Section one: conceptualizing human communication

1.1. Communication defined

Communication is central to human life. It is deeply rooted in human behaviors and societies. Communication is ubiquitous. We cannot avoid communication and we engage in communication every minute of every day of our life. Communication plays a major role in nearly every aspect of our life. It is difficult to think of social or behavioral events from which communication is absent. The term *communication* is derived from the Latin word *communicare*, which literally means "to put in common", or "to share". The term originally meant sharing of tangible things: food, land, goods, and property. Today, it is often applied to knowledge and information processed by living things or computers.

Beside the literal definition, more comprehensive and broader definitions of communication have been provided by communication scholars. These scholars follow different and varied approaches in defining and conceptualizing human communication. Some of these include:

1. Communication as transmission of massage

In its simplest form communication is conceived as the transmission of message from a source to a receiver. It is the process by which verbal and nonverbal messages are exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, and behavior. This conception of communication, which is adopted by many communication scholars, is identified with the writings of political scientist Harold Lasswell(1948) who said that a convenient way to describe communication is to answer the questions:

- Who?
- Says what?
- Through which channel?
- To whom?
- With what effect?

Thus, as to Lasswell's assertion, communication is said to occur when a source sends a message, though a medium, to a receiver, producing some effect.

2. *Communication as culture*

For those sociologists emphasizing this dimension, communication is "the most wonderful" because it is the basis of human fellowship; it produces the social bonds, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible. According to these sociologists, society is possible because of the binding forces of shared information circulating in an organic system.

Media theorist James W. Carey offered a cultural definition of communication that has had a profound impact on the way communication scientists and others have viewed the relationship between communication and culture. Carey wrote "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed." According to Carey, communication is a process embedded in our everyday lives that inform the way we perceive, understand, and construct our view of reality and the world. Communication is the foundation of our culture. Creation and maintenance of a more or less common culture occurs through communication, including mass communication.

Sociologist called Dewey also followed a cultural approach in defining communication. The following definition he provided can really represent the conceptualization of communication as culture:

> *There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common . . . are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding—like mindedness as sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. . . . Consensus demands communication (Dewey, 1916: 5–6)*

Therefore, the advocators of communication as culture maintain that communication is not merely the transmission of information. Instead, they stress the link between culture and communication. Through a life time of communication we have learnt what our culture expects of us. Culture is constructed and maintained through communication.

3. Communication as the process of symbolic interaction

The symbolic interaction approach sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals. Symbolic interactionists focus on social interaction in small group context.

For those sociologists conceiving communication as the process of symbolic interaction, *communication* refers to the process of human beings responding to the symbolic behavior of other persons. They see symbols as an especially important part of human communication. In the process of human communication, symbols have significant functions. According to them, symbols are crucial in allowing people to act in distinctively human ways. Because of the symbol, the human being does not respond passively to a reality that imposes itself but actively creates and re-creates the world acted in.

Symbols enable people to deal with the material and social world by allowing them to name, categorize, and remember the objects they encounter there. In particular, language as a symbolic representation allows people to name and categorize reality to facilitate the process of human interaction (communication) which will otherwise be impossible.

1.2 The need for studying communication

Studying communication is essential for you. Communication is central to your life. Effective communication can help you solve problems in your professional life and improve relationships in your personal life. Communication experts believe that poor communication is at the root of many problems and that effective communication is one solution to these problems.

Communication is consequential. Understanding the theory, research, and application of communication will make a significant difference in your life and in the lives of people around the world. Communication principles and practices can resolve disputes among nations as well as among friends and family. Effective communication may not solve all the world's problems, but better communication practices can help us solve or avoid many problems.

Regardless of your interests and goals, the ability to communicate effectively will enhance and enrich your life. But learning *how* to communicate is just as important as learning *about* communication. Studying communication comprehensively offers at least seven advantages:

1. Studying communication can improve the way you see yourself. Communication is "vital to the development of the whole person." As we will see in chapter 3, most of our self knowledge comes from the communicative experience. As we engage in thought (*intra*personal communication) and in interactions with significant other people (*inter*personal communication), we learn about ourselves. People who are naive about the communication process and the development of self-awareness, self-concept, and self efficacy may not see themselves accurately or may be unaware of their own self development. Knowing how communication affects self perception can lead to greater awareness and appreciation of the self.

2. Studying communication can improve the way others see you. In chapter 3 we will discuss self-presentation, image management, and locus of control. You will learn that you can to a considerable extent control your own behavior, which will lead to positive outcomes with others. You will find that your interactions can be smoother and that you can achieve your goals more easily as you manage the impression you make on others.

3. Studying communication can increase what you know about human relationships. The field of communication includes learning about how people relate to each other and about what type of communication is appropriate for a given situation. Most people value human relationships and find great comfort in friendships, family relationships, and community relationships. Within these relationships we learn about trust, intimacy, and reciprocity.

4. Studying communication can teach you important life skills. Studying communication involves learning important skills that everyone will use at some point in his or her life, such as critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution, team building, media literacy, and public speaking. Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Louden (1999) analyzed dozens of studies and concluded that "communication instruction improves the critical thinking ability of the participants." Our visual literacy is improved as we understand the technical and artistic aspects of the visual communication medium (Metallinos, 1992).

5. Studying communication can help you exercise your constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech. Few nations have a bill of rights that invites people to convey their opinions and ideas, yet freedom of speech is essential to a democratic form of government. Being a practicing citizen in a democratic society means knowing about current issues and being able to speak about them in

conversations, in speeches, and through the mass media; it also involves being able to critically examine messages from others.

6. Studying communication can help you succeed professionally. A look at the job postings in any newspaper will give you an immediate understanding of the importance of improving your knowledge and practice of communication. The employment section of *The Washington Post* provides some examples (Today's Employment, 1998): (a) "We need a results-oriented, seasoned professional who is a good communicator and innovator" reads one ad for a marketing manager; (b) Another ad, this one for a marketing analyst, reads, "You should be creative, inquisitive, and a good communicator both in writing and orally"; and (c) An ad for a training specialist calls for "excellent presentation, verbal, and written communication skills, with ability to interact with all levels within organization."

7. Studying communication can help you navigate an increasingly diverse world. As you stroll through a mall, deposit money in a bank, go to a movie, or work at your job, odds are that about one in every five people you come into contact with people from new culture and language. As you develop an understanding of basic communication concepts and learn how to apply those concepts in everyday interactions, you will be better equipped to bridge language and cultural barriers.

1.3. Components of communication

The basic communication model consists of seven elements: people, message, code, encoding and decoding, channel, feedback, and noise.

1. People

People are involved in the human communication process in two roles—as both the sources and the receivers of messages. A *source* initiates a message, and a *receiver* is the intended target of the message. Individuals do not perform these two roles independently. Instead, they are the sources and the receivers of messages simultaneously and continually.

People do not respond uniformly to all messages, nor do they always provide the same messages in exactly the same way. Individual characteristics, including race, sex, age, culture, values, and attitudes, affect the ways people send and receive messages.

2. The Message

The *message* is the verbal and nonverbal form of the idea, thought, or feeling that one person (The source) wishes to communicate to another person or group of people (the receivers). The message is the content of the interaction. The message includes the symbols (words and phrases) you use to communicate your ideas, as well as your facial expressions, bodily movements, gestures, physical contact, tone of voice, and other nonverbal codes. The message may be relatively brief and easy to understand or long and complex.

3. Code

A computer carries messages via binary code on cable, wire, or fiber; similarly, you converse with others by using a code called "language." A *code* is a systematic arrangement of symbols used to create meanings in the mind of another person or persons. Words, phrases, and sentences become "symbols" that are used to evoke images, thoughts, and ideas in the mind of others.

4. Encoding and Decoding

If communication involves the use of codes, the process of communicating can be viewed as one of encoding and decoding. *Encoding* is defined as the process of translating an idea or a thought into a code. *Decoding* is the process of assigning meaning to that idea or thought. For instance, suppose you are interested in purchasing a new car. You are trying to describe a compact model to your father, who wants to help you with your purchase. You might be visualizing the car with the black interior, sporty design, and red exterior that belongs to your best friend. Putting this vision into words, you tell your father you are interested in a car that is "small and well designed." You encode your perceptions of a particular car into words that describe the model.

Your father, on hearing this, decodes your words and develops his own mental image. But his love of larger cars affects this process, and as a result, he envisions a sedan. As you can see, misunderstanding often occurs because of the limitations of language and the inadequacy of descriptions. Nonetheless, encoding and decoding are essential in sharing your thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others.

5. The Channel

The *channel* is the means by which a message moves from the source to the receiver of the message. A message moves from one place to another, from one person to another, by traveling through a medium, or channel. Airwaves, sound waves, twisted copper wires, glass fibers, and

cable are all communication channels. Airwaves and cable are two of the various channels through which you receive television messages. Radio messages move through sound waves. Computer images (and sound, if there is any) travel through light waves, and sometimes both light and sound waves. In person-to-person communication, you send your messages through a channel of sound waves and light waves that enable receivers to see and hear you.

6. Feedback

Feedback is the receiver's verbal and nonverbal response to the source's message. Ideally, you respond to another person's messages by providing feedback so that the source knows the message was received as intended. Feedback is part of any communication situation.

7. Noise

Noise is anything that interferes with your receiving a message. At one extreme, noise may prevent a message from getting from source to receiver. A roaring noise or line static can prevent entire messages from getting through to your phone receiver. At the other extreme, with virtually no noise interference, the message of the source and the message received are almost identical. Most often, however, noise distorts some portion of the message a source sends as it travels to a receiver. Just as messages may be auditory or visual, noise comes in both auditory and visual forms. Four types of noise are especially relevant:

- **Physical noise** is interference that is external to both speaker and listener; it interferes with the physical transmission of the signal or message and would include the screeching of passing cars, the hum of a computer, sunglasses, blurred type or fonts that are too small or difficult to read, misspellings and poor grammar, and popup ads.
- **Physiological noise** is created by barriers within the sender or receiver and would include visual impairments, hearing loss, articulation problems, and memory loss.
- **Psychological noise** refers to mental interference in the speaker or listener and includes preconceived ideas, wandering thoughts, biases and prejudices, close-mindedness, and extreme emotionalism. You're likely to run into psychological noise when you talk with someone who is close-minded or who refuses to listen to anything he or she doesn't already believe.
- **Semantic noise** is interference that occurs when the speaker and listener have different meaning systems; it would include language or dialectical differences, the use of jargon or

overly complex terms, and ambiguous or overly abstract terms whose meanings can be easily misinterpreted.

1.4. Types of Human Communication

Within the domain of human interaction, there are several types of communication. Each occurs in a different context. Despite the features that they share, each has its own characteristics. The following are the major types of communication.

1. Intrapersonal communication

Intrapersonal communication is the process of understanding and sharing meaning within the self. Intrapersonal communication is the communication that occurs within your own mind. It is the communication that you have with yourself —when you talk with, learn about, and judges yourself.

Each one of us is continually engaged in intrapersonal communication. Although you might become more easily absorbed in talking to yourself when you are alone(while walking to class, driving to work, or talking a shower, for instance), you are also likely to be involved in this form of communication in crowded circumstances as well(such as during a lecture, at a party, or when visiting friends).

People involve in intrapersonal communication for different purposes: to clarify ideas or analyze a situation, to reflect upon or appreciate something, to solve problems internally, to resolve internal conflict, to plan for the future, and to evaluate their self and their relationship with others.

Intrapersonal communication also occurs before and during other forms of communication. For instance, you might argue with yourself during a conversation in which someone asks you to do something you don't really want to do: before you accept or decline, you mull over the alternative in your mind.

2. Dyadic/interpersonal communication

When you move from intrapersonal to interpersonal communication, you move from communication that occurs within your own mind to communication that involves another person. Social scientists call two persons interacting a ***dyad,*** and they often use the term dyadic communication to describe this type of communication.

Interpersonal communication is the process of using messages to generate meaning between at least two people in a situation that allows mutual opportunities for both speaking and listening. Direct dyadic/interpersonal communication involves a direct face-to-face relationship between the sender and receiver of a message, who are in an interdependent relationship. Because of interpersonal communication's immediacy (it is taking place now) and primacy (it is taking place here), it is characterized by a strong feedback component. Communication is enhanced when the relationship exists over a long period of time. Interpersonal communication involves not only the words used but also the various elements of nonverbal communication.

Virtually every verbal statement in dyadic communication contains two kinds of messages: content message and relational message. Content messages**,** which focus on the subject being discussed, are the most obvious. Relational messages make statements about how the parties feel toward one another. These relational messages express communicators' feelings and attitudes involving one or more dimensions:

- Affinity: One dimension of relational communication is affinity: the degree to which people like or appreciate one another;
- Respect: Respect is the degree to which we admire others and hold them in esteem;
- Immediacy: Communication scholars use the term immediacy to describe the degree of interest and attraction we feel toward and communicate to others; and
- Control: In every conversation and every relationship there is some distribution of control: the amount of influence communicators seek. Control can be distributed evenly among relational partners, or one person can have more and the other(s) less.

Unlike threesomes and other groups, dyads are complete and cannot be subdivided. If one person withdraws from the other, the communication/relationship is finished. This indivisibility means that, unlike groups, the partners in a dyad can't form coalitions to get their needs met: They must work matters out with one another.

3. Small group communication

Small group communication is the interaction of small group of people to achieve an interdependent goal. Small group communication occurs in families, work groups, support groups, religious groups, and study groups. Small group communication serves *relationship needs*—such

as those for companionship, affection, or support—and *task needs*—such as balancing the family budget, electing a new chairperson, or designing a new ad campaign. Through small group communication you interact with others, solve problems, and develop new ideas, and share knowledge and experiences.

Whatever their makeup, small groups possess characteristics that are not present in a dyad. For instance, two or more members of a group can form a coalition to defend their position against other members, whereas in a dyad the members face each other on their own, without support from others. In a group, the majority of members can put pressure on those in the minority to conform, either consciously or unconsciously; but in a dyad no such pressures exist. Conformity pressures can also be comforting, leading group members to take risks that they would not dare if they were alone or in a dyad. With their greater size, groups also have the ability to be more creative than dyads. Finally, communication in groups is affected strongly by the type of leader who is in a position of authority.

4. Public communication

Public communication occurs when a group becomes too large for all members to contribute. One characteristic of public communication is an unequal amount of speaking. One or more people are likely to deliver their remarks to the remaining members, who act as an audience. This leads to a second characteristic of public settings: limited verbal feedback. The audience isn't able to talk back in a two-way conversation the way they might in a dyadic or small group setting. This doesn't mean that speakers operate in a vacuum when delivering their remarks. Audiences often have a chance to ask questions and offer brief comments, and their nonverbal reactions offer a wide range of clues about their reception of the speaker's remarks.

Public communication, or public speaking, is recognized by its formality, structure, and planning. You probably are frequently a receiver of public communication in lecture classes, at convocations, and at religious services. Occasionally, you also may be a source: when you speak in a group, when you try to convince other voters of the merits of a particular candidate for office, or when you introduce a guest speaker to a large audience. Public communication most often informs or persuades, but it can also entertain, introduce, announce, welcome, or pay tribute.

5. Mass communication

Mass communication consists of messages that are transmitted to large, widespread audiences via electronic and print media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and so on. Basically, mass

communication differs from the interpersonal, small group, and public varieties in several ways. First, mass messages are aimed at a large audience without any personal contact between sender and receivers. Second, most of the messages sent via mass communication channels are developed, or at least financed, by large organizations. In this sense, mass communication is far less personal and more of a product than the other types we have examined so far. Finally, mass communication is almost always controlled by many gatekeepers who determine what messages will be delivered to consumers, how they will be constructed, and when they will be delivered. Sponsors (whether corporate or governmental), editors, producers, reporters, and executives all have the power to influence mass messages in ways that don't affect most other types.

1.5. Characteristics of communication

The following are the chief characteristics of human communication:

1. Communication is a process

If we accept the concept of process, we view events and relationships as dynamic, ongoing, ever changing, and continuous. When we label something as a process, we also mean that it does not have a beginning, an end, a fixed sequence of events. It is not static, at rest. It is moving. The ingredients within a process interact; each affects all the others.

We often talk about communication as if it occurred in discrete, individual acts such as one person's utterance or a conversation. But communication is essentially a process. When communication is referred to as a process it means it is always changing, always in motion.

Communication as a process, therefore, is a series of actions, something that may be better thought of as a continuum, rather than a point. The notion of communication as a process involves, at least, some time dimension which means that the characteristics, causes, and consequences of some communication act are subject to change over the life of the act. A key element in communication, then, is this concept of "change."

Consider, for example, a friend's compliment about your appearance. Your interpretation of those words will depend on a long series of experiences stretching far back in time: How have others judged your appearance? How do you feel about your looks? How honest has your friend been in the past? How have you been feeling about one another recently? All this history will help shape your response to the friend's remark. In turn, the words you speak and the way you say them will shape the way your friend behaves toward you and others—both in this situation and in the future.

This simple example shows that it's inaccurate to talk about "acts" of communication as if they occurred in isolation. To put it differently, communication isn't a series of incidents pasted together like photographs in a scrapbook; instead, it is more like a motion picture in which the meaning comes from the unfolding of an interrelated series of images.

2. Communication is Symbolic

Symbols are used to represent things, processes, ideas, or events in ways that make communication possible. The most significant feature of symbols is their *arbitrary* nature. For example, there's no logical reason why the letters in the word *book* should stand for the object that we read. Speakers of Spanish call it a *libro,* and Germans call it a *Buch.* Even in English, another term would work just as well as long as everyone agreed to use it in the same way. We overcome the arbitrary nature of symbols by linguistic rules and customs. Effective communication depends on agreement among people about these rules. This is easiest to see when we observe people who don't follow linguistic conventions. For example, recall how unusual the speech of children and immigrant speakers of a language often sounds.

We've already talked about words as one type of symbol. In addition, nonverbal behavior can have symbolic meaning. As with words, some nonverbal behaviors, though arbitrary, have clearly agreed-upon meanings. For example, to most North Americans, nodding your head up and down means "yes" (although this meaning isn't universal).But even more than words, many nonverbal behaviors are ambiguous. Does a frown signify anger or unhappiness? Does a hug stand for a friendly greeting or a symbol of the hugger's romantic interest in you? One can't always be sure.

3. Communication is Purposeful

You communicate for a purpose; some motivation leads you to communicate. When you speak or write, you're trying to send some message and to accomplish some goal. Although different cultures emphasize different purposes and motives, five general purposes seem relatively common to most, if not all, forms of communication:

- **To learn:** to acquire knowledge of others, the world, and yourself
- **To relate:** to form relationships with others, to interact with others as individuals
- **To help:** to assist others by listening, offering solutions
- **To influence:** to strengthen or change the attitudes or behaviors of others
- **To play:** to enjoy the experience of the moment

4. Communication Involves Choices

Throughout your communication life and in each communication interaction you're presented with choice points—moments when you have to make a choice as to whom you communicate with, what you say, what you don't say, how you phrase what you want to say, and so on.

5. Communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable

Inevitability: Communication is inevitable; that is, in interactional situations it is always taking place, even when a person may not intend or want to communicate. To understand the inevitability of communication, think about a student sitting in the back of a classroom with an expressionless face, perhaps staring out the window. Although the student might claim not to be communicating with the instructor, the instructor may derive a variety of messages from this behavior. Perhaps the instructor assumes that the student lacks interest, is bored, or is worried about something. In any event, the teacher is receiving messages even though the student may not intentionally be sending any. This does not mean that all behavior is communication. For instance, if the student looked out the window and the teacher didn't notice, no communication would have taken place. The two people must be in an interactional situation and the behavior must be perceived for the principle of inevitability to operate.

Irreversibility: Another all-important attribute of communication is its irreversibility**.** Once you say something or click "send" on your e-mail, you cannot uncommunicative the message. You can, of course, try to reduce its effects. You can say, for example, "I really didn't mean what I said." But regardless of how hard you try to negate or reduce the effects of a message, the message itself, once it has been received, cannot be taken back. In a public speaking situation in which the speech is recorded or broadcast, inappropriate messages may have national or even international effects. Here, attempts to reverse what someone has said (e.g., efforts to offer clarification) often have the effect of further publicizing the original statement.

Unrepeatability: finally, communication is unrepeatable. A communication act can never be duplicated. The reason is simple: Everyone and everything is constantly changing. As a result, you can never recapture the exact same situation, frame of mind, or relationship dynamics that defined a previous communication act. For example, you can never repeat meeting someone for the first time, comforting a grieving friend, leading a small group for the first time, or giving a public speech. You can never replace an initial impression; you can only try to counteract this initial (and perhaps negative) impression by making subsequent impressions more positive.

1.6 Functions of communication

Now, it is important to discuss why we spend so much time exploring the subject of human communication. Perhaps the strongest argument for studying communication is its central role in our lives. The amount of time we spend communicating is staggering. For example, Mambert (1971) has measured the amount of time a sample group of college students spent on various activities. He found that, the subjects spent an average of over 61 percent of their working hours engaged in some form of communication. The reality is that, whatever one's occupation, the results of such a study would not be too different. Most of us are surrounded by others, trying to understand them and hoping that they understand us: family, friends, coworkers, teachers, and strangers.

There's a good reason why we speak, listen, read, and write so much: Communication satisfies most of our needs. In the next few pages, we shall pay attention to the major functions of human communication.

1. Physical needs

Communication is so important that it is necessary for physical health. In fact, evidence suggests that an absence of satisfying communication can even jeopardize life itself. Medical researchers have identified a wide range of hazards that result from a lack of close relationships. For instance, Ronald and George (2006) have identified that:

- People who lack strong relationships have two to three times the risk of early death, regardless of whether they smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, or exercise regularly
- Terminal cancer strikes socially isolated people more often than those who have close personal relationships
- Divorced, separated, and widowed people are five to ten times more likely to need hospitalization for mental problems than their married counterparts
- Pregnant women under stress and without supportive relationships have three times more complications than pregnant women who suffer from the same stress but have strong social support

Studies indicate that social isolation (lack of any human communication) is a major risk factor contributing to coronary disease, comparable to physiological factors such as diet, cigarette

smoking, obesity, and lack of physical activity. Research like this demonstrates the importance of having satisfying personal relationships.

Remember: Not everyone needs the same amount of contact, and the quality of communication is almost certainly as important as the quantity. The important point here is that personal communication is essential for our well-being. To paraphrase an old song, "people who need people" aren't "the luckiest people in the world," they're the *only* people!

2. Identity needs

Communication does more than enable us to survive. It is the way—indeed, the *only* way—we learn who we are. As we shall see in the later part of the course, our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other people. Are we smart or stupid, attractive or ugly, skillful or inept? The answers to these questions don't come from looking in the mirror. Rather, we decide who we are based on how others react to us.

Deprived of communication with others, we would have no sense of identity. In his book "*Bridges, Not Walls",* John Stewart dramatically illustrates this fact by citing the case of the famous "Wild Boy of Aveyron," who spent his early childhood without any apparent human contact. The boy was discovered in January 1800 while digging for vegetables in a French village garden. He showed no behaviors one would expect in a social human. The boy could not speak but uttered only weird cries. More significant than this absence of social skills was his lack of any identity as a human being. As author Roger Shattuck put it, "The boy had no human sense of being in the world. He had no sense of himself as a person related to other persons." Only after the influence of a loving "mother" did the boy begin to behave—and, we can imagine, think of himself as a human. Contemporary stories support the essential role that communication plays in shaping identity. In 1970, authorities discovered a twelve-year-old girl (whom they called"Genie") who had spent virtually all her life in an otherwise empty, darkened bedroom with almost no human contact. The child could not speak and had no sense of herself as a person until she was removed from her family and "nourished" by a team of caregivers.

Like Genie and the boy of Aveyron, each of us enters the world with little or no sense of identity. We gain an idea of who we are from the ways others define us. In the process of identity formation, the messages we receive in early childhood are the strongest, but the influence of others continues throughout life.

The role of communication in shaping identity works in a second way. Besides others' messages shaping who we think we are, the messages we create often are attempts (some more conscious than others) to get others to view us the way we want to be seen. For example, the choices we make about how to dress and otherwise shape our appearance are almost always attempts to manage our identity.

3. Social needs

Besides helping to define who we are, communication provides a vital link with others. Researchers and theorists have identified a range of social needs we satisfy by communicating: *pleasure* (e.g., "because it's fun,""to have a good time"); *affection* (e.g., "to help others," "to let others know I care"); *inclusion* (e.g., "because I need someone to talk to or be with," "because it makes me less lonely"); *escape* (e.g., "to put off doing something I should be doing");*relaxation* (e.g., "because it allows me to unwind"); and *control* (e.g., "because I want someone to do something for me,""to get something I don't have").

As you look at this list of social needs for communicating, imagine how empty your life would be if these needs weren't satisfied. Then notice that it would be impossible to fulfill them without communicating with others. Because relationships with others are so vital, some theorists have gone as far as to argue that communication is the primary goal of human existence. For instance, Walter Goldschmidt terms the drive for meeting social needs as the "human career."

4. Practical needs

We shouldn't overlook the everyday, important functions that communication serves. Communication is the tool that lets us tell the hair stylist to take just a little off the sides, direct the doctor to where it hurts, and inform the plumber that the broken pipe needs attention *now!*

Beyond these obvious needs, a wealth of research demonstrates that communication is an important key to effectiveness in a variety of everyday settings. For example, a survey of over four hundred employers identified "communication skills" as the top characteristic that employers seek in job candidates. It was rated as more important than technical competence, work experience, or academic background (Ronald and George 2006). In another survey, over 90 percent of the personnel officials at five hundred U.S. businesses stated that increased communication skills are needed for success in the twenty-first century.

1.7. Section summary

Communication scholars follow different and varied approaches in defining and conceptualizing human communication. Some scholars conceive communication as transmission of message from a source to a receiver. For these scholars, communication is a process by which verbal and nonverbal messages are exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, and behavior. Other scholars view communication as culture. According to them communication is the means through which a more or less common culture is created and maintained. Furthermore, a number of communication scholars conceive communication as the process of symbolic interaction in which human beings respond to the symbolic behavior of other persons. These scholars see symbols as an especially important part of human communication.

Human communication is a process which is composed of different elements. The basic communication model consists of seven elements: people, message, code, encoding and decoding, channel, feedback, and noise. People are involved in the human communication process in two roles—as the sources and the receivers of messages. The source is the one who initiate the message while the receiver is the intended target of the message. The message is the verbal and nonverbal form of the idea, thought, or feeling that one person (The source) wishes to communicate to another person or group of people (the receivers). A code refers to the set of systematically arranged symbols (such as Words, phrases, and sentences) which are used to create meanings in the mind of another person or persons. *Encoding* is the process of translating an idea or a thought into a code while *Decoding* is the process of assigning meaning to that idea or thought. The *channel* is the means by which a message moves from the source to the receiver of the message. A message moves from one place to another, from one person to another, by traveling through a medium, or channel (such as airwave and sound wave). *Feedback* is the receiver's verbal and nonverbal response to the source's message. *Noise* is anything that interrupts the communication process. Four types of noise can interrupt the communication process: physical nose (such as screeching of passing cars, and the hum of a computer), physiological noise (such as visual impairments and hearing loss), psychological noise (such as biases and prejudices, close-mindedness, and extreme emotionalism) and semantic noise (such as language or dialectical differences and the use of jargon).

There are different types of communication which are differentiated on the basis of the context in which they take place and the number of people involved. The major types of communication are:

intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, small group communication, public communication, and mass communication. *Intrapersonal communication* is the communication that occurs within one's own mind. It is the communication that one has with himself. People involve in intrapersonal communication for different purposes: to clarify ideas or analyze a situation, to solve problems internally, and to plan for the future. *Dyadic/interpersonal* communication is a type of communication which involves a direct face-to-face relationship between two individuals who are in an interdependent relationship. *Small group* communication is the interaction of small group of people to achieve an interdependent goal. This type of communication occurs in different contexts(such as families, work groups, support groups, religious groups, and study groups) and serves *relationship needs*—such as those for companionship, affection, or support—and *task needs*—such as balancing the family budget, electing a new chairperson, or designing a new ad campaign. *Public communication* is a type of communication which occurs when a group becomes too large for all members to contribute. This type of communication is characterized by unequal amount of speaking between the speaker and the audience, limited verbal feedback from the audience, and formality. Example can be public communication in lecture classes. Mass communication is a type of communication which involves the transmission of messages to large, widespread audiences, via electronic and print media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and so on.

Human communication has different characteristics. The chief characteristics of communication include: (1) communication is a process**,** meaning that it is not static or at rest, but rather, dynamic, ongoing, ever changing, and continuous; (2) Communication is Symbolic**,** which means that it involves symbols (such as words and nonverbal cues) that are used to represent things, processes, ideas, or events in ways that make the transmission of message possible; (3) Communication is Purposeful, which refers to the fact that people communicate for achieving a given purpose or goal; (4) Communication involves Choices**,** meaning that in communication interaction people are presented with choice points as to whom they communicate with, what they say, what they don't say, how they phrase what they want to say, and so on; (5) Communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable.

Communication has central role in our lives and satisfies most of our needs. To start with, Communication is necessary for physical health. Medical researchers have identified that people who lack strong relationships are susceptible to coronary disease, terminal cancer, and have high

risk of early death. Research also indicates that pregnant women without supportive relationships have high risk of birth complications than pregnant women who have strong social support. Communication also satisfies our identity needs. That is, our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other people. Besides helping to define who we are, communication also provides a vital link with others. Researchers and theorists have identified a range of social needs such as *pleasure, affection*, and *inclusion* we satisfy by communicating with others. Finally, communication is important to satisfy our day to day Practical needs. It is a tool that we use to meet our basic necessities.

1.8. Self-Test Questions

1. Define communication from the point of view of those scholars who view it as:

A) Transmission of message

B) Culture

C) Process of symbolic interaction

2. Discuss what makes small group communication different from dyadic communication

3. Discuss the ways in which mass communication differs from other types of communication?

4. Discuss the characteristics of public communication

5. Discuss the two roles that people take in the communication process

6. Discuss the four types of noise that may interrupt communication

7. Discuss the five purposes of communication which are common to most forms of communication

Section two: system of human communication

2.1. Language defined

Different scholars have defined language in different ways. For our purpose, we can take up the following definition by Haviland et.al which could provide us with the most comprehensive definition of language:

> *Language is a system of communication using sounds and/or gestures that are put together according to certain rules, resulting in meanings that are based on agreement by a society and intelligible to all who share that language (Hailand et.al 2006: 90)*

2.2. The characteristics of language

Humans speak about ten thousand dialects. Although most of these sound different from one another, all possess the following characteristics in common.

1. Language is rule-governed

Language has multiple rules. Four sets of rules are relevant to our discussion: phonological rules, syntactic rules, semantic rules, and pragmatic rules. *Phonological rules* govern how words sound when pronounced. *Syntactic rules* govern the structure of language—the way in which symbols are arranged to form phrases and sentences. *Semantic rules* deal with the meaning of specific words. Semantic rules are what make it possible for us to agree that "bikes" are for riding and "books" are for reading; they also help us to know whom we will and won't encounter when we open doors marked "men" or "women." Without semantic rules, communication would be impossible, because each of us would use symbols in unique ways, unintelligible to one another. *Pragmatic rules* govern how people use language in everyday interaction. Consider the example of a male boss saying "You look very pretty today" to a female employee. It's easy to imagine how the subordinate might be offended by a comment that her boss considered an innocent remark. Scholars of language have pointed out several levels at which the rules each person uses can differ.

2. Language is symbolic

There's nothing natural about calling your loyal four-footed companion a "dog" or the object you're reading right now a "module." These words, like virtually all language, are *symbols*—arbitrary constructions that represent a communicator's thoughts. Not all linguistic symbols are spoken or written words. *Speech* and *writing* aren't the only forms of language. Sign language, as "spoken" by most deaf people, is symbolic in nature and not the pantomime it might seem. There are literally hundreds of different sign languages spoken around the world that represent the same ideas differently. These distinct languages include American Sign Language, British Sign Language, French Sign Language, Danish Sign Language, Chinese Sign Language—even Australian Aboriginal and Mayan sign languages.

Symbols are more than just labels: They are the way we experience the world. You can prove this fact by trying a simple experiment. Work up some saliva in your mouth, and then spit it into a glass. Take a good look, and then drink it up. Most people find this process mildly disgusting. But ask yourself why this is so. After all, we swallow our own saliva all the time. The answer arises

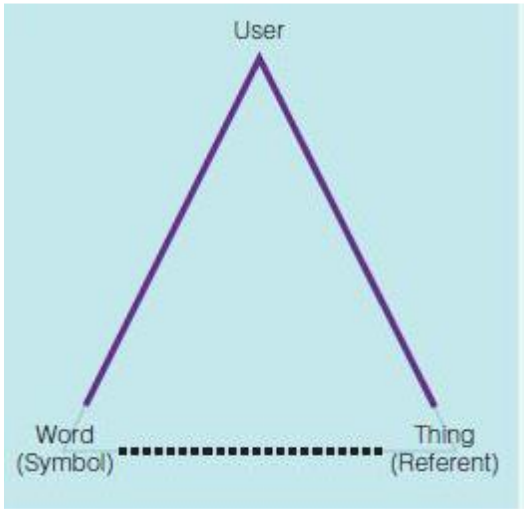
out of the symbolic labels we use. After the saliva is in the glass, we call it *spit* and think of it in a different way. In other words, our reaction is to the *name*, not the thing.

The naming process operates in virtually every situation. How you react to a stranger will depend on the symbols you use to categorize him or her: gay (or straight), religious (or not), attractive (or unattractive), and so on.

3. Meanings are in people, not words

Ask a dozen people what the same symbol means, and you are likely to get twelve different answers. Take the Ethiopian flag as an example. For the Ethiopians, it does bring up associations of patriots giving their lives for their country. But, for non Ethiopian citizens it does not bring about the same meaning. How about a holy cross: What does it mean for Christian and non Christian believers? Obviously, the meaning it conveys differs depending upon whether people are Christian believers or non Christian believers.

As with physical symbols, the place to look for meaning in language isn't in the words themselves, but rather in the way people make sense of them. In their well known *"triangle of meaning"* (the figure below), Ogden and Richards illustrated the fact that meanings are social constructions. This model shows that there is only an indirect relationship—indicated by a broken line—between a word and the thing it claims to represent.



Problems arise when people mistakenly assume that others use words in the same way they do. It's possible to have an argument about *feminism* without ever realizing that you and the other person are using the word to represent entirely different things. The same goes for

environmentalism, Republicans, rock music, and thousands upon thousands of other symbols. Words don't mean; people do—and often in widely different ways.

Despite the potential for linguistic problems, the situation isn't hopeless. We do, after all, communicate with one another reasonably well most of the time. And with enough effort, we can clear up most of the misunderstandings that do occur. The key to more accurate use of language is to avoid assuming that others interpret words the same way we do. In truth, successful communication occurs when we *negotiate* the meaning of a statement. As one French proverb puts it: *The spoken word belongs half to the one who speaks it and half to the one who hears*.

2.3 The power of language

On the most obvious level, language allows us to satisfy basic functions such as describing ideas, making requests, and solving problems. But beyond these functions, the way we use language also influences others and reflects our attitudes in more subtle ways, which we will examine now.

1. Language shapes attitude

The power of language to shape ideas has been recognized throughout history. As we will now see, our speech—sometimes consciously and sometimes not—shapes others' values, attitudes, and beliefs in a variety of ways:

- ***Naming:*** Research has demonstrated that names are more than just a simple means of identification: They shape the way others think of us, the way we view ourselves, and the way we act. Think of the attitude of people regarding a "Doctor" vs "Farmer", "men" vs "women" and so on
- ***Credibility:*** Scholarly speaking is a good example of how speech style influences perception. We refer to what has been called the *Dr. Fox hypothesis*: "An apparently legitimate speaker who utters an unintelligible message will be judged competent by an audience in the speaker's area of apparent expertise." The Dr. Fox hypothesis got its name from one Dr. Myron L. Fox, who delivered a talk followed by a half-hour discussion on "Mathematical Game Theory as Applied to Physical Education."The audience included psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and educators. Questionnaires collected after the session revealed that these educated listeners found the lecture clear and stimulating. Despite his warm reception by this learned audience, Fox was a complete fraud.

- ***Status:*** Studies have demonstrated that the power of speech to influence status is a fact. Several factors combine to create positive or negative impressions: accent, choice of words, speech rate, and even the apparent age of a speaker. In most cases, speakers of standard dialect are rated higher than nonstandard speakers in a variety of ways: They are viewed as more competent and more self-confident, and the content of their messages is rated more favorably. The unwillingness or inability of a communicator to use the standard dialect fluently can have serious consequences. For instance, speakers of Black English, a distinctive dialect with its own accent, grammar, syntax, and semantic rules, are rated as less intelligent, professional, capable, socially acceptable, and employable by speakers of Standard English.
- ***Sexism and racism:*** By now it should be clear that the power of language to shape attitudes goes beyond individual cases and influences how we perceive entire groups of people. For example, Miller and Swift (2003) argue that some aspects of language suggest women are of lower status than men. Miller and Swift contend that, except for words referring to females by definition, such as *mother* and *actress*, English defines many nonsexual concepts as male.

2. Language reflects attitude

Besides shaping the way we view ourselves and others, language reflects our attitudes. Feelings of control, attraction, commitment, responsibility—all these and more are reflected in the way we use language.

- ***Power:*** Communication researchers have identified a number of language patterns that add to, or detract from, a speaker's ability to influence others, as well as reflecting how a speaker feels about his or her degree of control over a situation.
- ***Affiliation:*** Power isn't the only way language reflects the status of relationships. Language can also be a way of building and demonstrating solidarity with others. An impressive body of research has demonstrated that communicators who want to show affiliation with one another adapt their speech in a variety of ways, including their choice of vocabulary, rate of talking, number and placement of pauses, and level of politeness. On an individual level, close friends and lovers often develop special terms that serve as a way of signifying their relationship. Using the same vocabulary sets these people apart from

others, reminding themselves and the rest of the world of their relationship. The same process works among members of larger groups, ranging from street gangs to military personnel. Communication researchers call this linguistic accommodation *convergence.*

- ***Attraction and interest:*** Social customs discourage us from expressing like or dislike in many situations. Only a clod would respond to the question "What do you think of the cake I baked for you?" by saying, "It's terrible."Bashful or cautious suitors might not admit their attraction to a potential partner. Even when people are reluctant to speak candidly, the language they use can suggest their degree of interest and attraction toward a person, object, or idea
- ***Responsibility:*** In addition to suggesting liking and importance, language can reveal the speaker's willingness to accept responsibility for a message

2.4. Forms of language communication

In elaborating the definition of language, Ronald and George (2006) stated, although humans rely heavily on spoken language, or speech, to communicate with one another, it is not their sole means of communication. Human language is embedded in an age-old gesture-call system in which body motions and facial expression, along with vocal features such as tone and volume, play vital roles in conveying messages. This fact suggests language as a system of communication can come both as verbal and non-verbal forms. In the next two subsections, we shall focus on these forms of language communication.

2.4.1. Verbal communication

2.4.1.1. Verbal communication defined

- Verbal communication is one form of language communication in which speech/linguistic behavior is used for interactional communicative social behavior (Ronald and George 2006)
- Verbal communication is the use of verbal language in the process of human interaction. One of the most important design features of verbal language is its capacity to say or convey things that have never been said or conveyed before but will still be understood by another speaker of the same language (Novinger 2001)

2.4.1.2. Cross-cultural differences in the use of verbal communication

Using language is more than just choosing a particular group of words to convey an idea. Each language has its own unique style that distinguishes it from others. And when a communicator tries to use the verbal style from one culture in a different one, problems are likely to arise. The following contexts illustrate how verbal language varies across cultures:

- ***Direct-Indirect:*** One way in which verbal styles vary is in their *directness.* Sociologists and Anthropologist have identified two distinct cultural ways of using language: low-context and high-context cultures. Low-context cultures focus on explicit verbal codes. Low-context cultures use language primarily to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas as clearly and logically as possible. To low-context communicators, the meaning of a statement is in the words spoken. By contrast, high-context cultures do not rely in the same way on verbal communication. High context cultures value language as a way to maintain social harmony. Rather than upset others by speaking clearly, communicators in these cultures learn to discover meaning from the context in which a message is delivered: the nonverbal behaviors of the speaker, the history of the relationship, and the general social rules that govern interaction between people.
- ***Elaborate-Succinct:*** Another way in which language styles can vary across cultures is in terms of whether they are *elaborate* or *succinct.* Speakers of Arabic, for instance, commonly use language that is much more rich and expressive than most communicators who use English. Strong assertions and exaggerations that would sound ridiculous in English are a common feature of Arabic. This contrast in linguistic style can lead to misunderstandings between people from different backgrounds. Succinctness is most extreme in cultures where silence is valued. In many American Indian cultures, for example, the favored way to handle ambiguous social situations is to remain quiet. When you contrast this silent style to the talkativeness common in mainstream American cultures when people first meet, it's easy to imagine how the first encounter between an Apache or Navajo and a white person might feel uncomfortable to both people.
- ***Formal-Informal:*** Along with differences such as directness-indirectness and elaborate succinct styles, a third way languages differ from one culture to another involves *formality* and *informality.* The informal approach that characterizes relationships in countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia is quite different from the great concern for using

proper speech in many parts of Asia and Africa. Formality isn't so much a matter of using correct grammar as of defining social position. In Korea, for example, the language reflects the Confucian system of relational hierarchies. It has special vocabularies for different sexes, for different levels of social status, for different degrees of intimacy, and for different types of social occasions. For example, there are different degrees of formality for speaking with old friends, non-acquaintances whose background one knows, and complete strangers. One sign of being a learned person in Korea is the ability to use language that recognizes these relational distinctions. When you contrast these sorts of distinctions with the casual friendliness many North Americans use even when talking with complete strangers, it's easy to see how a Korean might view communicators in the United States as boorish and how an American might view Koreans as stiff and unfriendly.

2.4.2. Non-verbal communication

2.4.2.1. Non-verbal communication defined

- Nonverbal communication is defined as the attributes or actions of humans , other than the use of words themselves, which have socially shared meaning, are intentionally sent or interpreted as intentional, are consciously sent or consciously received, and have a potential for feedback from the receiver(Burgoon and Saine, 1978)
- If *non* means "not" and *verbal* means "words," then *nonverbal communication* appears to mean "communication without words (Novinger 2001)
- Non-verbal communication *(or NVC)* is carried on through presentational codes such as gestures, eye movements, or qualities of voice. These codes can give messages only about the here and now. My tone of voice can indicate my present attitude to my subject and listener: it cannot send a message about my feelings last week. Presentational codes, then, are limited to face-to-face communication or communication when the communicator is present (John 1990)

2.4.2.2. Characteristics of non-verbal communication

Our brief definition only hints at the richness of nonverbal messages. You can begin to understand their prevalence by trying a simple experiment. Spend an hour or so around a group of people who are speaking a language you don't understand. Your goal is to see how much information you can learn about the people you're observing from means other than the verbal messages they transmit. This experiment will reveal several characteristics of nonverbal communication:

- ***Non-verbal communication exists:*** Your observations in the experiment show clearly that even without understanding speech it is possible to get an idea about how others are feeling. You probably noticed that some people were in a hurry, whereas others seemed happy, confused, withdrawn, or deep in thought. The point is that without any formal experience you were able to recognize and to some degree interpret messages that other people sent nonverbally;
- **Nonverbal behavior has communicative value*:*** The pervasiveness of nonverbal communication brings us to its second characteristic: It's virtually impossible to not communicate nonverbally. Suppose you were instructed to avoid communicating any messages at all. What would you do? Close your eyes? Withdraw into a ball? Leave the room? In whatever cases, the meaning of some nonverbal behavior can be ambiguous, but it always has communicative value.

  Of course, we don't always intend to send nonverbal messages. Unintentional nonverbal behaviors differ from intentional ones. For example, we often stammer, blush, frown, and sweat without meaning to do so. Some theorists argue that unintentional behavior may provide information, but it shouldn't count as communication. Others draw the boundaries of nonverbal communication more broadly, suggesting that even unconscious and unintentional behavior conveys messages and thus is worth studying as communication. We take the broad view here because, whether or not our nonverbal behavior is intentional, others recognize it and take it into account when responding to us;

- ***Nonverbal communication is primarily relational:*** Some nonverbal messages serve utilitarian functions. For example, a police officer directs the flow of traffic, and a team of street surveyors uses hand motions to coordinate its work. But nonverbal communication also serves a far more common (and more interesting) series of social functions.

One important social function of nonverbal communication involves identity management. Nonverbal communication plays an important role in this process of identity management— in many cases more important than verbal communication. Along with identity management, nonverbal communication allows us to define the kind of relationships we want to have with others. You can appreciate this fact by thinking about the wide range of ways you could behave when greeting another person. You could wave, shake hands, nod, smile, clap the other person on the back, give a hug, or avoid all contact. Each one of these decisions would send a message about the nature of your relationship with the other person.

Nonverbal communication performs a third valuable social function: conveying emotions that we may be unwilling or unable to express—or ones we may not even be aware of. In fact, nonverbal communication is much better suited to expressing attitudes and feelings than ideas;

2.4.2.5. Nonverbal communication and culture

Cultures have different nonverbal languages as well as verbal ones. What is more, the meaning of some gestures varies from one culture to another. The "okay" gesture made by joining thumb and forefinger to form a circle is a cheery affirmation to most Americans, but it has less positive meanings in other parts of the world. In France and Belgium it means "You're worth zero."In Greece and Turkey it is a vulgar sexual invitation, usually meant as an insult. Given this sort of cross-cultural ambiguity, it's easy to imagine how an innocent tourist might wind up in serious trouble.

Less obvious cross-cultural differences can damage relationships without the parties ever recognizing exactly what has gone wrong. For example, whereas Americans are comfortable conducting business at a distance of roughly four feet, people from the Middle East stand much closer. It is easy to visualize the awkward advance and retreat pattern that might occur when two diplomats or business people from these cultures meet. The Middle Easterner would probably keep moving forward to close the gap that feels so wide, whereas the American would continually move back away. Both would feel uncomfortable, probably without knowing why.

Like distance, patterns of eye contact vary around the world. A direct gaze is considered appropriate for speakers in Latin America, the Arab world, and southern Europe. On the other

hand, Asians, Indians, Pakistanis, and northern Europeans gaze at a listener peripherally or not at all. In either case, deviations from the norm are likely to make a listener uncomfortable and hence, distort communication.

Despite differences like these, many nonverbal behaviors have the same meanings around the world. Smiles and laughter are a universal signal of positive emotions, for example, whereas the same sour expressions convey displeasure in every culture. Charles Darwin (1859) believed that expressions like these are the result of evolution, functioning as survival mechanisms that allowed early humans to convey emotional states before the development of language.

Although nonverbal expressions like these may be universal, the way they are used varies widely around the world. In some cultures display rules discourage the overt demonstration of feelings like happiness or anger. In other cultures the same feelings are perfectly appropriate. Thus, Japanese might appear much more controlled and placid than an Arab when in fact their feelings might be identical.

2.6. Self-Test Questions

1. Discuss the different rules by which language is governed?

2. Discuss how cross-cultural differences in verbal communication affect communication that takes place between individuals who came from different cultures.

3. Discuss the ways by which nonverbal communication differs from verbal communication

4. Discuss the ways in which nonverbal communication works in conjunction with verbal communication

5. Discuss the four types of personal space as a form of nonverbal communication

6. Discuss how cross-cultural variation in the meaning of a given nonverbal code affects communication that takes place between individuals who came from different cultures.

Section three: perception, the self, and communication

In this course, the reasons why we must discuss perception, the self, and communication are obvious:

- Two or more people often perceive the world in radically different ways, which presents major challenges for successful communication;
- The beliefs each of us holds about ourselves—our self-concept—have a powerful effect on our own communication behavior;
- The messages we send can shape others' self-concepts and thus influence their communication;
- The image we present to the world varies from one situation to another.

These simple truths play a role in virtually all the important messages we send and receive. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the significance of these truths by describing the nature of perception and showing how it influences the way we view ourselves and how we relate to others.

3.1. Defining perception

Like most concepts within the social science disciplines, perception has been defined in a variety of ways since its first usage. Below are the common definitions.

- From the lay man's perspective, social perception is defined as an act of being aware of "one's environment through physical sensation, which denotes an individual's ability to understand" (Chambers Dictionary).
- Social perception is defined as the process by which people translate sensory impressions into a coherent and unified view of the world around them. Though necessarily based on incomplete and unverified (or unreliable) information, perception is equated with reality for most practical purposes and guides human behavior in general (John 1990)

According to Nelson and Quick (1997: 83-84) "social perception is the process of interpreting information about another person." What this definition has clearly highlighted for your attention is that the opinions you form about another person depends on the amount of information available to you and the extent to which you are able to correctly interpret the information you have acquired. In other words, you may be in possession of the same set of information that other people have on a particular situation,

- person or group but still arrive at different conclusions due to individual differences in the capacity to interpret the information that you all have.
- Social perception refers to constructing an understanding of the social world from the data we get through our senses (Michener, DeLamater and Myers, 2004: 106). Thus, perception "refers to the process by which we form impressions of other people's traits and personalities."

3.2. Perception and communication

Our communication with others is highly dependent upon our perceptual interpretation. The perceptions that we make of others and that others make of us affect how we communicate and act. The point will be elaborated more if we consider the following examples:

- We develop our perception of school based on things that parents, peers, and the media tell us about school. This perception in turn affects our experiences in school including how we interact with principals, Teachers, and classmates.
- Our perception of other people is influenced by different factors such as their age, sex, race, ethnic identity, occupation, and where they are from. We often form different perception of people on the basis of these variables and communicate with them in different

ways. Think about how your communication with someone might differ if he or she were introduced to you as: (1) a farmer versus a doctor (2) an American versus an Indian (3) someone from a rural area versus someone from an urban area.

- If you are doing a group project for class and you perceive a group member to be shy based on your understanding of how shy people communicate, you may avoid giving him presentation responsibilities in your group project because you do not think shy people make good public speech.
- Imagine that Tesfaye and Hiwot are dating. One day, Tesfaye gets frustrated and raises his voice to Hiwot. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow up to his personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change. Conversely, Hiwot may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Tesfaye's control, since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Hiwot may think, "Wow, this person is really loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Tesfaye has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed."
- Perceptual biases occur because we all perceive differently. These biases can affect how we communicate with others, how we perceive others' communication, and how we interpret and evaluate others' behavior. For example, suppose an employee is tagged for low productivity. A supervisor may perceive the employee's low productivity to be a result of a personal defect or a negative personality characteristic. This perception may influence the supervisor to deny the employee a salary increase or consider terminating her or his employment. Conversely, the supervisor may perceive that something in the employee's work situation, such as malfunctioning equipment or unreliable team members, may be the cause of the productivity problem. This perception can lead the supervisor to improve the working environment for the employee rather than taking measures that result in serious consequences.
- The self-serving bias is a perceptual error through which we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control. The professor-student relationship offers a good case example of self-

serving bias. It isn't unusual that students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an exam attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. Students may further attribute their poor grade to their busy schedule or other external, situational factors rather than their lack of motivation, interest, or preparation (internal attributions). Professors, on the other hand, tend to attribute a poor grade to the student's laziness, attitude, or intelligence... On the other hand, when students gets a good grade on an exam, they will likely attribute that cause to their intelligence or hard work rather than an easy assignment or an "easy grading" professor. These psychological processes have implications for our communication because when we attribute causality to another person's personality, we tend to have a stronger emotional reaction and tend to assume that this personality characteristic is stable, which may lead us to avoid communication with the person or to react negatively.

3.3. Perception and culture

Culture has a significant impact on the way individuals think about and perceive the world. It provides a perceptual filter that influences the way people interpret events. Members of cultural groups learn and share similar perceptions based on their shared experiences and what their culture teaches them.

Marshal R. Singer(1982), an intercultural communication researcher, maintains that perception is conditioned by culture. He says that people's perceptions are largely learned; the greater the experiential differences among people, the greater the disparity in their perception. Conversely, the more similar their backgrounds, the more similarly they perceive the world.

Research has demonstrated cross-cultural differences in perception and interpretation of identical phenomena and events. The way members of a given culture perceive a given phenomena differs from the way members of other culture perceive the same phenomena. This cross-cultural variation is often taken as indicator of the power of culture to influence perception. This issue can be elaborated by considering the following points:

1. How we perceive basic sensory information is influenced by our culture, as is illustrated in the following list:

- Blinking while another person talks may be hardly noticeable to North Americans, but the same behavior is considered impolite in Taiwan. A "V" sign made with two fingers means "victory" in most of the Western world—as long as the palm is facing out. But in some European countries the same sign with the palm facing in roughly means "shove it." The beckoning finger motion that is familiar to Americans is an insulting gesture in most Middle and Far Eastern countries.
- Some cultures perceive certain simple gestures as positive whereas others view them as negative. For example, a thumbs-up signals that is familiar to American and European cultures is considered an offensive gesture in Islamic and Asian cultures (Knapp & Hall, 2009)
- In some cultures it would be very offensive for a man to touch—even tap on the shoulder—a woman who isn't a relative. However, touching a woman is a normal and socially accepted behaviour in many other cultures.
- While US Americans spend considerable effort to mask natural body odor, which we typically find unpleasant, with soaps, sprays, and lotions, some other cultures would not find the natural body odor unpleasant and they may find a US American's "clean" (soapy, perfumed, deodorized) smell unpleasant.

2. Aside from differences in reactions to basic information we take in through our senses, there is also cultural variation in how we perceive more complicated constructs such as communication and social interaction, as is illustrated in the following list:

- Perception about the very value of talk differs from one culture to another. North American culture views talk as desirable and use it to achieve social purposes as well as to perform tasks. Silence in conversational situations has a negative value in this culture. It is likely to be interpreted as lack of interest, unwillingness to communicate, hostility, anxiety, shyness, or a sign of interpersonal incompatibility. Westerners are uncomfortable with silence, which they find embarrassing and awkward. Furthermore, the *kind* of talk that Westerners admire is characterized by straightforwardness and honesty. Being indirect or vague—"beating around the bush," it might be labeled—has a negative connotation.

  On the other hand, most Asian cultures discourage the expression of thoughts and feelings. Silence is valued, as Taoist sayings indicate: "In much talk there is great weariness," or

"One who speaks does not know; one who knows does not speak." Unlike Westerners, who are uncomfortable with silence, Japanese and Chinese believe that remaining quiet is the proper state when there is nothing to be said. To Easterners, a talkative person is often considered a show-off or insincere. And when an Asian does speak up on social matters, the message is likely to be phrased indirectly to "save face" for the recipient.

It is easy to see how these different views of speech and silence can lead to communication problems when people from different cultures meet. Both the talkative Westerner and the silent Easterner are behaving in ways they believe are proper, yet each view the other with disapproval and mistrust. Only when they recognize the different standards of behavior can they adapt to one another, or at least understand and respect their differences.

- Research has also demonstrated cultural differences in causal attribution, and evidence from this area of research supports the idea that compared to Westerners, East Asians tend to be more aware of how individuals and events are interrelated (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1998). A variety of evidence suggests that East Asians tend to make relatively broad, complex causal attributions, whereas Westerners make narrower attributions. For instance, many studies have demonstrated that whereas Westerners have a strong tendency to explain behaviors in terms of an actor's personal characteristics—the so-called fundamental attribution error (e.g., Ross, 1977)—East Asians are more inclined to explain behaviors in terms of situational factors influencing the actor (Lee, Hallahan, & Herzog, 1996; Morris & Peng, 1994). In one study demonstrating this difference, Morris and Peng (1994) examined newspaper articles about similar types of mass murders in the United States and China and showed that American journalists tended to focus on the negative personal characteristics of the murderers, whereas Chinese journalists focused much more on the situational and contextual influences that might have influenced the murderers.
- People's perception of animals differs from culture to culture. For example, Dogs are pets in some cultures (such as USA) and food in others (such as china). In the Arab world, dogs are acceptable as watchdogs and as hunting dogs but are not kept in the home as pets because they are seen as unclean and a low form of life. To call someone a dog is an insult among Arabs.

- People in most cultures have strong ideas about which foods are acceptable for human consumption and which are not. People in some countries think the custom in the United States of eating corn on the cob is disgusting because that food is fit only for pigs. Some Ukrainians like to eat *salo*, raw pig fat with black bread and vodka, which might cause nausea in some, as would knowing that horse meat from California is served in restaurants in Belgium, France, and Japan.

3. Members of the same culture may perceive an identical phenomenon differently because of the influence of the co-cultures(s) to which they belong. Perceptual differences are just as important right at home when members of different co-cultures interact. Consider the following examples:

3.4. Perceiving and presenting the self

Just as our perception of others affects how we communicate, so does our perception of ourselves. But what influences our self-perception? How much of our self is a product of our own making and how much of it is constructed based on how others react to us? How do we present ourselves to others in ways that maintain our sense of self or challenge how others see us? We will begin to answer these questions in this section as we explore self-concept, self-esteem, and self-presentation.

3.4.1. Conceptualizing self concept and self esteem

Self-concept

The *self-concept* is a set of relatively stable perceptions that each of us holds about ourselves.
The self-concept includes our conception about what is unique about us and what makes us both similar to, and different from, others. To put it differently, the self-concept is rather like a mental mirror that reflects how we view ourselves: not only physical features, but also emotional states, talents, likes and dislikes, values, and roles.

Self-concept refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks he or she is. If someone said, “Tell me who you are,” your answers would be clues as to how you see yourself, your self-concept. Each

person has an overall self-concept that might be encapsulated in a short list of overarching characteristics that he or she finds important. But each person's self-concept is also influenced by context, meaning we think differently about ourselves depending on the situation we are in. In some situations, personal characteristics, such as our abilities, personality, and other distinguishing features, will best describe who we are. You might consider yourself laid back, traditional, funny, open minded, or driven, or you might label yourself a leader or a thrill seeker. In other situations, our self-concept may be tied to group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a member of the Orthodox Church, a Southerner, or a member of the track team.

Self-Esteem

An important element of the self-concept is *self-esteem:* our evaluations of self-worth. Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept. While self-concept is a broad description of the self, self-esteem is more specific evaluation of the self. If someone prompted you to "Tell him who you are," and then asked you to evaluate (label as good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable) each of the things you listed about yourself, he would get clues about your self-esteem. Like self-concept, self-esteem has general and specific elements. Generally, some people are more likely to evaluate themselves positively while others are more likely to evaluate themselves negatively. More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our life span and across contexts.

Self-esteem has a powerful effect on the way we communicate. People with high self-esteem are more willing to communicate than people with low self-esteem. They are more likely to think highly of others and expect to be accepted by others. They aren't afraid of others' reactions and perform well when others are watching them. They work harder for people who demand high standards of performance, and they are comfortable with others whom they view as superior in some way. When confronted with critical comments, they are comfortable defending themselves. By contrast, people with low self-esteem are likely to be critical of others and expect rejection from them. They are also critical of their own performances. They are sensitive to possible disapproval of others and perform poorly when being watched. They work harder for undemanding, less critical people. They feel threatened by people they view as superior in some way and have difficulty defending themselves against others' negative comments.

3.4.2. Communication and the self concept

Our self-concept is formed through our interactions with others and their reactions to us. Our identity comes almost exclusively from communication with others. We develop an image of ourselves from the way we think others view us.

The notion of the *"looking-glass self"* was introduced in 1902 by Charles H. Cooley, who suggested that we put ourselves in the position of other people and then, in our mind's eye, view ourselves as we imagine they see us. The concept of the looking glass self explains that we see ourselves reflected in other people's reactions to us and then form our self-concept based on how we believe other people see us. This reflective process of building our self-concept is based on what other people have actually said, such as "You're a good listener," and other people's actions, such as coming to you for advice. These thoughts evoke emotional responses that feed into our self-concept. For example, you may think, "I'm glad that people can count on me to listen to their problems."

The fact that our identity comes from our communication with others is also apparent in the view of Arthur Combs and Donald Snygg who put it: *The self is essentially a social product arising out of experience with people. . . . We learn the most significant and fundamental facts about ourselves from . . . "reflected appraisals," inferences about ourselves made as a consequence of the ways we perceive others behaving toward us.*

George Herbert Mead, a symbolic interactionist, is another proponent of the power of communication in self development. It is long since George Herbert Mead recognizes the development of the self as the process of human communication. For him, the self is far more than an "internalization of components of social structure and culture." It is more centrally a social process, a process of self-interaction in which the human actor indicates to himself matters that confront him in the situation in which he acts, and organizes his action through his interpretation of such matters. The actor engages in this social interaction with himself, according to Mead, by taking the roles of others, addressing himself through these roles, and responding to these

approaches. This conception of self interaction in which the actor is pointing out things to himself lies at the basis of Mead's scheme of social psychology.

George Herbert Mead specifically focused on the role of *"significant others"*—people whose opinions we especially value- in shaping our self concept. A teacher from long ago, a special friend or relative, or perhaps a barely known acquaintance whom you respected can all leave an imprint on how you view yourself. To see the importance of significant others, ask yourself how you arrived at your opinion of you as a student, as a person attractive to the opposite sex, as a competent worker, and so on and you will see that these self-evaluations were probably influenced by the way others regarded you.

In general, the development of the self through human communication can be summarized into the three stages provided by George H. Mead. He outlined the three stages by which the self develops through communication in his writings on the play, the game, and the generalized other. The stages are the following:

- The first stage of self-development, the "pre-play" stage at about age two, is marked by meaningless, imitative acts. In Meadian vocabulary, the word *meaning* appears regularly and has a unique connotation. For Mead, meaning is the object of thought, arises in experience through the individual stimulating himself to take the attitude of the other in his reaction toward the object. In other words, when individuals share symbolic interpretations, the act is meaningful to them. They are "speaking the same language" or "looking through the same eyeglasses." Meaning is, then, the wedding of different attitudes and the use of significant symbols that have the same import for all concerned. The reason Mead labels acts in the preplay state "meaningless" is that the child at that age lacks the ability to take the attitude of the other. As Mead outlines it, this ability gradually evolves as the child develops a self;
- The second stage, ***the "play" stage,*** which appears later in childhood, is the stage when the child can put himself in the position of another person but cannot relate the roles of the other players. At the play stage, the player has only one alternative role in mind at a time. Nevertheless, this is the time, according to Mead, when the child begins to form a self by taking the roles of other people; and

- ***At the game stage,*** several players act together. This happens in complex, organized games in which the team member must anticipate all the attitudes and roles of all other players. In a wider context, this generalized others include the organized attitudes of the whole community. Mead explains, "The mature self arises when a generalized other is internalized so that the community exercise control over the conduct of its individuals…The structure, then, on which the self is built is this response which is common to all, for one has to be a member of a community to be a self."

3.4.3. Social comparison and the self concept

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. Social comparison theory states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference. In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn't appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

We also engage in social comparison based on similarity and difference. Since self-concept is context specific, similarity may be desirable in some situations and difference more desirable in others. Factors like age and personality may influence whether or not we want to fit in or stand out. Although we compare ourselves to others throughout our lives, adolescent and teen years usually bring new pressure to be similar to or different from particular reference groups. Think of all the cliques in high school and how people voluntarily and involuntarily broke off into groups based on popularity, interest, culture, or grade level. Some kids in your high school probably

wanted to fit in with and be similar to other people in the marching band but be different from the football players. Conversely, athletes were probably more apt to compare themselves, in terms of similar athletic ability, to other athletes rather than kids in show choir. But social comparison can be complicated by perceptual influences. We organize information based on similarity and difference, but these patterns don't always hold true. Even though students involved in athletics and students involved in arts may seem very different, a dancer or singer may also be very athletic, perhaps even more so than a member of the football team. As with other aspects of perception, there are positive and negative consequences of social comparison.

3.4.4. Influences on Self-Perception

We have already learned that other people influence our self-concept and self-esteem. While interactions we have with individuals and groups are definitely important to consider, we must also note the influence that larger, more systemic forces have on our self-perception. Social and family influences, culture, and the media all play a role in shaping who we think we are and how we feel about ourselves. Although these are powerful socializing forces, there are ways to maintain some control over our self-perception.

1. Social and Family Influences

Various forces help socialize us into our respective social and cultural groups and play a powerful role in presenting us with options about who we can be. While we may like to think that our self-perception starts with a blank canvas, our perceptions are limited by our experiences and various social and cultural contexts.

Parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self. In the past few years, however, there has been a public discussion and debate about how much positive reinforcement people should give to others, especially children. The following questions have been raised: Do we have current and upcoming generations that have been over praised? Is the praise given warranted? What are the positive and negative effects of praise? What is the end goal of the praise? Let's briefly look at this discussion and its connection to self-perception.

Whether praise is warranted or not is very subjective and specific to each person and context, but in general there have been questions raised about the potential negative effects of too much praise. Motivation is the underlying force that drives us to do things. Sometimes we are intrinsically motivated, meaning we want to do something for the love of doing it or the resulting internal satisfaction. Other times we are extrinsically motivated, meaning we do something to receive a reward or avoid punishment. If you put effort into completing a short documentary for a class because you love filmmaking and editing, you have been largely motivated by intrinsic forces. If you complete the documentary because you want an "A" and know that if you fail your parents will not give you money for your spring break trip, then you are motivated by extrinsic factors. Both can, of course, effectively motivate us. Praise is a form of extrinsic reward, and if there is an actual reward associated with the praise, like money or special recognition, some people speculate that intrinsic motivation will suffer. But what's so good about intrinsic motivation? Intrinsic motivation is more substantial and long-lasting than extrinsic motivation and can lead to the development of a work ethic and sense of pride in one's abilities. Intrinsic motivation can move people to accomplish great things over long periods of time and be happy despite the effort and sacrifices made. Extrinsic motivation dies when the reward stops. Additionally, too much praise can lead people to have a misguided sense of their abilities. College professors who are reluctant to fail students who produce failing work may be setting those students up to be shocked when their supervisor critiques their abilities or output once they get into a professional context.

2. Culture

The power of culture in shaping self concept is far more basic and powerful than most people realize. Although we seldom recognize the fact, our whole notion of the self is shaped by the culture in which we have been reared.

How people perceive themselves varies across cultures. Most Western cultures are highly individualistic, whereas other cultures—most Asian ones, for example— are traditionally much more collective. When asked to identify themselves, Americans, Canadians, Australians, and Europeans would probably respond by giving their first name, surname, street, town, and country. Many Asians do it the other way around. If you ask Hindus for their identity, they will give you their caste and village as well as their name. The Sanskrit formula for identifying one's self begins with lineage and goes on to family and house and ends with one's personal name.

These conventions for naming aren't just cultural curiosities: They reflect a very different way of viewing one's self. In collective cultures a person gains identity by belonging to a group. This means that the degree of interdependence among members of the society and its subgroups is much higher. Feelings of pride and self-worth are likely to be shaped not only by what the individual does, but also by the behavior of other members of the community. This linkage to others explains the traditional Asian denial of self-importance—a strong contrast to the self promotion that is common in individualistic Western cultures. In Chinese written language, for example, the pronoun "I" looks very similar to the word for "selfish.

Many cultures exhibit a phenomenon known as the self-enhancement bias, meaning that we tend to emphasize our desirable qualities relative to other people. But the degree to which people engage in self-enhancement varies. A review of many studies in this area found that people in Western countries such as the United States were significantly more likely to self-enhance than people in countries such as Japan. Many scholars explain this variation using a common measure of cultural variation that claims people in individualistic cultures are more likely to engage in competition and openly praise accomplishments than people in collectivistic cultures. The difference in self-enhancement has also been tied to economics, with scholars arguing that people in countries with greater income inequality are more likely to view themselves as superior to others or want to be perceived as superior to others (even if they don't have economic wealth) in order to conform to the country's values and norms. This holds true because countries with high levels of economic inequality, like the United States, typically value competition and the right to boast about winning or succeeding, while countries with more economic equality, like Japan, have a cultural norm of modesty.

This sort of cultural difference isn't just an anthropological and sociological curiosity. It shows up in the level of comfort or anxiety that people feel when communicating. In societies where the need to conform is great, there is a higher degree of communication apprehension. For example, as a group, residents of China, Korea, and Japan exhibit significantly more anxiety about speaking out than do members of individualistic cultures such as the United States and Australia. It's important to realize that different levels of communication apprehension don't mean that shyness is a "problem" in some cultures. In fact, just the opposite is true: In these cultures, reticence is valued. When the goal is to *avoid* being the nail that sticks out, it's logical to feel nervous when

you make yourself appear different by calling attention to yourself. A self-concept that includes "assertive" might make a Westerner feel proud, but in much of Asia it would more likely be cause for shame.

3. Media

The representations we see in the media affect our self-perception. The vast majority of media images include idealized representations of attractiveness. Despite the fact that the images of people we see in glossy magazines and on movie screens are not typically what we see when we look at the people around us in a classroom, at work, or at the grocery store, many of us continue to hold ourselves to an unrealistic standard of beauty and attractiveness. Movies, magazines, and television shows are filled with beautiful people, and less attractive actors, when they are present in the media, are typically portrayed as the butt of jokes, villains, or only as background extras.

Aside from overall attractiveness, the media also offers narrow representations of acceptable body weight. Researchers have found that only 12 percent of prime-time characters are overweight, which is dramatically less than the national statistics for obesity among the actual US population. Further, an analysis of how weight is discussed on prime-time sitcoms found that heavier female characters were often the targets of negative comments and jokes that audience members responded to with laughter. Conversely, positive comments about women's bodies were related to their thinness. In short, the heavier the character, the more negative the comments, and the thinner the character, the more positive the comments. The same researchers analyzed sitcoms for content regarding male characters' weight and found that although comments regarding their weight were made, they were fewer in number and not as negative, ultimately supporting the notion that overweight male characters are more accepted in media than overweight female characters. Much more attention has been paid in recent years to the potential negative effects of such narrow media representations. The following "Getting Critical" box explores the role of media in the construction of body image.

In terms of self-concept, media representations offer us guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable and valued or not valued in our society. Mediated messages, in general, reinforce cultural stereotypes related to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and class. People from historically marginalized groups must look much harder than those in the dominant groups to find

positive representations of their identities in media. As a critical thinker, it is important to question media messages and to examine who is included and who is excluded.

Advertising in particular encourages people to engage in social comparison, regularly communicating to us that we are inferior because we lack a certain product or that we need to change some aspect of our life to keep up with and be similar to others. For example, for many years advertising targeted to women instilled in them a fear of having a dirty house, selling them products that promised to keep their house clean, make their family happy, and impress their friends and neighbors. Now messages tell us to fear becoming old or unattractive, selling products to keep our skin tight and clear, which will in turn make us happy and popular

3.4.5. Communication as Self presentations and impression management

So far we have described how communication shapes the way communicators view themselves and others. In the remainder of this chapter we turn the tables and focus on *"impression management"*—the communication strategies people use to influence how others view them. In the following pages you will see that many of our messages aim at creating desired impressions.

1. Self presentation

We attempt to influence other's perception of ourselves through self presentation. Self presentation can be defined as the way we portray ourselves to others. It is the process of strategically concealing or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions. We engage in this process daily and for different reasons. Although people occasionally intentionally deceive others in the process of self-presentation, in general we try to make a good impression while still remaining authentic.

There are two main types of self-presentation: pro-social and self-serving. Pro-social self-presentation entails behaviors that present a person as a role model and make a person more likable and attractive. For example, a supervisor may call on her employees to uphold high standards for business ethics, model that behavior in her own actions, and compliment others when they exemplify those standards. Self-serving self presentation entails behaviors that present a person as highly skilled, willing to challenge others, and someone not to be messed with. For example, a supervisor may publicly take credit for the accomplishments of others or publicly critique an

employee who failed to meet a particular standard. Pro-social strategies are aimed at benefiting others, while self-serving strategies benefit the self at the expense of others.

Most often, we strive to present a public image that matches up with our self-concept, but we can also use self-presentation strategies to enhance our self-concept. When we present ourselves in order to evoke a positive evaluative response, we are engaging in self-enhancement. In the pursuit of self-enhancement, a person might try to be as appealing as possible in a particular area or with a particular person to gain feedback that will enhance one's self-esteem. For example, a singer might train and practice for weeks before singing in front of a well-respected vocal coach but not invest as much effort in preparing to sing in front of friends. Although positive feedback from friends is beneficial, positive feedback from an experienced singer could enhance a person's self-concept. Self-enhancement can be productive and achieved competently, or it can be used inappropriately. Using self-enhancement behaviors just to gain the approval of others or out of self-centeredness may lead people to communicate in ways that are perceived as phony or overbearing and end up making an unfavorable impression.

Since self-presentation helps meet our instrumental, relational, and identity needs, we stand to lose quite a bit if we are caught intentionally misrepresenting ourselves. In May of 2012, Yahoo!'s CEO resigned after it became known that he stated on official documents that he had two college degrees when he actually only had one. In a similar incident, a woman who had long served as the dean of admissions for the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology was dismissed from her position after it was learned that she had only attended one year of college and had falsely indicated she had a bachelor's and master's degree. Such incidents clearly show that although people can get away with such false self-presentation for a while, the eventual consequences of being found out are dire. As communicators, we sometimes engage in more subtle forms of inauthentic self-presentation. For example, a person may state or imply that they know more about a subject or situation than they actually do in order to seem smart or "in the loop." During a speech, a speaker works on a polished and competent delivery to distract from a lack of substantive content. These cases of strategic self-presentation may not ever be found out, but communicators should still avoid them as they do not live up to the standards of ethical communication.

2. Impression management

I. What is impression management?

During self presentation we involve in "impression management"—the communication strategies we use to influence how others view us. In our impression management, we often seek to present an "idealized" version of ourselves in order to reach desired ends.

To understand why impression management exists, we have to differentiate between two quite distinct types of selves: the *perceived* self and the *presenting* self. The *perceived self* is a reflection of the self-concept. Your perceived self is the person you believe yourself to be in moments of honest self-examination. We can call the perceived self *"private"* because you are unlikely to reveal all of it to another person. In contrast to the perceived self, the *presenting self* is a public image—the way we want to appear to others. In most cases the presenting self we seek to create is a socially approved image: diligent student, loving partner, conscientious worker, loyal friend, and so on. Because there often exist a gap between the perceived self (the actual self) and presenting self (the socially accepted self), people involve in different techniques of impression management in order to create a socially approved image of their selves.

II. How do we manage impression?

In face-to-face interaction, communicators can manage impression in three ways: manner, appearance, and setting. *Manner* consists of a communicator's words and nonverbal actions. Physicians, for example, display a wide variety of manners as they conduct physical examinations. Some are friendly and conversational, whereas others adopt a brusque and impersonal approach. Still others are polite but businesslike. Much of a communicator's manner comes from what he or she says. A doctor who remembers details about your interests and hobbies is quite different from one who sticks to clinical questions. Along with the content of speech, nonverbal behaviors play a big role in creating impressions. A doctor who greets you with a friendly smile and a handshake comes across quite differently from one who gives nothing more than a curt nod.

Along with manner, a second dimension of impression management is *appearance*—the personal items people use to shape an image. Sometimes appearance is part of creating a professional image. A physician's white lab coat and a police officer's uniform both set the wearer apart as someone special. A tailored suit or a rumpled outfit creates very different impressions in the business world. Off the job, clothing is just as important. We choose clothing that sends a message about ourselves, sometimes trendy and sometimes traditional. Some people dress in ways that accent their sexuality,

whereas others hide it. Clothing can say "I'm an athlete,""I'm wealthy," or "I'm an environmentalist."Along with dress, other aspects of appearance play a strong role in impression management. Are you suntanned or pale? What is your hair style?

A third way to manage impressions is through the choice of *setting*—physical items we use to influence how others view us. Consider the artifacts that people use to decorate the space where they live. For example, the posters and other items a college student uses to decorate her dorm room function as a kind of "who I am" statement. In modern Western society the automobile is a major part of impression management. This explains why many people lust after cars that are far more expensive and powerful than they really need.

III. What are the Characteristics of impression management?

The following are the chief characteristics of impression management:

- In the process of identity management, everyone strives to construct multiple identities. In the course of even a single day communication, most people play a variety of roles: respectful student, joking friend, friendly neighbor, and helpful worker, to suggest just a few. We even play a variety of roles with the same person. Thus, the ability to construct multiple identities is one element of communication competence.
- Identity management is collaborative. As we perform like actors trying to create a front, our "audience" is made up of other actors who are trying to create their own characters. Identity related communication is a kind of process theater in which we collaborate with other actors to improvise scenes in which our characters mesh.
- Identity management can be conscious or unconscious. At this point you might object to the notion of strategic identity management, claiming that most of your communication is spontaneous and not a deliberate attempt to present yourself in a certain way. However, you might acknowledge that some of your communication involves a conscious attempt to manage impressions.
- People differ in their degree of identity management. Some people are much more aware of their impression management behavior than others. These high self-monitors have the ability to pay attention to their own behavior and others' reactions, adjusting their communication to create the desired impression. By contrast, low self-monitors express

what they are thinking and feeling without much attention to the impression their behavior creates.

IV. The work of Erving Goffman on self presentation and impression management

In his early and often-cited work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman(symbolic Interactionists) focuses on *dramaturgy: a view of social life* as a series of dramatic performances akin to those performed on the stage. He takes the dramatic situation of actors and actresses on stage and applies this theatrical representation to the everyday lives of ordinary women and men who are acting out their roles in the real world.

Goffman looks at the ways individuals in their everyday lives present themselves and their activities to others; in particular, he focuses on *impression management*, the ways in which the individual guides and controls the impressions other form of him or her through every day communication.

Goffman assumed that when individuals interact, they want to present a certain sense of self that will be accepted by others. However, even as they present that self, actors are aware that members of the audience can disturb their performance. For that reason actors are attuned to the need to control the audience, especially those elements of it that might be disruptive. The actors hope that the sense of self that they present to the audience will be strong enough for the audience to define the actors as the actors want them to. The actors also hope that this will cause the audience to act voluntarily as the actors want them to. Goffman characterized this central interest as "impression management." It involves techniques actors use to maintain certain impressions in the face of problems they are likely to encounter and methods they use to cope with these problems.

Following this theatrical analogy, Goffman spoke of a front stage and back stage. The *front* is that part of the performance that generally functions in rather fixed and general ways to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Within the front stage, Goffman further differentiated between the setting and the personal front. The *setting* refers to the physical scene that ordinarily must be there if the actors are to perform. Without it, the actors usually cannot perform. For example, a surgeon generally requires an operating room, a taxi driver a cab, and an ice skater ice. The *personal front* consists of those items of expressive equipment that the audience identifies with the performers and expects them to carry with them into the setting. A surgeon, for instance, is expected to dress in a medical gown, have certain instruments, and so on.

Goffman then subdivided the personal front into appearance and manner. *Appearance* includes those items that tell us the performer's social status (for instance, the surgeon's medical gown). *Manner* tells the audience what sort of role the performer expects to play in the situation (for example, the use of physical mannerisms, demeanor). A brusque manner and a meek manner indicate quite different kinds of performances. In general, we expect appearance and manner to be consistent.

Goffman argued that because people generally try to present an idealized picture of themselves in their front-stage performances, inevitably they feel that they must hide things in their performances. First, actors may want to conceal secret pleasures (for instance, drinking alcohol) engaged in prior to the performance or in past lives (for instance, as drug addicts) that are incompatible with their performance. Second, actors may want to conceal errors that have been made in the preparation of the performance as well as steps that have been taken to correct these errors. For example, a taxi driver may seek to hide the fact that he started in the wrong direction. Third, actors may find it necessary to show only end products and to conceal the process involved in producing them. For example, professors may spend several hours preparing a lecture, but they may want to act as if they have always known the material. Fourth, it may be necessary for actors to conceal from the audience that "dirty work" was involved in the making of the end products. Dirty work may include tasks that "were physically unclean, semi-legal, cruel, and degrading in other ways." Fifth, in giving a certain performance, actors may have to let other standards slide. Finally, actors probably find it necessary to hide any insults, humiliations, or deals made so that the performance could go on. Generally, actors have a vested interest in hiding all such facts from their audience.

Another aspect of dramaturgy in the front stage is that actors often try to convey the impression that they are closer to the audience than they actually are. For example, actors may try to foster the impression that the performance in which they are engaged at the moment is their only performance or at least their most important one. To do this, actors have to be sure that their audiences are segregated so that the falsity of the performance is not discovered. Even if it is discovered, Goffman argued, the audiences themselves may try to cope with the falsity so as not to shatter their idealized image of the actor. This reveals the interactional character of performances. A successful performance depends on the involvement of all the parties. Another example of this kind of impression management is an actor's attempt to convey the idea that there

is something unique about this performance as well as his or her relationship to the audience. The audience, too, wants to feel that it is the recipient of a unique performance.

Goffman also discussed a *back stage* where facts suppressed in the front or various kinds of informal actions may appear. A back stage is usually adjacent to the front stage, but it is also cut off from it. Performers can reliably expect no members of their front audience to appear in the back. Furthermore, they engage in various types of impression management to make sure of this. A performance is likely to become difficult when actors are unable to prevent the audience from entering the back stage.

Generally, Goffman perceived the self not as a possession of the actor but rather as the product of the dramatic interaction between actor and audience. The self "is a dramatic effect arising . . . from a scene that is presented" (Goffman, 1959:253).

3.6. Self-test questions

1. Discuss how our perception of basic sensory information is influenced by culture.

2. Discuss the impact of co-culture on perception by pointing out how members of different co-cultures may perceive identical phenomena differently

3. Discuss how our self- esteem affects the way we communicate with others

4. Discuss Charles H. Cooley's concept of the *looking glass self*

5. Discuss George Herbert Mead's idea on the impact of communication on self development

6. Discuss the factors which influence self perception