



**Pearson New International Edition**

Interpersonal Communication  
Relating to Others  
Beebe Beebe Redmond  
Seventh Edition

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Beebe Beebe Redmond  
Seventh Edition

PEARSON®

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Harlow  
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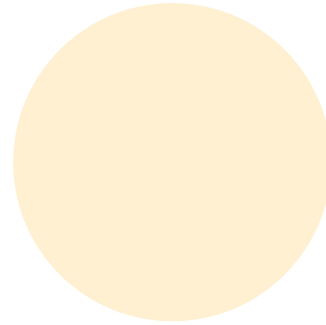
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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction to Interpersonal Communication</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Interpersonal Communication and Perception</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>35</b>
<b>3. Listening and Responding Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>63</b>
<b>4. Verbal Communication Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>103</b>
<b>5. Nonverbal Communication Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>139</b>
<b>6. Conflict Management Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>177</b>
<b>7. Understanding Interpersonal Relationships</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>217</b>
<b>8. Managing Relationship Challenges</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>247</b>
<b>9. Interpersonal Relationships: Friendship and Romance</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>285</b>
<b>10. Interpersonal Relationships: Family and Workplace</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>323</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>359</b>

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# Introduction to Interpersonal Communication

“Communication is to a relationship what breathing is to maintaining life.” —Virginia Satir

## OBJECTIVES

- 1 Compare and contrast definitions of communication, human communication, and interpersonal communication.
- 2 Explain why it is useful to study interpersonal communication.
- 3 Describe the key components of the communication process, including communication as action, interaction, and transaction.
- 4 Discuss five principles of interpersonal communication.
- 5 Discuss electronically mediated communication's role in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.
- 6 Identify strategies that can improve your communication competence.

## OUTLINE

- Interpersonal Communication Defined
- Interpersonal Communication's Importance to Your Life
- Interpersonal Communication and the Communication Process
- Interpersonal Communication Principles
- Interpersonal Communication and Technology
- Interpersonal Communication Competence

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Audio Chapter at  
MyCommunicationLab

Interpersonal communication is like breathing; it is a requirement for life. And, like breathing, interpersonal communication is inescapable. Unless you live in isolation, you communicate interpersonally every day. Listening to your roommate, talking to a teacher, meeting for lunch with a friend, and talking to your parents or your spouse are all examples of interpersonal communication.

It is impossible *not* to communicate with others.<sup>1</sup> Even before we are born, we respond to movement and sound. With our first cry, we announce to others that we are here. Once we make contact with others, we communicate, and we continue to do so until we draw our last breath. Even though many of our messages are not verbalized, we nonetheless send messages to others—intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. Whatever our intentions, people draw conclusions from our behavior. Without interpersonal communication, a special form of human communication that occurs as we manage our relationships, people suffer and even die. Recluses, hermits, and people isolated in solitary confinement dream and hallucinate about talking with others face to face.

Human communication is at the core of our existence. Think of the number of times you communicated with someone today, as you worked, ate, studied, shopped, or went about your other daily activities. Most people spend between 80 and 90 percent of their waking hours communicating with others.<sup>2</sup> It is through these interactions with others that we develop interpersonal relationships.<sup>3</sup>

Because these relationships are so important to our lives, we will focus on the communication skills and principles that explain and predict how we develop, sustain, and sometimes end relationships. We'll explore such questions as the following:

- Why do we like some people and not others?
- How can we interpret other people's unspoken messages with greater accuracy?
- Why do some relationships blossom and others deteriorate?
- How can we better manage disagreements with others?
- How can we better understand our relationships with our family, friends, and coworkers?

As we address essential questions about how you relate to others, we will emphasize the importance of being **other-oriented**. Being other-oriented results in awareness of the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners while still maintaining your own integrity. Becoming other-oriented is not a single skill, but a collection of skills and principles that are designed to increase your sensitivity to and understanding of others. Next, we chart the course ahead, addressing key questions about what interpersonal communication is and why it is important. We will begin by seeing how our understanding of the interpersonal communication process has evolved. And we will conclude by examining how we initiate and sustain relationships through interpersonal communication.

## Interpersonal Communication Defined

**other-oriented** To be aware of the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners while still maintaining your own integrity.

**communication** Process of acting on information.

To understand interpersonal communication, we must begin by understanding how it relates to two broader categories: communication in general and human communication. Scholars have attempted to arrive at a general definition of communication for decades, yet experts cannot agree on a single one. One research team counted more than 126 published definitions.<sup>4</sup> In the broadest sense, **communication** is the process of acting on information.<sup>5</sup> Someone does or says something, and others think or do something in response to the action or the words as they understand them.

To refine our broad definition, we can say that **human communication** is the process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages.<sup>6</sup> We learn about the world by listening, observing, tasting, touching, and smelling; then we share our conclusions with others. Human communication encompasses many media: speeches, e-mail, songs, radio and television broadcasts, online discussion groups, letters, books, articles, poems, and advertisements.

**Interpersonal communication** is a distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships. The three essential elements of this definition differentiate the unique nature of interpersonal communication from other forms of human communication.<sup>7</sup>

## Interpersonal Communication Is a Distinctive Form of Communication

For years, many scholars defined interpersonal communication simply as communication that occurs when two people interact face to face. This limited definition suggests that if two people are interacting, they are engaging in interpersonal communication. Today, interpersonal communication is defined not just by the number of people who communicate, but also by the quality of the communication. Interpersonal communication occurs when you treat the other person as a unique human being.<sup>8</sup>

Increasingly, people are relating more and more via smartphones, Twitter, Facebook, and Skype. Research is confirming that many of us think of the various electronic means we use to connect to others as natural ways to establish and maintain relationships.<sup>9</sup> With a smartphone in our pocket, we are within reach of our friends, family, and colleagues.

**Interpersonal versus Impersonal Communication.** Think of all human communication, whether mediated or face-to-face, as ranging on a continuum from impersonal to interpersonal communication. **Impersonal communication** occurs when you treat others as objects or respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique persons. When you ask a server in a restaurant for a glass of water, you are interacting with the role, not necessarily with the individual. You're having an impersonal conversation rather than an interpersonal one.

**I-It and I-Thou Relationships.** Philosopher Martin Buber influenced our thinking about the distinctiveness of interpersonal communication when he described communication as consisting of two different qualities of relationships: an "I-It" relationship or an "I-Thou" relationship.<sup>10</sup> He described an "I-It" relationship as an impersonal one, in which the other person is viewed as an "It" rather than as an authentic, genuine person. For every communication transaction to be a personal, intimate dialogue would be unrealistic and inappropriate. It's possible to go through an entire day communicating with others but not be involved in interpersonal communication.

An "I-Thou" relationship, on the other hand, occurs when you interact with another person as a unique, authentic individual rather than as an object or an "It." In this kind of relationship, true, honest dialogue results in authentic communication. An "I-Thou" relationship is not self-centered. The communicators are patient, kind, and forgiving. They have developed an attitude toward each other that is honest, open, spontaneous, nonjudgmental, and based on equality rather than superiority.<sup>11</sup> However, although interpersonal communication is more intimate and reveals more about the people involved than does impersonal communication, not all interpersonal communication involves sharing closely guarded personal information.

### human communication

Process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages.

### interpersonal communication

A distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships.

### impersonal communication

Process that occurs when we treat others as objects or respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique persons.

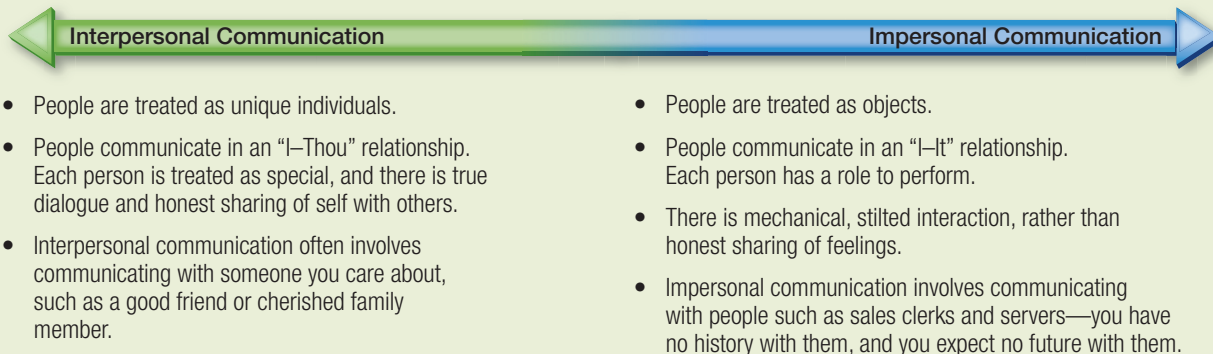


**Interpersonal Versus Other Forms of Communication.** We define interpersonal communication as a unique form of human communication. There are other forms of communication, as well.

- **Mass communication** occurs when one person communicates the same message to many people at once, but the creator of the message is usually not physically present, and listeners have virtually no opportunity to respond immediately to the speaker. Messages communicated via radio and TV are examples of mass communication.
- **Public communication** occurs when a speaker addresses an audience in person.
- **Small group communication** occurs when a group of from three to fifteen people meet to interact with a common purpose and mutually influence one another. The purpose of the gathering can be to solve a problem, make a decision, learn, or just have fun. While communicating with others in a small group, it is also possible to communicate interpersonally with one or more individuals in the group.
- **Intrapersonal communication** is communication with yourself. Thinking is perhaps the best example of intrapersonal communication.

## RECAP

### The Continuum Between Interpersonal Communication and Impersonal Communication



**mass communication** Process that occurs when one person issues the same message to many people at once; the creator of the message is usually not physically present, and listeners have virtually no opportunity to respond immediately to the speaker.

**public communication** Process that occurs when a speaker addresses an audience in person.

**small group communication** Process that occurs when a group of from three to fifteen people meet to interact with a common purpose and mutually influence one another.

**intrapersonal communication** Communication with yourself; thinking.

### Interpersonal Communication Involves Mutual Influence Between Individuals

Every interpersonal communication transaction influences us. Mutual influence means that *all* partners in the communication are affected by a transaction. Interpersonal communication may or may not involve words. The degree of mutual influence varies a great deal from transaction to transaction. You probably would not be affected a great deal by a brief smile that you received from a traveling companion on a bus, but you would be greatly affected by your lover telling you he or she was leaving you. Sometimes interpersonal communication changes our lives dramatically, sometimes in small ways. Long-lasting interpersonal relationships are sustained not by one person giving and another taking, but by a spirit of mutual equality. Both you and your partner listen and respond with respect for each other. There is no attempt to manipulate others.

Buber’s concept of an “I–Thou” relationship includes the quality of being fully “present” when communicating with another person.<sup>12</sup> To be present is to give your full attention

to the other person. The quality of interpersonal communication is enhanced when both you and your partner are simultaneously present and focused on each other.

### Interpersonal Communication Helps Individuals Manage Their Relationships

Question: What is neither you nor I, but always you and I? Answer: a relationship.<sup>13</sup> A **relationship** is a connection established when you communicate with another person. When two individuals are in a relationship, what one person says or does influences the other person. As in dancing, people in relationships are affected by the beat of the music (that is, the situation in which they are communicating), their ability to interpret the music and move accordingly (the personal skills they possess), and the moves and counter-moves of their partner.

You initiate and form relationships by communicating with others whom you find attractive in some way. You seek to increase your interactions with people with whom you wish to develop relationships, and you continually communicate interpersonally to maintain the relationship. You also use interpersonal communication to end or redefine relationships that you have decided are no longer viable or need to be changed. In summary, to relate to someone is to “dance” with them. You dance with them in a specific time and place, with certain perceptions and expectations. Over time, this dance becomes an ongoing interpersonal relationship.

You are increasingly likely to use social media to connect with friends and manage your relationships. Research has found that instant messages (including text messages) have an overall positive effect on your relationships. E-mail, texting, and other forms of instant messages appear to be primarily used to maintain *existing* relationships, although they certainly play a role in establishing initial contact with others. Additional research has found that online and instant messages at first are perceived as lower quality than face-to-face interactions, but over time are judged just as positively.<sup>14</sup> So whether it occurs online or offline, interpersonal communication helps you manage your relationships.



In face-to-face encounters, we simultaneously exchange both verbal and nonverbal messages that result in shared meanings. Through this kind of interrelation, we build relationships with others.

## Interpersonal Communication’s Importance to Your Life

Why learn about interpersonal communication? Because it touches every aspect of our lives. It is not only pleasant or desirable to develop quality interpersonal relationships with others, it is vital for our well-being. We have a strong need to communicate interpersonally with others. Learning how to understand and improve interpersonal communication can improve relationships with family, loved ones, friends, and colleagues and can enhance the quality of physical and emotional health.

### Improved Relationships with Family

Relating to family members can be a challenge. The divorce statistics in the United States document the difficulties that can occur when people live in relationships with others: About half of all marriages end in divorce. We don’t claim that you will avoid all family

**relationship** Connection established when we communicate with another person.

conflicts or that your family relationships will always be harmonious if you learn principles and skills of interpersonal communication. You can, however, develop more options for responding when family communication challenges come your way. You will be more likely to develop creative, constructive solutions to family conflict if you understand what's happening and can promote true dialogue with your spouse, partner, child, parent, brother, or sister. Furthermore, family relationships play a major role in determining how you interact with others. Family communication author Virginia Satir calls family communication "the largest single factor determining the kinds of relationships [people make] with others."<sup>15</sup> Being able to have conversations with family members and loved ones is the fundamental way of establishing close, personal relationships with them.

### Improved Relationships with Friends and Lovers

For unmarried people, developing friendships and falling in love are the top-rated sources of satisfaction and happiness in life.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, losing a relationship is among life's most stressful events. Most people between the ages of 19 and 24 report that they have had from five to six romantic relationships and have been "in love" once or twice.<sup>17</sup> Studying interpersonal communication may not unravel all the mysteries of romantic love and friendship, but it can offer insight into behaviors.<sup>18</sup>

### Improved Relationships with Colleagues

In many ways, colleagues at work are like family members. Although you choose your friends and lovers, you don't always have the same flexibility in choosing those with whom or for whom you work. Understanding how relationships develop on the job can help you avoid conflict and stress and increase your sense of satisfaction. In addition, your success or failure in a job often hinges on how well you get along with supervisors and peers.

Several surveys document the importance of quality interpersonal relationships in contributing to success at work.<sup>19</sup> The abilities to listen to others, manage conflict, and develop quality interpersonal relationships with others are usually at the top of the list of the skills employers seek in today's job applicants.<sup>20</sup>

### Improved Physical and Emotional Health

Positive interpersonal relationships with others have direct benefits for your overall health and happiness. Research has shown that the lack or loss of a close relationship can lead to ill health and even death. Physicians have long observed that patients who are widowed or divorced experience more medical problems such as heart disease, cancer, pneumonia, and diabetes than do married people.<sup>21</sup> Grief-stricken spouses are more likely than others to die prematurely, especially around the time of the departed spouse's birthday or near their wedding anniversary.<sup>22</sup> Being childless can also shorten one's life. One study found that middle-aged, childless wives were almost two-and-one-half times more likely to die in a given year than those who had at least one child.<sup>23</sup> Terminally ill patients with a limited number of friends or no social support die sooner than those with stronger ties.<sup>24</sup> Without companions and close friends, opportunities for intimacy and stress-minimizing interpersonal communication are diminished. Although being involved in intimate interpersonal relationships can lead to conflict and feelings of anger and frustration, researchers suggest that when all is said and done, having close relationships with others is a major source of personal happiness.<sup>25</sup> Studying how to enhance the quality of your communication with others can make life more enjoyable and enhance your overall well-being.<sup>26</sup>



Explore the  
**Exercise** "Principles  
of Communication" at  
**MyCommunicationLab**

## Interpersonal Communication and the Communication Process

Interpersonal communication is a complex process of creating meaning in the context of an interpersonal relationship. To better understand interpersonal communication as a distinct form of communication, it is useful to examine the basic communication process.<sup>27</sup>

### Elements of the Communication Process

The most basic components of communication include these elements: source, message, channel, receiver, noise, feedback, and context. Understanding each of these elements can help you analyze your own communication with others as you relate to them in interpersonal situations as well as other communication contexts. Let's explore these elements in greater detail.

- **Source.** The **source** of a message is the originator of the ideas and feelings expressed. The source puts a message into a code, a process called **encoding**. The opposite of encoding is the process of **decoding**; this occurs when the receiver interprets the words or nonverbal cues.
- **Message.** **Messages** are the written, spoken, and unspoken elements of communication to which people assign meaning. You can send a message intentionally (talking to a professor before class) or unintentionally (falling asleep during class); verbally (“Hi. How are you?”), nonverbally (a smile and a handshake), or in written form (a book).
- **Channel.** The **channel** is the means by which the message is expressed to the receiver. If you're typical, you receive messages through a variety of channels that include mediated channels such as text messaging, e-mail, phone, video conference, Facebook, or Twitter.
- **Receiver.** The **receiver** of the message is the person or persons who interpret the message and ultimately determine whether your message was understood and appropriate. Effective communicators are other-oriented; they understand that the listener ultimately makes sense of the message they express.
- **Noise.** **Noise** is anything that interferes with the message being interpreted as it was intended. Noise happens. If there were no noise, all of our messages would be interpreted accurately. But noise is always present. It can be literal—such as beeps coming from an iPad or iPhone that signal incoming e-mail—or it can be psychological—such as competing thoughts, worries, and feelings that capture our attention.
- **Feedback.** **Feedback** is response to the message. Think of a Ping-Pong game. Like a Ping-Pong ball, messages bounce back and forth. We talk; someone listens and responds; we listen and respond to this response. This perspective can be summarized using a physical principle: For every action, there is a reaction.

Without feedback, communication is rarely effective. When your roommate says, “Would you please pick up some milk at the store?”, you may say, “What kind—1 percent, 2 percent, organic, or chocolate?” Your quest for clarification is feedback. Further feedback may seek additional information, or simply confirm that the message has been interpreted: “Oh, some 1 percent organic milk would be good.” Like other messages, feedback can be intentional (your mother gives you a hug when you announce your engagement) or unintentional (you yawn as you listen to your uncle tell his story about bears again); verbal (“That’s a pepperoni pizza, right?”) or nonverbal (blushing after being asked to dance).

**source** Originator of a thought or emotion, who puts it into a code that can be understood by a receiver.

**encode** To translate ideas, feelings, and thoughts into code.

**decode** To interpret ideas, feelings, and thoughts that have been translated into a code.

**message** Written, spoken, and unspoken elements of communication to which people assign meaning.

**channel** Pathway through which messages are sent.

**receiver** Person who decodes a message and attempts to make sense of what the source has encoded.

**noise** Anything literal or psychological that interferes with accurate reception of a message.

**feedback** Response to a message.

- **Context.** **Context** is the physical and psychological environment for communication. All communication takes place in some context. As the cliché goes, “Everyone has to be somewhere.” A conversation on the beach with your good friend would likely differ from a conversation the two of you might have in a funeral home. Context encompasses not only the physical environment but also the people present and their relationships with the communicators, the communication goal, and the culture of which the communicators are a part.<sup>28</sup>

## Models of the Communication Process

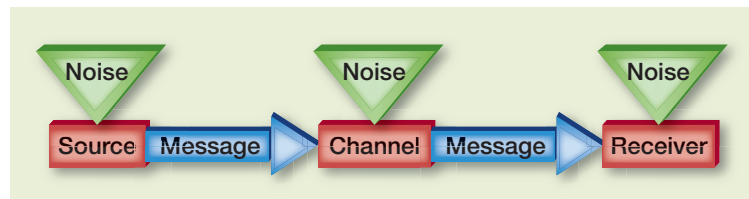
The elements of the communication process are typically arranged in one of three communication models, showing communication as action, as interaction, or as transaction. Let’s review each model in more detail to see how expert thinking about human communication has evolved.

**Communication as Action: Message Transfer.** The oldest and simplest model, shown in Figure 1, is *communication as action*—a transferring of meaning. “Did you get my message?” This sentence reflects the communication-as-action approach to human communication. Communication takes place when a message is sent and received. Period.

**Communication as Interaction: Message Exchange.** The perspective of communication as interaction adds two elements to the action model: feedback and context. As shown in Figure 2, the interaction model is more realistic than the action perspective, but it still has limitations. Although it emphasizes feedback and context, the interaction model does not quite capture the complexity of simultaneous human communication. The interaction model of communication still views communication as a linear, step-by-step process. But in interpersonal situations, both the source and the receiver send and receive messages at the same time.

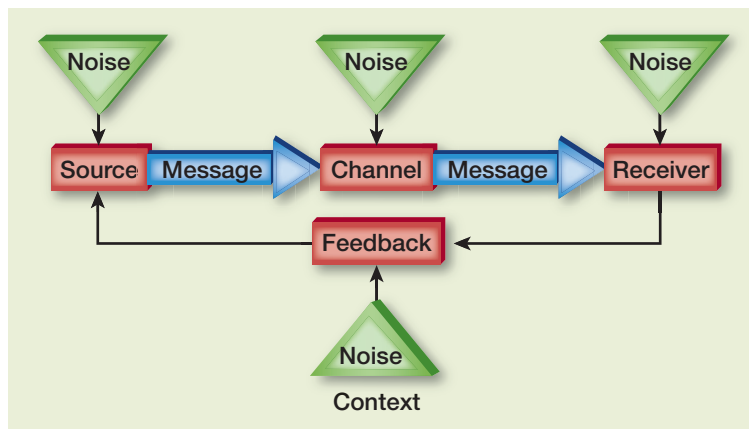
**context** Physical and psychological environment for communication.

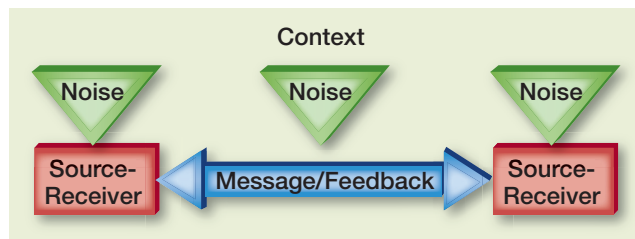
**FIGURE 1**  
A Simple Model of Human Communication as Action



**FIGURE 2**  
A Model for Communication as Interaction

Interaction models of communication include feedback as a response to a message sent by the communication source and context as the environment for communication.



**FIGURE 3****A Model for Communication as Transaction**

The source and receiver of a message experience communication simultaneously.

**Communication as Transaction: Message Creation.** Today, the most sophisticated and realistic model views communication as transaction, in which each element influences all of the other elements in the process at the same time. This perspective acknowledges that when you talk to another person face to face, you are constantly reacting to your partner's responses. In this model, all the components of the communication process are simultaneous. As Figure 3 indicates, even as you talk, you are also interpreting your partner's nonverbal and verbal responses.

The transactional approach to communication is based on **systems theory**. A system is a set of interconnected elements in which a change in one element affects all of the other elements. Key elements of any system include *inputs* (all of the variables that go into the system), *throughputs* (all of the things that make communication a process), and *outputs* (what the system produces). From a transactional communication perspective, a change in any aspect of the communication system (source, message, channel, receiver, noise, context, feedback) potentially influences all the other elements of the system. From a systems theory point of view, each element of communication is connected to all other elements of communication.

**systems theory** Theory that describes the interconnected elements of a system in which a change in one element affects all of the other elements.

## ADAPTING TO DIFFERENCES Understanding Others

### The World Is Here

*One of our most visionary politicians said that he envisioned a time when the United States could become the brain of the world, by which he meant the repository of all the latest advanced information systems. I thought of that remark when an enterprising poet friend of mine called to say that he had just sold a poem to a computer magazine and that the editors were delighted to get it because they didn't carry fiction or poetry. Is that the kind of world we desire? A humdrum homogeneous world of all brains but no heart, no fiction, no poetry; a world of robots with human attendants, bereft of imagination or culture. Or does North America deserve a more exciting destiny—to become a place where the cultures of the world crisscross? This is possible because the United States is unique in the world: The world is here.<sup>29</sup>*

These words from Ishmael Reed's essay "The World Is Here" remind us that America is not a one-dimensional culture. You need not travel to far-off places to develop interpersonal relationships with people from other cultures, races, or ethnic backgrounds. America has long been known as a melting pot—a place where people from a variety of cultures and traditions have come together to seek their fortunes. Others think America is more like a tossed salad than a melting pot—in a salad, each ingredient retains its essential character rather than melting together to form a united whole. Focusing on communication and diversity means much more than focusing on cultural differences. Culture consists of the learned values, behaviors, and expectations shared by a group of people. It takes skill and sensitivity to develop quality interpersonal

relationships with others whose religion, race, ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual orientation differs from your own. We include boxes like this one to help you develop your sensitivity to important issues related to cultural diversity. As you embark on your study of interpersonal communication, consider these questions, either individually or with a group of your classmates:

1. What are the implications of this melting pot or tossed salad culture for your study of interpersonal communication?
2. Is there too much emphasis on being politically correct on college campuses today? Support your answer.
3. What specific interpersonal skills will help you communicate effectively with others from different cultural and ethnic traditions?

A transactional approach to communication suggests that no single cause explains why you interpret messages the way you do. In fact, it is inappropriate to point to a single factor to explain how you are making sense of the messages of others; communication is messier than that. The meaning of messages in interpersonal relationships evolves from the past, is influenced by the present, and is affected by visions of the future.

One researcher says that interpersonal communication is “the coordinated management of meaning” through **episodes**, sequence of interactions between individuals during which the message of one person influences the message of another.<sup>30</sup> Technically, only the sender and receiver of those messages can determine where one episode ends and another begins.

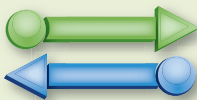
## RECAP An Evolving Model for Interpersonal Communication

### Human Communication as Action



Human communication is linear, with meaning sent or transferred from source to receiver.

### Human Communication as Interaction



Human communication occurs as the receiver of the message responds to the source through feedback. This interactive model views communication as a linear action–reaction sequence of events within a specific context.

### Human Communication as Transaction



Human communication is mutually interactive. Meaning is created based on a concurrent sharing of ideas and feelings. This transaction model most accurately describes human communication.

## Interpersonal Communication Principles

Underlying our current understanding of interpersonal communication are five principles: Interpersonal communication connects us to others, is irreversible, is complicated, is governed by rules, and involves both content and relationship dimensions. Without a clear understanding of interpersonal communication principles, people may rely on untrue characterizations of communication, which can increase communication problems. So in addition to presenting interpersonal communication principles, we also correct some of the misunderstandings people have about interpersonal communication and suggest why these myths persist.

### Interpersonal Communication Connects Us to Others

Unless you are a living in a cave or have become a cloistered monk, you interact with others every day. We agree with author H. D. Duncan, who said, “We do not relate and then talk, but relate in talk.” Fundamental to an understanding of interpersonal communication is the assumption that the quality of interpersonal relationships stems from the quality of communication with others. As we noted earlier, people can’t *not* communicate. Because people often don’t *intend* to express ideas or feelings, this perspective is debated among communication scholars. However, there is no question that interpersonal communication is inescapable and that communication connects us to others.

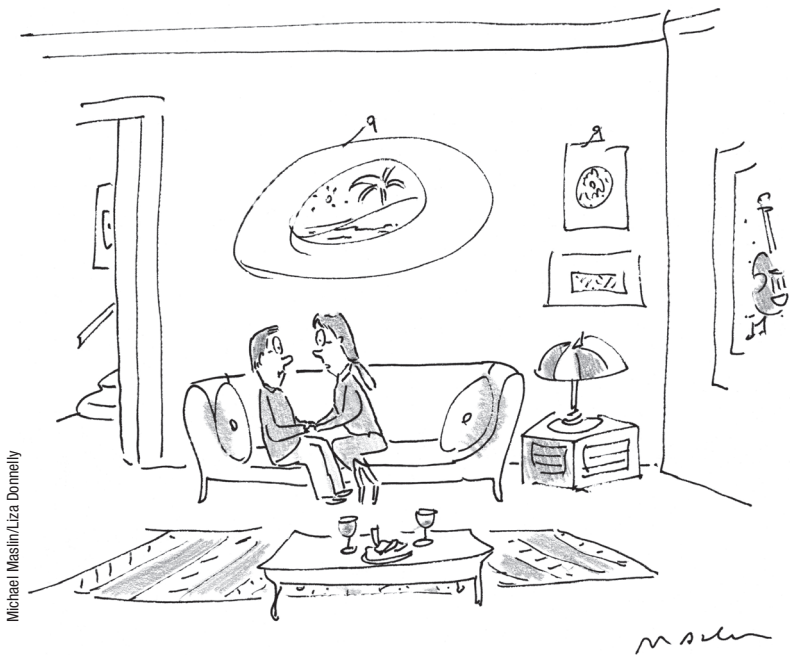
**episode** Sequence of interactions between individuals, during which the message of one person influences the message of another.

As important as communication is in connecting us to others, it's a myth that all interpersonal relationship problems are communication problems. Although communication makes interpersonal relationships possible, sometimes the problem is not that there is a communication problem, but that people simply disagree. "You don't understand me!" shouts Paul to his exasperated partner, Chris. "We just can't communicate anymore!" Paul seems to think that the problem he and Chris are having is a communication problem. But Paul and Chris may understand each other perfectly; they may be self-centered or grumpy, or they may just disagree. The problem in the relationship may not be communication, but a non-other-oriented, self-absorbed communicator.

The ever-present nature of interpersonal communication doesn't mean others will always *accurately* decode your messages; it does mean that others will draw inferences about you and your behavior—conclusions based on available information, which may be right or wrong. Even as you silently stand in a crowded elevator, your lack of eye contact with fellow passengers communicates your unwillingness to interact. Your unspoken messages, even when you are asleep, provide cues that others interpret. Remember: *People judge you by your behavior, not your intent.* Even in well-established interpersonal relationships, you may be evoking an unintended response by your behavior.

### Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible

"Disregard that last statement made by the witness," instructs the judge. Yet the clever lawyer knows that once her client has told the jury her husband gave her a black eye during an argument, the client cannot really "take it back," and the jury cannot really disregard it. This principle applies to all forms of communication. We may try to modify the meaning of a spoken message by saying something like "Oh, I really didn't mean it." But in most cases, the damage has been done. Once created, communication has the physical property of matter; it can't be uncreated. As the helical model in Figure 4 suggests, once interpersonal communication begins, it never loops back on itself. Instead, it continues to be shaped by the events, experiences, and thoughts of the communication partners. A Russian proverb nicely summarizes the point: "Once a word goes out of your mouth, you can never swallow it again."



"Gary, we need to not talk."



**FIGURE 4**

#### Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible

This helical model shows that interpersonal communication never loops back on itself. Once it begins, it expands infinitely as the communication partners contribute their thoughts and experiences to the exchange.

Copyright © F. E. X. Dance in *Human Communication Theory*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, 294.



*Because interpersonal communication is irreversible, it's a myth to assume that messages can be taken back like erasing information from a page or hitting the delete key on your computer.* “How many times do I have to tell you not to surf the Internet while you're on the job?” “Can't you read? It's in the syllabus.” “Are you deaf? I've already told you that I love you a hundred times!” Each of these exasperated communicators seems to believe that information is the same thing as communication. But information is *not* communication. Presenting information doesn't make people “get” your meaning. Like the proverbial tree that falls silently in the forest because no one is there to hear it, a message is not necessarily communication just because you've expressed it. So you can't take a message back simply because you erased it—the meaning already has been created.

### Interpersonal Communication Is Complicated

No form of communication is simple. If any were, we would know how to reduce the number of misunderstandings and conflicts in our world. One of the purposes of communication, according to communication theorists, is to reduce our uncertainty about what is happening at any given moment.<sup>31</sup> Because of the variables involved in interpersonal exchanges, even simple requests are extremely complex. Additionally, communication theorists have noted that whenever you communicate with another person, at least six “people” are actually involved: (1) who you think you are; (2) who you think the other person is; (3) who you think the other person thinks you are; (4) who the other person thinks he or she is; (5) who the other person thinks you are; and (6) who the other person thinks you think he or she is.<sup>32</sup> Whew! And when you add more people to the interaction, it becomes even more involved.

Moreover, when humans communicate, they interpret information from others as symbols. A **symbol** is a word, sound, or visual image that represents something else, such as a thought, concept, or object; it can have various meanings and interpretations. Language is a system of symbols. In English, for example, the word (symbol) for *cow* does not look at all like a cow; someone, somewhere, decided that *cow* should mean a beast that chews its cud and gives milk. The reliance on symbols to communicate poses a communication challenge; you are often misinterpreted. Sometimes you don't know the code. Only if you are up to date on contemporary slang will you know, for example, that “fo' shizzle” means “certainly,” “wikidemia” is a term paper entirely researched on Wikipedia.org, and “brodown” is a boys' night out.

Messages are not always interpreted as we intend them. Osmo Wiio, a Scandinavian communication scholar, points out the messiness of communicating with others when he suggests the following maxims:

If communication can fail, it will.

If a message can be understood in different ways, it will be understood in just that way which does the most harm.

There is always somebody who knows better than you what you meant by your message.

The more communication there is, the more difficult it is for communication to succeed.<sup>33</sup>

Although we are not as pessimistic as Professor Wiio, we do suggest that the task of understanding each other is challenging.

*Because interpersonal communication is complicated, it's a myth to assume that there are always simple solutions to every interpersonal communication problem.* Yes, sometimes

**symbol** Word, sound, or visual image that represents something else, such as a thought, concept, or object.

simply saying “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you” can melt tension. But because multiple factors result in the creation of meaning in people’s minds, it’s not accurate to assume that there are always simple solutions to communication problems. As we’ve noted, communication is a transactive process anchored in systems theory, in which every element in the process is connected to all the other elements. Taking time to clearly express a message and then having someone listen and accurately respond is a multifaceted, multistep process. Communication is complicated.



Watch the Video  
“Art Appreciation” at  
MyCommunicationLab

## Interpersonal Communication Is Governed by Rules

According to communication researcher Susan Shimanoff, a **rule** is a “followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts.”<sup>34</sup> The rules that help define appropriate and inappropriate communication in any given situation may be *explicit* or *implicit*. For your interpersonal communication class, explicit rules are probably spelled out in your syllabus. But your instructor has other rules that are more implicit. They are not written or verbalized, because you learned them long ago: Only one person speaks at a time, you raise your hand to be called on, you do not send text messages during class.

Interpersonal communication rules are developed by the people involved in the interaction and by the culture in which the individuals are communicating. Many times, we learn communication rules from experience, by observing and interacting with others.

British researcher Michael Argyle and his colleagues asked people to identify general rules for relationship development and maintenance and then rate their importance. The study yielded the following most important rules:<sup>35</sup>

- Respect each other’s privacy.
- Don’t reveal each other’s secrets.
- Look the other person in the eye during conversation.
- Don’t criticize the other person publicly.

*Although communication is governed by rules, it’s a myth that the rules are always clear and that one person determines the rules and can modify the meaning of a relationship.* Although rules are always present, they may not be clear to each person in the relationship. You thought it was OK to bring your dog to a casual pizza date. Your partner thought it was crude and thoughtless. It takes communication to uncover rules and expectations. Few of us learn relationship rules by copying them from a book. Most of us learn these rules from experience, through observing and interacting with family members and friends. Individuals who grow up in environments in which these rules are not observed may not know how to behave in close relationships. In addition, relationships have both implicit and explicit rules that involve more than one person in the relationship. The rules of interpersonal relationships are *mutually* defined and agreed on. Expectations and rules are continually renegotiated as the relationship unfolds. So although rules exist, they may not be clear or shared by the individuals in the relationship.

**rule** Followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts.



For many of us, friendships are vital to our personal well-being. By improving our interpersonal communication skills, we can learn how to improve our friendships.

## Interpersonal Communication Involves Both Content and Relationship Dimensions

What you say (your words) and how you say it (your tone of voice, amount of eye contact, facial expression, and posture) can reveal much about the true meaning of your message. If one of your roommates loudly and abruptly bellows, “HEY, DORK! CLEAN THIS ROOM!” and another roommate uses the same verbal message but more gently and playfully says, “Hey, dork. Clean this room,” both are communicating a message aimed at achieving the same outcome. But the two messages have different relationship cues. The shouted message suggests that roommate number one may be frustrated that the room is still full of leftovers from last night’s pizza party, whereas roommate number two’s teasing request suggests he or she may be fondly amused by your untidiness. What you say and how you say it provide information not only about content but also about the relationship you have with the other person.

**Content Message.** The **content** of a communication message consists of the information, ideas, or suggested action that the speaker wishes to share. You may think that your messages to others are primarily about content, but that’s not the whole story. You also provide clues about your relationship with others.

**Relationship Message.** The **relationship dimension** of a communication message offers cues about the emotions, attitudes, and amount of power and control the speaker feels with regard to the other person. This distinction between the content of a message (what is said) and relationship cues (how the message is expressed) explains why a printed transcript can seem to reveal quite a different meaning from a spoken message.

**Metacommunication Message.** Because messages have both content and relationship dimensions, one dimension can modify or even contradict the other dimension. Communication theorists have a word that describes how we can communicate about our communication: metacommunication. Stated in the simplest way, **metacommunication** is communication about communication, and it can be nonverbal or verbal. Accurately decoding unspoken or verbalized metamessages helps you understand what people really mean and can help you “listen between the lines” of what someone is expressing.<sup>36</sup>

You can express an idea nonverbally (for example, by smiling to communicate that you are pleased), and you can also express your positive feeling verbally (for example, by saying, “I’m happy to be here”). But sometimes your nonverbal communication can contradict your verbal message. You can say “Oh, that’s just great” and use your voice to indicate just the opposite of what the verbal content of the message means. The sarcasm communicated by the tone of your voice (a relationship cue) modifies the meaning of your verbal message (the content of your message).

In addition to nonverbal cues, which provide communication about communication, you can also use words to talk explicitly about your message. For example, when you can ask, “Is what I’m saying bothering you?” You are using a metamessage to check on how your message is being understood. Here’s another example of verbal metacommunication: “I’d like to talk with you about the way we argue.” Again, you are using communication to talk about communication. Talking about the way you talk can help clarify misunderstandings. Being aware of the metamessage, in both its verbal and its nonverbal forms, can help improve the accuracy of your interpretations of the meaning of message content, as well as enhance the quality of your relationships with others.

*Because meaning is created in the heart and mind of the communicator, it’s a myth to think that meaning resides in a word.* Given the potential for miscommunication as the content and relationship dimensions of a message create meaning, it is important to remember that the ultimate meaning for a word or expression is not in the word or gesture but within the person who creates the meaning. Being aware of the metamessage can help you better interpret a

**content** Information, ideas, or suggested actions that a speaker wishes to share.

**relationship dimension**

The implied aspect of a communication message, which conveys information about emotions, attitudes, power, and control.

**metacommunication** Verbal or nonverbal communication about communication.

message and derive meaning from it. Simply because you said something doesn't mean your partner understood you. Your vocal inflection, facial expression, or gesture may have created a different interpretation of what you intended. Meaning is in people, not in words or gestures.

## RECAP Understanding Interpersonal Communication Principles Can Help Overcome Interpersonal Myths

Principle	Myth	Reality
Interpersonal communication connects us to others.	All interpersonal relationship problems are always communication problems.	We may understand what someone means and feel connected to them, but we may still disagree with them.
Interpersonal communication is irreversible.	A message can be taken back because when information has been presented, communication has occurred.	We can't simply hit "delete" and erase communication. Communication is more than the information in a message; it creates meaning for others.
Interpersonal communication is complicated.	There are always simple solutions to all communication problems.	Because of the complicated nature of how meaning is created, there are not always simple ways to untangle communication problems. It often takes time, skill, and patience to enhance human understanding.
Interpersonal communication is governed by rules.	One person can resolve interpersonal communication problems.	The communication rules are developed <i>mutually</i> between all people in the relationship. Understanding how the rules are developed and interpreted can help minimize misunderstandings.
Interpersonal communication involves both content and relationship dimensions.	Meanings are in words and gestures.	Meanings reside within a person based on the interpretation of both the content and the relationship dimensions of a message and how the metacommunication is interpreted.

## Interpersonal Communication and Technology

Can you really communicate *interpersonally* with people on a smartphone or the Internet without meeting them face to face (FtF)? Yes, of course. You probably relate to others through such media every day, to both initiate and maintain relationships. When you go on Facebook or Twitter or text friends and family members, you are using **electronically mediated communication (EMC)**. As social media expert Sherry Turkle has noted, "Those little devices in our pockets don't only change what we do, they change who we are."<sup>37</sup>

Mediated communication is not new; people have been communicating for centuries without being face to face; sending letters and other written messages to others is an age-old human way of relating to others. And even before written communication was widespread, humans used smoke signals and drum beats to communicate via long distances. What's new is that there are so many different ways of *immediately* connecting with someone, such as using a smartphone, social networking applications (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), text messages, e-mail, instant messaging, video messages on YouTube or Skype, and a host of other Internet-based ways of communicating that shift in their popularity. E-mail was once the hot new way of connecting; then came instant messaging (IM). Today, as noted in the E-Connections box, texting and connecting via Facebook or Twitter are among the most used EMC technologies.

We frequently use our technology to make and keep friends, to share information, to listen and respond to and confirm and support others.<sup>38</sup> Interpersonal communication is only a click or a keystroke away. Mediated communication relationships can be as satisfying as

### electronically mediated communication (EMC)

Communication that is not face to face, but rather is sent via a medium such as a smartphone or the Internet.

## Communication and Emotion

## The Role of Emotions in Our Relationships with Others

Your emotions and your moods play an important role in how you communicate with others.

What is emotion? How do emotions work? Precisely what causes us to experience emotions? There are various theories, but scholars don't agree on any one specific answer to each of these questions. One researcher described an emotion as a biological, cognitive, behavioral, and subjective affective reaction to an event.<sup>39</sup> A closer look at that definition suggests that an emotional reaction includes four things: biological or physiological reactions (heart rate increases, changes in breathing); cognitive responses (angry thoughts, happy thoughts); behavioral reactions to our thoughts and feelings (frowning, laughing); and subjective affective responses (either mild or strong experiences of joy, panic, anger, pleasure, and the like).<sup>40</sup>

How does an emotion differ from a mood? **Moods** are typically longer lasting than emotions, and a mood often doesn't have a single, specific, identifiable cause. You can be in a bad mood or a good mood and not know precisely why you're

feeling the way you do. Sometimes you can pinpoint what has put you in a particular mood, but it's often several things, not just one, that determine your mood.

To get an idea of the role emotions play in our relationships, consider the following general principles:

**We are more likely to discuss our emotions in an interpersonal relationship than in an impersonal relationship.** Research supports our common intuition: We are more likely to talk about our personal feelings with people we know, care about, and feel a unique relationship with (friends, lovers, and family members) than with people we don't know or don't particularly care about.<sup>41</sup>

**We express our emotions both verbally and nonverbally, yet our nonverbal messages often communicate our emotions more honestly.** We sometimes explicitly tell people how we are feeling ("I'm feeling sad," "I'm angry with you," or "I love you"). But it's often through our nonverbal behavior (facial expression, tone of voice, or body posture) that our true feelings are communicated to others.

**Our culture influences our emotional expression.** It may seem that we express our feelings of happiness, joy, or sadness spontaneously, yet there is evidence that we learn what is and is not an appropriate expression of emotion.<sup>42</sup> The culture in which we are raised has a major influence on how we learn to both express emotions and respond to emotions expressed by others. In Western cultures, for example, males are sometimes encouraged not to express emotions ("Boys don't cry"). One study found that Japanese students express fewer negative emotions than American students.<sup>43</sup>

**Emotions are contagious.** When you watch a funny movie in a crowded theatre, you are more likely to laugh when other people around you laugh. You are also more likely to cry when you see others experiencing sadness or pain. The process called **emotional contagion** occurs when we mimic the emotions of others.<sup>44</sup> So being around positive, upbeat people can have an impact on your emotions. And, in turn, your emotional expression can affect others.

face-to-face relationships; people seamlessly and easily switch from EMC to FtF context.<sup>45</sup> That's why we'll discuss electronically mediated as well as FtF interpersonal communication. Our gadgets and EMC have a major impact on our real-life relationships.

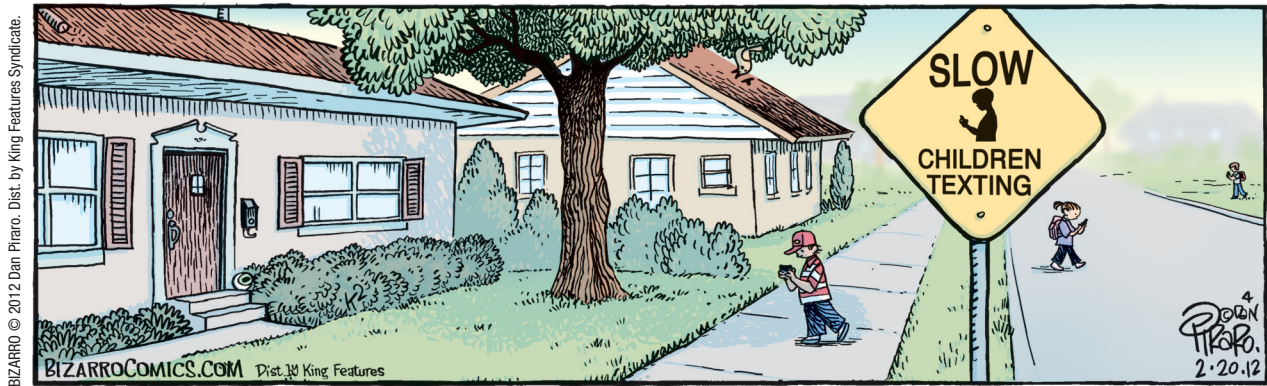
Do people who communicate online ignore other face-to-face relationships? Not according to research by social media researcher Sook Jung Lee, who found support for what he called the "Rich get richer" hypothesis: If you are already "rich" in terms of the quality of face-to-face interpersonal relationships, you will also enrich your online interpersonal relationships. Researchers have found that spending time online with friends does not necessarily result in your avoiding "real time" friends.<sup>46</sup> Another research study found similar results: Spending time on Facebook does not mean that your face-to-face interpersonal relationships suffer. Rather, your Facebook use is merely an extension of relationships, not a substitute for them.<sup>47</sup>

In fact, using EMC messages can result in relationships becoming more intimate *in less time* than they would through FtF interpersonal communication. **Hyperpersonal relationships** are relationships formed primarily through EMC that become even *more personal* than equivalent face-to-face relationships, in part because of the absence of distracting external cues (such as physical qualities), an overdependence on just a few tidbits of personal information (which increases the importance of the information), and idealization of the partner.<sup>48</sup> Hyperpersonal relationships were first identified in a study in which pairs of students who were initially strangers interacted for up to an hour in a simulated instant-messaging situation, while another group of pairs met face to face for up to fifteen minutes. Those in EMC interactions skipped the typical superficial getting-acquainted questions and

**mood** A conscious, subjective state of mind.

**emotional contagion** The process whereby people mimic the emotions of others after watching and hearing their emotional expressions.

**hyperpersonal relationship** A relationship formed primarily through electronically mediated communication that becomes more personal than an equivalent face-to-face relationship because of the absence of distracting external cues, smaller amounts of personal information, and idealization of the communication partner.



used more direct questioning and disclosure with their partners.<sup>49</sup> Online pairs engaged in more intimate probes and responses and reached a similar level of understanding and ability to predict their partners' behaviors as those in FtF interactions.

Researchers have explored questions about the type of person who is more likely to use EMC messages to initiate and maintain relationships. For example, researchers have asked whether people who spend a lot of time online generally have more or less personal contact with other people. A team of researchers led by Robert Kraut and Sara Kiesler made headlines when they published the results of their study, which concluded that the more people use the Internet, the less they will interact with others in person.<sup>50</sup> The researchers also found a correlation between claims of loneliness and Internet use. But other research contradicts this finding: Two follow-up studies found that people who use the Internet are more likely to have a greater number of friends, are more involved with community activities, and overall have greater levels of trust in other people. The most recent research seems to suggest that for some people—those who are already prone to being shy or introverted—there may be a link between Internet use and loneliness or feelings of social isolation. However, their isolation may not be the result of their use of the Internet, but simply because they are naturally less likely to make contact with others.<sup>51</sup> For those who are generally outgoing and who like to interact with others, the Internet is just another tool to reach out and make contact. If you're shy in person, you also may be less likely to tweet or IM; however, there is some evidence that shy or introverted people may be more comfortable using instant messaging.<sup>52</sup>

A comprehensive study that investigated whether instant messages and text messages are more like speech or writing concluded that instant messages contain elements of both, but nonetheless differ from speech in grammar, style, syntax, and other language factors. Text messages are more like writing than they are like spoken messages. There are also gender differences: Women's text and instant messages use more words, longer sentences, and more emoticons, and they discuss and include more social and relational information than men's messages.<sup>53</sup>

## Differences Between EMC and FtF Communication

How is electronically mediated interpersonal communication different from live, face-to-face conversations? There are six key differences, which have to do with (1) time, (2) varying degrees of anonymity, (3) potential for deception, (4) availability of nonverbal cues, (5) role of the written word, and (6) distance.<sup>54</sup>

**Time.** When you interact with others using EMC, you can do so asynchronously. **Asynchronous messages** are not read, heard, or seen at the same time they are sent; there is a time delay between when you send such a message and when someone else receives it. A text message sent to a friend's phone or to someone who is not monitoring Facebook or a voicemail message are examples of asynchronous messages.

**Synchronous messages** are sent and received instantly and simultaneously. Face-to-face conversations are synchronous—there is no time delay between when you send a message

### asynchronous message

A message that is not read, heard, or seen exactly when it is sent; there is a time delay between the sending of the message and its receipt.

### synchronous message

A message that is sent and received simultaneously.

and when the other person receives it. A live video conference or a phone conversation are other examples of synchronous messages. New research is helping us understand phone etiquette. One study has developed a scale to measure what the research calls “mobile communication competence.” Research confirms what you’d expect: We don’t like to overhear loud, personal conversations. And the time and place of phone conversations are important variables that help determine whether we are using the phone competently or annoyingly.<sup>55</sup>

The more synchronous an interaction, the more similar it is to face-to-face interactions. The more a technology simulates a face-to-face conversation, the more social presence it creates. **Social presence** is the feeling we have when we act and think as if we’re involved in an unmediated, FtF conversation. Technically, there is always some delay in sending and receiving messages (even in FtF interactions, sound takes time to travel). The key distinction among different forms of EMC and the degree of social presence we experience is whether we *feel* we are in a synchronous interaction. When we send text messages back and forth, or instant message, we create a shared sense of social or psychological co-presence with our partners. Receiving a tweet from a friend letting us know what he or she is doing at that moment gives us the feeling of being instantly connected to that person.

Another time difference between EMC and FtF messages is that it takes longer to tap out a typewritten message than to speak or to convey a nonverbal message. The amount of delay (which corresponds to silence in FtF interactions) can have an impact on the interpretation of a message’s meaning. When texting, participants may expect to see a response to their message very quickly. This is one reason text messages are often very short and concise. (Another reason is that it can be tricky to type on smaller keyboards with your thumbs—although some people are quite adept at using tiny keyboards.) A rapid succession of short messages fosters a sense of synchronicity and social presence.

Texting someone (as well as sending e-mail, instant messages, and tweets) allows you time to compose your message and craft it more carefully than you might in an FtF interaction. As a sender of text messages, you have more control over what you say and the impression you create; as the receiver of Internet messages, you no doubt realize that the other person has had the chance to shape his or her message carefully for its greatest impact on you.

**Varying Degrees of Anonymity.** Maybe you’ve seen the cartoon of a mutt sitting at a computer and saying to his companion, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” The cartoon canine communicator has a point: You may not always know precisely with whom you are communicating when you receive an e-mail message or are “friended” or “poked” by someone you don’t know. When you are friending someone on Facebook, that person may not know precisely who you are. (One study found seventeen Karl Marxes, seven Kermit the Frogs, four Anne Boleyns, and three people named Socrates of Athens who had Facebook pages.)<sup>56</sup> Because you can be anonymous, you may say things that are bolder, more honest, or even more outrageous than you would if your audience knew who you were. And being anonymous may also tempt you to say things that aren’t true. Yet many of the EMC messages you send and receive are from people you know. So there are varying degrees of anonymity, depending on the technology that you are using and the honesty between you and your communication partners.

**Potential for Deception.** Because with many forms of EMC you can’t see or hear others, it’s easy to lie. Here’s evidence that people are deceptive when using EMC: 81 percent of people lied about their height, weight, or age in a dating profile.<sup>57</sup>

Online deception is almost as easy as typing. We say “almost,” because you *can* assess the content of a written message for clues to deceit. In a study by Katherine Cornetto, college student respondents reported the most common indicator of deception was someone’s making an implausible statement or bragging.<sup>58</sup> As friendships develop over the Internet, to detect deception, people come to depend on personal knowledge and impressions of their

**social presence** The feeling that communicators have of engaging in unmediated, face-to-face interactions even though messages are being sent electronically.

partners acquired over the course of their correspondence.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Cornetto's study found that those who reported lying frequently were most likely to suspect others of lying.<sup>60</sup> The ease with which someone can create a false persona means that you need to be cautious in forming relationships with strangers over the Internet.

One researcher suggests looking for these top lying cues when reading online profiles:<sup>61</sup>

1. Liars often use fewer first-person pronouns (such as *I* or *me*).
2. Liars are more likely to use more negative terms like “not” and “never.”
3. Liars use fewer negative emotions words such as “sad” and “upset.”
4. Liars write briefer online personal essays. The authors of the study suggested that it's easier not to get caught lying if you use fewer words.<sup>62</sup>

**Nonverbal Cues.** Words and graphics become more important in EMC than in FtF interactions, because when communicating electronically, you must rely solely on words to carry nonverbal messages. Of course, a YouTube or Skype video does include nonverbal messages, but even when using video some cues may be limited, such as the surrounding context and reactions from others.

There are some basic things text users do to add emotion to their messages, including CAPITALIZING THE MESSAGE (which is considered “yelling”), making letters **bold**, and inserting emoticons—a smiley face :-), a frowning face with glasses 8-(, and so on. In FtF communication, we laugh and smile in direct response to what we or others are saying. In the EMC context, we use emoticons to provide emotional punctuation in our written messages. There are predictable places where we place a smiley face or a frowning face to underscore something we've just written.<sup>63</sup> The ability to tease or make sarcastic remarks is limited with EMC, because there is no tone of voice in the written message—so emoticons must provide information about the intended emotional tone of what is written. You can also write out an accompanying interpretation—for example, “Boy, am I insulted by that! (just kidding)” to compensate for the limited emotional cues.

There is also typically less emphasis on a person's physical appearance online than in FtF situations, unless you're using Facebook, Skype, or other video messages. In those forums, not only does your appearance as depicted in your photos help determine how others react to you, but one study found that the physical attractiveness or unattractiveness of your “friends” rubs off on you. If you have Facebook friends who are perceived as attractive, you will be perceived as more popular and attractive.<sup>64</sup>

**Role of the Written Word.** The reliance on the written word also affects EMC interactions. One scholar suggests that a person's typing ability and writing skills affect the quality of any relationship that is developed.<sup>65</sup> Not everyone is able to encode thoughts quickly and accurately into written words. Writing skills not only affect your ability to express yourself and manage relationships, they also affect how others perceive you. Your written messages provide insights to others about your personality, skills, sense of humor, and even your values. Consider the following two text messages and think about the impressions you form of the two authors.

Parr: “Hey, babe, whaddup? no what im thinking now we shuld do?”

Chuck: “Hello, Ashley. I have been thinking about some options for our evening's entertainment.”



People use electronically mediated communication (EMC) to share information that ranges from the dramatic to the routine. EMC can create a shared sense of social or psychological presence between two people, giving them the feeling of being instantly connected to each other.



What's your impression of the two texters? What affected your impression? The first example is filled with grammar and spelling shortcuts that might create a negative impression because the author is not particularly skilled at writing—or, just the opposite, you might have a positive reaction because you think the author is cool and contemporary. The second author uses correct grammar and spelling, which may produce a positive impression, yet (because text messages are typically brief and casual) you may think author number two is a nerd, or at least older and more traditional. You communicate a message about the nature of a relationship based on the formality or informality of your language and whether your style reflects what the receiver expects.

**Distance.** Although we certainly can and do send text messages to people who live and work in the same building we're in (or even the same room), there is typically greater physical distance between people who are communicating using EMC. When using the Internet or a smartphone, we can just as easily send a text or a video message to someone on the other side of the globe as we can to someone on the other side of the room.

## Understanding EMC

We've noted that EMC messages have both similarities to and differences from FtF messages. Which theories and models of electronically mediated messages help us understand how relationships are developed and make predictions about how we will use EMC messages?

The communication models that we've presented (communication as action, interaction, and transaction) are certainly applicable to EMC. There are times when EMC is like the action model of communication. You post a message on a message board, blog, or Facebook wall and you get no immediate response from others. The communication is asynchronous—there's a time delay, so you're not really sure you've communicated with anyone. During some e-mail or text-message exchanges, your communication is more like the communication-as-interaction model; you send a text message and you wait for the response. There's a time delay, but sooner or later you get a response. And then there are instances when you can see and hear the other person simultaneously, such as in a live conversation with someone via a webcam—which is a synchronous interaction. In this instance the EMC resembles the transactional communication model, in that communicating this way is almost like being there in person because of the immediacy of the communication. Three theories have been developed to further explain and predict how EMC works.

**Cues-Filtered-Out Theory.** One early theory of communication via the Internet was called **cues-filtered-out theory**. This theory suggested that emotional expression is severely restricted when we communicate using only text messages; nonverbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice are filtered out. The assumption was that text messages were best used for brief, task-oriented communication, such as sharing information or asking questions; text messages were assumed to be less effective in helping people establish meaningful relationships.<sup>66</sup> The cues-filtered-out-theory also suggests that because of the lack of nonverbal cues and other social information, we'll be less likely to use EMC to manage relationships because of its limited ability to carry emotional and relational information. Although a venue like Facebook presents photos and ample personal information, communication through those forums is still not as rich as an FtF conversation.

### cues-filtered-out theory

Theory that suggests that communication of emotions is restricted when people send messages to others via text messages because nonverbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice are filtered out.

**Media Richness Theory.** Another theory helps us make predictions about which form of media we will use to send certain kinds of messages. We use different types of media depending on the richness of a medium—whether it allows us to express emotions and relational