages.

Defining Identity

We define **identity** as the person we think we are and communicate to others. Specifically, it is the personal "theory of self that is formed and maintained through actual or imagined interpersonal agreement about what self is like" (Schlenker, 1985, p. 67). Identity is the sense of self or the "I" that has been a central topic in psychology and communication for years (R. Brown, 1965). Identity is the self, the face, the ego, and the image we present to others in everyday life. It helps define who we are in relation to others, including what makes us similar and unique (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). **Identity management** occurs when we try to influence people's images of ourselves. Carolina does this on her public social media accounts when she posts her best photos, including both selfies and pictures with friends. She manages her identity on social media by trying to present a favorable brand or image of herself as an attractive, educated young woman who loves to travel and has lots of friends.

Identity: The person we think we are and the self we communicate to others.

Identity management: The process people use to project and maintain a positive image to others.

Human Nature and Identity

Human beings are cognitively sophisticated creatures who reflect on who they are and how they fit into the greater social fabric. Indeed, a universal quality of all human beings

regardless of culture is a sense of self as being distinct from others (D. E. Brown, 1991; Erikson, 1968). Thus, a sense of identity is a genetic legacy of our species that becomes increasingly focused as we develop. Of course, our identities are largely shaped by culture and communication, but our essence as humans includes an identity as a unique individual.

Communication and Identity

In large part, our identity is shaped in interactions with other people, the image or brand we seek to project, our anticipated interactions, and the way people respond to and judge us. No force is as powerful in shaping identity as the feedback we get and the self-image we form from observing ourselves behave and interact, as well as observing how people respond to us. Think about Carolina's social media. If she gets a lot of likes and positive comments when posting pictures while in Italy, she is likely to keep posting these types of pictures and to become even prouder of and more identified with her Italian heritage. Expressing identity on public or semipublic social media sites, such as Instagram and Twitter, has a stronger impact on our personal identity than sharing our identity with a single friend because of the broader audience we reach (Walther et al., 2011). The larger the perceived audience, the more carefully managed our identities generally are.

Social identity theory explains how we develop and maintain our identity. Identity does not exist in a vacuum: It is linked to our membership in social groups as broad as our ethnic, sexual, or religious affiliation or as narrow as small cliques—for example, Italian American, bisexual, Catholic, alumnus of West High School, a resident of the Bronx, a softball player, and a member of "the big four" (a group of childhood friends). After scrolling through Carolina's Twitter, for instance, you would probably associate her with several large and small groups, including her high school, sports teams, and sorority, as well as her Italian heritage. A key principle of social identity theory is that membership is characterized by in-group behaviors that signal membership and define someone as being a part of a group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Group members may dress a certain way, get similar tattoos, talk with an accent, use particular gestures, play the same sports, or have conversational routines that identify themselves as belonging to the group. To maintain positive views of ourselves, we often think of "our" groups as better than other groups who are considered outsiders. We often think that our way of doing things is superior, what we wear looks best, what we say is smartest, our view of the world is most reasonable, our perspective on a conflict is a sensible one, our values are moral and divine, and our beliefs are correct. Of course, these beliefs are all biased. People in other groups also believe that those groups are the best.

Social identity theory: A perspective focusing on the way in which people's identification with groups shapes their behavior, toward both members of that group and members of other groups.

Several factors influence the impact a group has on our identity, including how central the group is to our self-view (Oakes, 1987). For instance, an ethnic group association may be important for someone like Carolina, who has visited relatives in Rome, but unimportant to those who have little connection to their ethnic roots. Several studies have also shown that minority groups are especially likely to identify with their ethnic backgrounds. African Americans or Latinos see ethnicity as more central to their identity than do Caucasians (R. L. Jackson, 1999). People in minority groups are typically more aware of their membership in that group than are majority members. Why is that? Everyday events remind them of their minority status. Think about how many dark-skinned dolls you see advertised on television. Not many! Even in stores in African American neighborhoods most dolls are white, leaving African American girls to imagine that their dolls look like them.

Think about examples in your textbooks: How many describe the lives of gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals? Not many. Despite our efforts to include all sexual orientations in this book, research on gay relationships is not abundant, so gay or lesbian students cannot always relate to our examples of heterosexual relationships. In these cases, group identity is more salient to minority group members because their lives are surrounded by reminders that they don't "fit" into the majority group's way of thinking or doing.

Communication theory of identity: A theory that focuses on how identities are managed. Identity construction can be viewed through four frames of identity (personal, enactment, relationship, and communal).

To clarify how identities are formed, Hecht (1993) introduced the **communication theory of identity**. He argued that identity is based on four interdependent layers or frames that reflect how people see themselves (see also Hecht, 2015; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2004):

- **Personal Identity:** The self-concept or individual understanding we have of ourselves.
- **Enacted Identity:** The communication, management, and performance of our identity.
- **Relational Identity:** The way we see ourselves in relation to others, including how we believe other people view us (perhaps, as kind, popular, or nerdy), our roles within relationships (such as sister, uncle, friend, or lover) and the joint identities we share with others (such as couple or family identities).
- **Communal Identity:** The way we see ourselves in relation to social identities (such as culture, generation, and sexual orientation) and social discourses (such as social media and popular culture depictions of people).

These four frames work together to affect identity development (Hecht, 1993, 2015). Sometimes there are identity gaps between conflicting frames of identity such as personal and relational frames (Jung & Hecht, 2004) and between different roles within a given frame, such as between a wife and a granddaughter (J. A. Kam & Hecht, 2009). Relational identity gaps have been associated with both self-reported stress and physiological measures of stress such as increased cortisol (Merrill & Afifi, 2017). Larger identity gaps, for instance, between grandparents and adult grandchildren, can lead to reduced communication satisfaction (Pusateri, Roaché, & Kam, 2016). Different frames of identity may be privileged in certain situations and cultures. For example, Carolina might emphasize her personal identity more in her Finsta account, which shows a more candid representation of herself. However, her more public Instagram account broadcasts a more carefully crafted enacted identity that reflects how she wants people to see her. In individualistic cultures such as U.S. culture, people focus on individual needs, whereas in collectivistic cultures, group needs are privileged (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, in individualistic cultures, personal identity may be central to one's overall identity, whereas in collectivist cultures relational identity may be salient. Communal identity may be strongest under conditions of high uncertainty where knowing how society or culture functions guides our behavior (Grant & Hogg, 2012).

All couples routinely deal with identity issues, but interracial or intercultural couples often face special challenges (S. Williams & Andersen, 1998). Each person in an interracial or intercultural couple must deal with not only who he or she is as an individual, for example, as a white man or an African American woman (personal frame), but also with