



Reading 2.1

The Self and Perception

DeVito, J. (2012). The self and perception. In *Human communication: The basic course* (12th ed., pp. 50–75). Boston, MA: Pearson.

3 The Self and Perception

In this chapter we'll explore these major topics:

- ▶ The Self in Human Communication
- ▶ Self-Disclosure
- ▶ Perception
- ▶ Impression Formation
- ▶ Impression Management



Marisol's brother Jose is going through a rough patch and she wants to be able to help him get through it. Marisol considers the topics covered in this chapter as she contemplates her communication choices. See how her choices play out in the video "My Brother's in Trouble" (www.mycommunicationlab.com).

The self is perhaps the most important element in any form of communication. This chapter focuses on the ways in which you and others perceive yourself.

In this chapter you'll learn about:

- ▶ self-concept, self-awareness, and self-esteem.
- ▶ the process of self-disclosure.
- ▶ the nature and workings of perception.
- ▶ the way impressions are formed and managed.

You'll learn to:

- ▶ communicate with a better understanding of who you are.
- ▶ regulate your self-disclosures and respond appropriately to the disclosures of others.
- ▶ increase your own accuracy in perceiving other people and their messages.
- ▶ manage the impressions you communicate to others.

In this chapter we look at the self and perception, particularly the processes that we use to make judgments of others and that they use to make judgments of us. First, let's look at the self.

THE SELF IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

Who you are and how you see yourself influence not only the way you communicate, but also how you respond to the communications of others. First we'll explore the self: the self-concept and how it develops; self-awareness and ways to increase it; self-esteem and ways to enhance it; and self-disclosure, or communication that reveals who you are.

Self-Concept

Your **self-concept** is your image of who you are. It's how you perceive yourself: your feelings and thoughts about your strengths and weaknesses, your abilities and limitations. Self-concept develops from the images that others have of you, comparisons between yourself and others, your cultural experiences, and your evaluation of your own thoughts and behaviors (Figure 3.1). Let's explore each of these components of the self-concept.

Others' Images of You

If you want to see how your hair looks, you probably look in a mirror. But what would you do if you wanted to see how friendly or how assertive you are? According to the concept of the **looking-glass self** (Cooley, 1922), you'd look at the image of yourself that others reveal to you through the way they communicate with you. Of course, you would not look to

just anyone. Rather, you would look to those who are most significant in your life—to your *significant others*, such as your friends, family members, and romantic partners. If these significant others think highly of you, you will see a positive self-image reflected in their behaviors; if they think little of you, you will see a more negative image.

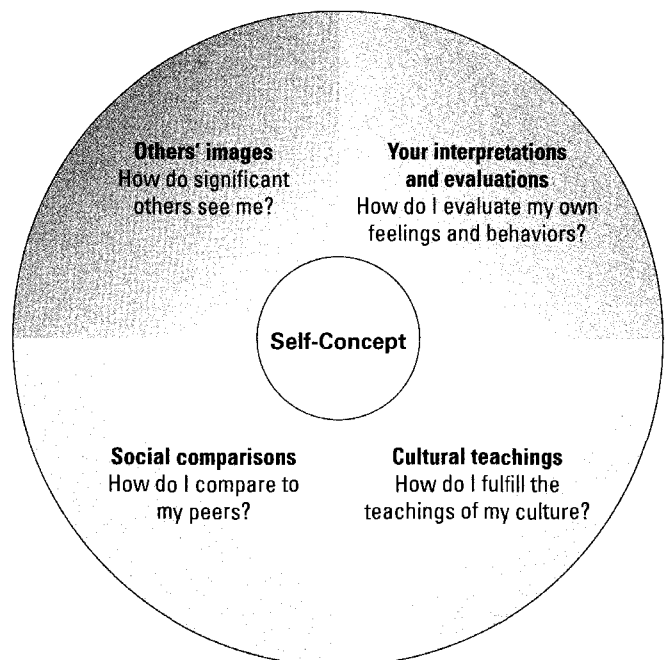


FIGURE 3.1 The Sources of Self-Concept

This diagram depicts the four sources of self-concept, the four contributors to how you see yourself. As you read about self-concept, consider the influence of each factor throughout your life. Which factor influenced you most as a preteen? Which influences you most now? Which will influence you most 25 or 30 years from now?

Comparisons with Others

Another way you develop self-concept is by comparing yourself with others, most often with your peers (Festinger, 1954). For example, after an exam, you probably want to know how you performed relative to the other students in your class. This gives you a clearer idea of how effectively you performed. If you play on a baseball team, it's important to know your batting average in comparison with the batting average of others on the team. You gain a different perspective when you see yourself in comparison to your peers.

Cultural Teachings

Your culture instills in you a variety of beliefs, values, and attitudes about such things as success (how you define it and how you should achieve it); the relevance of religion, race, or nationality; and the ethical principles you should follow in business and in your personal life. These teachings provide benchmarks against which you can measure yourself. Your ability to achieve what your culture defines as success, for example, contributes to a positive self-concept; in the same way, your failure to achieve what your culture encourages contributes to a negative self-concept.

Self-Interpretations and Self-Evaluations

Your **self-interpretations** (your reconstruction of the incident and your understanding of it) and **self-evaluations** (the value—good or bad—that you place on the behavior also contribute to your self-concept. For example, let's say you believe that lying is wrong. If you then lie and you view it as a lie (rather than as, say, a polite way of avoiding an issue), you will probably evaluate this behavior in terms of your internalized beliefs about lying (*lying is wrong*) and you'll react negatively to your own behavior. You may, for example, experience guilt about violating your own beliefs. On the other hand, let's say that you pull someone out of a burning building at great personal risk. You will probably evaluate this behavior positively; you'll feel good about this behavior and, as a result, about yourself.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness—your knowledge of who you are; of your traits, your strengths and limitations, your emotions and behaviors, your individuality—is basic to all communication. You can achieve self-awareness by examining the several aspects of yourself as they might appear to others as well as to yourself. One tool that is commonly used for this examination is called the **Johari window**, a metaphoric division of the self into four areas (Figure 3.2).

	Known to self	Not known to self
Known to others	Open self Information about yourself that you and others know	Blind self Information about yourself that you don't know but that others do know
Not known to others	Hidden self Information about yourself that you know but others don't know	Unknown self Information about yourself that neither you nor others know

FIGURE 3.2 The Johari Window

This diagram is a commonly used tool for examining what we know and don't know about ourselves. It can also help explain the nature of self-disclosure, covered later in this chapter. The window gets its name from its originators, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham.

Source: Adapted from Joseph Luft, *Group Process: An Introduction to Group Dynamics* (3rd ed.). Copyright © 1984. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies. Reprinted by permission.

Your Four Selves

Divided into four areas or “panes,” the Johari window shows different aspects or versions of the self. The four aspects are the open self, blind self, hidden self, and unknown self. These areas are not separate from one another, but interdependent. As one dominates, the others recede to a greater or lesser degree; or, to stay with our metaphor, as one windowpane becomes larger, one or another becomes smaller.

- **Open self.** This self represents all the information, behaviors, attitudes, and feelings about yourself that you know and that others also know. Such knowledge could include everything from your name, skin color, sex, and age to your religion and political beliefs. The size of the **open self** varies according to your personality and the people to whom you're relating. You may be more open with some people than you are with others. So, you may have a large open self about your romantic life with your friends (you tell them everything), but a very small open self about the same issues with, say, your parents.
- **Blind self.** This self represents knowledge about you that others have but you don't. **Blind self** might include your habit of finishing other people's sentences or your way of rubbing your nose when you become anxious. A large blind self indicates low self-awareness and interferes with accurate

communication. So it's important to reduce your blind self and learn what others know about you. You can do this by following the suggestions offered below, under "Growing in Self-Awareness."

- **Unknown self.** The **unknown self** represents those parts of yourself that neither you nor others know. This is information that is buried in your subconscious. You may, for example, learn of your obsession with money, your fear of criticism, or the kind of lover you are through hypnosis, dreams, psychological tests, or psychotherapy.
- **Hidden self.** This self represents all the knowledge you have of yourself but keep secret from others. The **hidden self** windowpane includes all your successfully kept secrets; for example, your fantasies, embarrassing experiences, and any attitudes or beliefs of which you may be ashamed. You probably keep secrets from some people and not from others; for example, you might not tell your parents you're dating someone of another race or religion, but you might tell a close friend.

Each person's Johari window will be different, and each individual's window will vary from one time to another and from one communication situation to another. By way of example, Figure 3.3 illustrates two possible configurations.

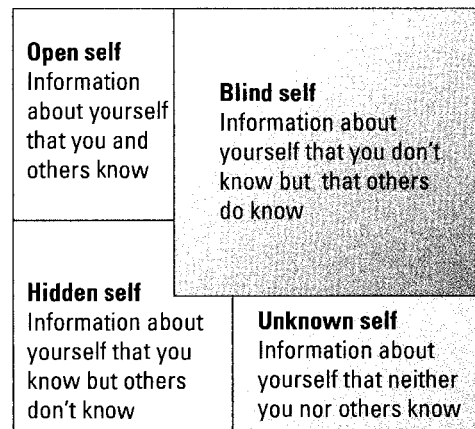
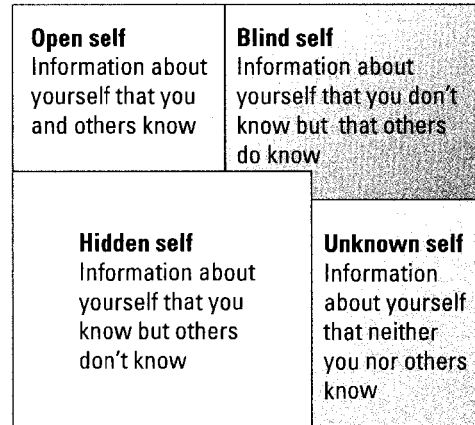


FIGURE 3.3 Johari Windows of Different Structures

Notice that as one self grows, one or more of the other selves shrink. Assume that these models depict the self-awareness and self-disclosure of two different people. How would you describe the type of communication (especially self-disclosure) that might characterize each of these two people?

Source: Adapted from Joseph Luft, *Group Process: An Introduction to Group Dynamics* (3rd ed.). Copyright © 1984. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies. Reprinted by permission.

Growing in Self-Awareness

Because self-awareness is so important in communication, try to increase awareness of your own needs, desires, habits, beliefs, and attitudes. You can do this in various ways.

- **Listen to others.** Conveniently, others are constantly giving you the very feedback you need to increase self-awareness. In every interaction people comment on you in some way—on what you do, what you say, how you look. Sometimes these comments are explicit: "Loosen up" or "Don't take things so hard." Often they're "hidden" in the way others look at you—in the expressionless face that indicates disagreement or disappointment or the broad smile that says, "I think you're wonderful."
- **Increase your open self.** Revealing yourself to others will help increase your self-awareness. As you talk about yourself, you may see connections that you had previously missed. With feedback from others, you may gain still more insight. By increasing your open self, you also increase the chances that others will reveal what they know about you.
- **Seek information about yourself.** Encourage people to reveal what they know about you. Use situations that arise every day to gain self-information: "Do you think I came down too hard

on the kids today?" "Do you think I was assertive enough when asking for the raise?" But seek this self-awareness in moderation. If you do it too often, your friends will soon look for someone else with whom to talk.

- **Dialogue with yourself.** No one knows you better than you know yourself. Ask yourself self-awareness questions: What motivates me to act as I do? What are my short-term and long-term goals? How do I plan to achieve them? What are my strengths and weaknesses?

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a measure of how valuable you think you are; people with high self-esteem think very highly of themselves, whereas people with low self-esteem view themselves negatively. The basic idea behind

building self-esteem is that when you feel good about yourself—about who you are and what you’re capable of doing—you will perform better. When you think like a success, you’re more likely to act like a success. Conversely, when you think you’re a failure, you’re more likely to act like a failure. When you get up to give a speech and you visualize yourself being successful and effective, you’re more likely to give a good speech. Increasing self-esteem will, therefore, help you to function more effectively in school, in interpersonal relationships, and in careers. Here are five suggestions for increasing self-esteem.

Attack Self-Destructive Beliefs

Challenge beliefs you have about yourself that are unproductive or that make it more difficult for you to achieve your goals (Einhorn, 2006). Here, for example, are some beliefs that are likely to prove self-destructive (Butler, 1981).

1. The belief that you have to be perfect; this causes you to try to perform at unrealistically high levels at work, school, and home; anything short of perfection is unacceptable.
2. The belief that you have to please others and that your worthiness depends on what others think of you.
3. The belief that you have to take on more responsibilities than any one person can be expected to handle.

Self-destructive beliefs set unrealistically high standards and therefore almost always lead to failure. As a result, you may develop a negative self-image, seeing yourself as someone who constantly fails. So replace these self-destructive beliefs with more productive ones, such as “I succeed in many things, but I don’t have to succeed in everything” and “It would be nice to be loved by everyone, but it isn’t necessary to my happiness.”

Seek Out Nourishing People

Psychologist Carl Rogers (1970) drew a distinction between *noxious* and *nourishing* people. Noxious people criticize and find fault with just about everything. Nourishing people, on the other hand, are positive and optimistic. Most important, nourishing people reward us, they stroke us, they make us feel good about ourselves. To enhance your self-esteem, seek out these people—and avoid noxious people, those who make you feel negatively about yourself. At the same time, seek to become more nourishing yourself so that you each build up the other’s self-esteem.

Identification with people similar to yourself also seems to increase self-esteem. For example, in one study deaf people who identified with the larger deaf community had greater self-esteem than those who

didn’t so identify (Jambor & Elliott, 2005). Similarly, identification with your cultural group also seems helpful in developing positive self-esteem (McDonald, McCabe, Yeh, Lau, Garland, & Hough, 2005).

Work on Projects That Will Result in Success

Some people want to fail (or so it seems). Often, they select projects that will result in failure simply because these projects are impossible to complete. Avoid this trap; select projects that will result in success. Each success will help build self-esteem, and each success will make the next success a little easier. If a project does fail, recognize that this does not mean that *you’re* a failure. Everyone fails somewhere along the line. Failure is something that happens; it’s not necessarily something you’ve created. It’s not something inside you. Further, your failing once does not mean that you will fail the next time. So learn to put failure in perspective.

Remind Yourself of Your Successes

Some people have a tendency to focus, sometimes too much, on their failures, their missed opportunities, their social mistakes. If your objective is to correct what you did wrong or to identify the skills that you need to correct these failures, then focusing on failures can have some positive value. But if you focus on failure without thinking about plans for correction, then you’re probably just making life more difficult for yourself and limiting your self-esteem. To counteract the tendency to recall failures, remind yourself of your successes. Recall these successes both intellectually and emotionally. Realize why they were successes, and relive the emotional experience—the feelings you had when you sank that winning basketball or aced that test or helped that friend overcome a personal problem.

Secure Affirmation


An **affirmation** is simply a statement asserting that something is true. In discussions of self-concept and self-awareness, as noted in this chapter, the word *affirmation* is used to refer to positive statements about you, statements asserting that something good or positive is true of you. It’s frequently recommended that you remind yourself of your successes with self-affirmations—that you focus on your good deeds; on your positive qualities, strengths, and virtues; on your productive and meaningful relationships with friends, loved ones, and relatives (Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1998; Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010).

Self-affirmations include statements such as “I’m a worthy person,” “I’m responsible and can be depended upon,” and “I’m capable of loving and being loved.” The idea behind this advice is that the way

you talk to yourself will influence what you think of yourself. If you *affirm* yourself—if you tell yourself that you’re a success, that others like you, that you will succeed on the next test, and that you will be welcomed when asking for a date—you will soon come to feel more positive about yourself.

Some researchers, however, argue that self-affirmations—although extremely popular in self-help books—may not be very helpful. These critics contend that if you have low self-esteem, you’re not going to believe your self-affirmations, because you don’t have a high opinion of yourself to begin with (Paul, 2001). They propose that the alternative to self-affirmation is to secure affirmation from others. You’d do this by, for example, becoming more competent in communication and interacting with more positive people. In this way, you’d get more positive feedback from others—which, these researchers argue, is more helpful than self-talk in raising self-esteem.



COMMUNICATION CHOICE POINT  **SELF-ESTEEM** *Your best friend at work has hit a new low in self-esteem—a long-term relationship failed, an expected promotion never materialized, a large investment went sour. What are some of your choices for helping your friend to regain some self-esteem? What do you say? What would you say? Through what channel?*

SELF-DISCLOSURE

Self-disclosure is (1) a type of communication in which (2) you reveal information about yourself that (3) you normally keep hidden (Jourard, 1968, 1971a, 1971b; Tardy & Dindia, 2006).

1. Self-disclosure is a type of communication in which you take information from your hidden self and move it to the open self. Overt statements about the self (for example, “I’m getting fat”), as well as slips of the tongue (for example, using the name of an ex instead of your present lover), unconscious nonverbal movements (for example, self-touching movements or eye avoidance), and public confessions (for example, “Well, Jerry, it’s like this . . .”) can all be considered forms of self-disclosure. Usually, however, the term *self-disclosure* is used to refer to the conscious revealing of information, as in the statements “I’m afraid to compete” or “I love you.”
2. In self-disclosure you reveal *information* about yourself; it is *information* in that it involves something that the receiver did not know about you. This information may vary from the relatively commonplace (“I’m really scared about that French exam”) to the extremely significant (“I’m so depressed, I feel

like committing suicide”). For self-disclosure to occur, you must reveal the information to someone else; the information must be received and understood by at least one other individual.

3. Generally, self-disclosure—at least the kind that’s researched in communication and related fields—involves information that you normally keep hidden. To tell a listener something about yourself that you’d tell anyone is not self-disclosure but rather simply talking about yourself.

Factors Influencing Self-Disclosure

The following self-test “How willing to self-disclose are you?” focuses on the influences of self-disclosure to be discussed next and will help you to personalize the discussion to follow.

As you can appreciate from the self-test, many factors influence whether or not you disclose, what you disclose, and to whom you disclose. Among the most important factors are who you are, your culture, your gender, your listeners, and your topic and channel.

self assessment *noun*
personal or self analysis,
introspection, examination of
personal beliefs, self evaluation

TEST YOURSELF

How Willing to Self-Disclose Are You?

Respond to each of the following statements by indicating the likelihood that you would disclose such items of information to, say, other members of this class in a one-on-one interpersonal situation, in a public speaking situation, and in online communication

(say, e-mail, blogs, and social networking sites). Use the following scale to fill in all three columns: 1 = would definitely self-disclose; 2 = would probably self-disclose; 3 = don't know; 4 = would probably not self-disclose; and 5 = would definitely not self-disclose.

Information	Interpersonal Communication	Public Communication	Online Communication
1. My attitudes toward other religions, nationalities, and races	_____	_____	_____
2. My financial status, how much money I earn, how much I owe, how much I have saved	_____	_____	_____
3. My feelings about my parents	_____	_____	_____
4. My sexual fantasies	_____	_____	_____
5. My physical and mental health	_____	_____	_____
6. My ideal romantic partner	_____	_____	_____
7. My drinking and/or drug behavior	_____	_____	_____
8. My most embarrassing moment	_____	_____	_____
9. My unfulfilled desires	_____	_____	_____
10. My self-concept	_____	_____	_____

HOW DID YOU DO? There are, of course, no right or wrong answers to this self-test. The higher your scores, the more apt to disclose you are in this channel. Generally, people will self-disclose most in the interpersonal communication situations, least in the public communication situations, and somewhere in between in online communication.

WHAT WILL YOU DO? Taking this test, and ideally discussing it with others who also complete it, should

get you started thinking about your own self-disclosing behavior and especially the factors that influence it. How does your personality influence your self-disclosure behavior? Are there certain topics you are less willing to disclose than others? Are you more likely to disclose positive secrets than negative ones? Are there topics about which you wish you had the opportunity to self-disclose but somehow can't find the right situation?

Who You Are

Highly sociable and extroverted people self-disclose more than those who are less sociable and more introverted. People who are comfortable communicating also self-disclose more than those who are apprehensive about talking in general. And competent people engage in self-disclosure more than less-competent people. Perhaps competent people have greater self-confidence and more positive things to reveal. Similarly, their self-confidence may make them more willing to risk possible negative reactions (McCroskey & Wheelless, 1976).

Your Culture

Different cultures view self-disclosure in different ways. Some cultures (especially those high in masculinity) view disclosing inner feelings as weakness. Among some groups, for example, it would be considered "out of place" for a man to cry at a happy occasion such as a wedding, whereas in some Latin cultures that same display of emotion would go unnoticed. Similarly, it's considered undesirable in Japan for colleagues to reveal personal information, whereas in much of the United States it's expected (Barnlund, 1989; Hall & Hall, 1987).

Your Gender

The popular stereotype of gender differences in self-disclosure emphasizes males' reluctance to speak about themselves. For the most part, research supports this view; women disclose more than men about their previous romantic relationships, their feelings about their closest same-sex friends, their greatest fears, and what they don't like about their partners (Sprecher, 1987). Women also increase the depth of their disclosures as the relationship becomes more intimate, whereas men seem not to change their self-disclosure levels. Women have fewer taboo topics—information that they will not disclose to their friends—than men do (Goodwin & Lee, 1994). Women also self-disclose more to members of their extended families than men (Argyle & Henderson, 1984, 1985; Komarovsky, 1964; Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993).

There are exceptions, however. For example, in initial encounters men will disclose more intimately than women, perhaps “in order to control the relationship's development” (Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Hunter, 1985). Still another exception is found in a study of Americans and Argentineans; here males in both cultures indicated a significantly greater willingness to self-disclose than females (Horenstein & Downey, 2003).

Your Listeners

Self-disclosure occurs more readily in small groups than in large groups. Dyads, or groups of two people, are the most hospitable setting for self-disclosure. With one listener, you can monitor your disclosures, continuing if there's support from your listener and stopping if there's not. With more than one listener, such monitoring becomes difficult, because the listeners' responses are sure to vary.

Not surprisingly, you disclose most to people you like (Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Greenspan, 1987) and to people you trust (Wheless & Grotz, 1977). You also come to like those to whom you disclose (Berg & Archer, 1983). At times self-disclosure is more likely to occur in temporary than in permanent relationships—for example, between strangers on a train or plane, in a kind of “in-flight intimacy” (McGill, 1985). In this situation two people set up an intimate, self-disclosing relationship during a brief travel period, but they don't pursue it beyond that point. In a similar way, you might set up a relationship with one or several people on the Internet and engage in significant disclosure. Perhaps knowing that you'll never see these other people, and that they will never know where you live or work, makes it easier to disclose.

You are more likely to disclose when the person you're with also discloses. This **dyadic effect** (what one

person does, the other person also does) probably leads you to feel more secure and reinforces your own self-disclosing behavior. In fact, research shows that disclosures made in response to the disclosures of others are generally more intimate than those that are not the result of the dyadic effect (Berg & Archer, 1983). This dyadic effect, however, is not universal across all cultures. For example, Americans are likely to follow the dyadic effect and reciprocate with explicit self-disclosure, Koreans aren't (Won Doornink, 1985). As you can appreciate, this difference can easily cause intercultural difficulties; the American may feel insulted if his or her Korean counterpart doesn't reciprocate with self-disclosures that are similar in depth.

Your Topic and Channel

You're more likely to disclose information about your job or hobbies than about your sex life or financial situation (Jourard, 1968, 1971a). Further, you're more likely to disclose favorable information than unfavorable information. Generally, the more personal and negative the topic, the less likely you are to self-disclose.

A **disinhibition effect** seems to occur in online communication; people seem less inhibited in communicating in e-mail or in social network sites, for example, than in face-to-face situations. Among the reasons for this seem to be that in online communication there is a certain degree of anonymity and invisibility (Suler, 2004). Research also finds that reciprocal self-disclosure occurs more quickly and at higher levels of intimacy online than it does in face-to-face interactions (Levine, 2000; Joinson, 2001).

The Rewards and Dangers of Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure often brings rewards, but it can also create problems. Whether or not you self-disclose will depend on your assessment of the possible rewards and dangers.

Self-Disclosure Rewards

Among the rewards of self-disclosure are:

- **Self-knowledge.** Self-disclosure helps you gain a new perspective on yourself and a deeper understanding of your own behavior.
- **Improved coping abilities.** Self-disclosure helps you deal with problems, especially guilt. Because you feel that problems are a basis for rejection, you may develop guilt. By self-disclosing negative feelings and receiving support rather than rejection, you may be better able to deal with guilt, perhaps reducing or even eliminating it.

- **Communication enhancement.** Self-disclosure often improves communication. You understand the messages of others largely to the extent that you understand the individuals. You can tell what certain nuances mean, when a person is serious or joking, and when a person is being sarcastic out of fear or out of resentment.
- **More meaningful relationships.** By self-disclosing you tell others that you trust, respect, and care enough about them and your relationship to reveal yourself. This, in turn, leads the other individual to self-disclose and forms a good start to a relationship that is honest and open.

Self-Disclosure Dangers

Among the dangers of self-disclosure are:

- **Personal risks.** The more you reveal about yourself to others, the more areas of your life you expose to possible attack. Especially in the competitive context of work (or even romance), the more that others know about you, the more they'll be able to use against you.
- **Relationship risks.** Even in close and long-lasting relationships, self-disclosure can cause problems. Parents, normally the most supportive people in

most individuals' lives, frequently reject children who disclose their homosexuality, their plans to marry someone of a different race, or their belief in another faith. Your best friends—your closest intimates—may reject you for similar self-disclosures.

- **Professional risks.** Sometimes self-disclosure may result in professional or material losses. Politicians who disclose that they have been in therapy may lose the support of their own political party and find that voters are unwilling to vote for them. Teachers who disclose disagreement with school administrators may find themselves being denied tenure, teaching undesirable schedules, and becoming victims of "budget cuts." In the business world self-disclosures of alcoholism or drug addiction often result in dismissal, demotion, or social exclusion.

Remember that self-disclosure, like any other communication, is irreversible (see Chapter 1). You cannot self-disclose and then take it back. Nor can you erase the conclusions and inferences listeners make on the basis of your disclosures. Remember, too, to examine the rewards and dangers of self-disclosure in terms of particular cultural rules. As with all cultural rules, following the rules about self-disclosure brings approval, and violating them brings disapproval.



COMMUNICATION CHOICE POINT CORRECTIVE SELF-DISCLOSURE

When you met your current partner—with whom you want to spend the rest of your life—you minimized the extent of your romantic past. You now want to come clean and disclose your "sordid" past. **What are some of your options for introducing this topic? In what context would you want to do this? What channel would you use? What would you say?**

Guidelines for Self-Disclosure

Because self-disclosure is so important and so delicate a matter, here are some guidelines for (1) deciding whether and how to self-disclose, (2) responding to the disclosures of others, and (3) resisting the pressure to self-disclose.

Guidelines for Making Self-Disclosures

In addition to weighing the potential rewards and dangers of self-disclosure, consider the following factors as well. These hints will help you raise the right questions before you make what must be your decision.

- **Consider the motivation for the self-disclosure.** Self-disclosure should be motivated by a concern for the relationship, for the others involved, and for yourself.

skill noun ability, effectiveness, competence, proficiency

BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Deciding about Self-Disclosure

For any one or two of the following instances of impending self-disclosure, indicate whether you think the person should self-disclose and why. In making your decisions, consider each of the guidelines identified in this chapter.

1. Cathy has fallen in love with another man and wants to end her relationship with Tom, a coworker. She wants to call Tom on the phone, break the engagement, and disclose her new relationship.
2. Gregory plagiarized a term paper in anthropology. He's sorry, especially since the plagiarized paper only earned a grade of C+. He wants to disclose to his instructor and redo the paper.

3. Roberto, a college sophomore, has just discovered he is HIV positive. He wants to tell his parents and his best friends, but fears their rejection. In his Mexican American culture, information like this is rarely disclosed, especially by men. He wants the support of his friends and family and yet doesn't want them to reject him or treat him differently.

Self-disclosure is a complex communication process and is especially important because its potential consequences, both positive and negative, are so significant. Disclose significant information only after mindfully considering the consequences.

- **Consider the appropriateness of the self-disclosure.** Self-disclosure should be appropriate to the context and to the relationship between you and your listener. Before making any significant self-disclosure, ask whether this is the right time (Do you both have the time to discuss this in the length it requires?) and place (Is the place private enough?). Ask, too, whether this self-disclosure is appropriate to the relationship. Generally, the more intimate the disclosure, the closer the relationship should be.
- **Consider the disclosures of the other person.** During your disclosures, give the other person a chance to reciprocate with his or her own disclosures. If the other person does not reciprocate, reassess your own self-disclosures. It may be that for this person at this time and in this context, your disclosures are not welcome or appropriate.
- **Consider the possible burdens self-disclosure might entail.** Carefully weigh the potential problems that you may incur as a result of your disclosure. Can you afford to lose your job if you disclose your prison record? Are you willing to risk relational difficulties if you disclose your infidelities (on the *Jerry Springer Show*, for example)?

Also, ask yourself whether you're placing burdens on the listener. For example, consider the person who swears his or her mother-in-law to secrecy and then discloses having an affair with a neighbor. This disclosure clearly places an unfair burden on the mother-in-law.

The accompanying Building Communication Skills box provides a few examples of impending self-disclosures that illustrate the difficulties involved in deciding what to disclose and how to do it.

Guidelines for Facilitating and Responding to Self-Disclosures

When someone discloses to you, it's usually a sign of trust and affection. In carrying out this most important receiver function, keep the following guidelines in mind.

- **Practice the skills of effective and active listening.** Listen actively, listen politely, listen for different levels of meaning, listen with empathy, and listen with an open mind. Express an understanding of the speaker's feelings in order to give the speaker the opportunity to see his or her feelings more objectively and through the eyes of another. Ask questions to ensure your own understanding and to signal your interest and attention.
- **Support and reinforce the discloser.** Try to refrain from evaluation, concentrating on understanding and empathizing. Make your supportiveness clear to the discloser through your verbal and nonverbal responses; for example, maintain eye contact, lean toward the speaker, ask relevant questions, and echo the speaker's thoughts and feelings.
- **Be willing to reciprocate.** Your own disclosures (made in response to the other person's disclosures), demonstrate your understanding of the other's meanings and your willingness to communicate on a meaningful level.

- **Keep the disclosures confidential.** If you reveal disclosures to others, negative effects are inevitable. It's interesting to note that one of the netiquette rules of e-mail is that you shouldn't forward mail to third parties without the writer's permission. This rule is useful for self-disclosure generally: Maintain confidentiality; don't pass on disclosures made to you to others without the person's permission.
- **Don't use the disclosures against the person.** Many self-disclosures expose vulnerability or weakness. If you later turn around and use a disclosure against the person, you betray the confidence and trust invested in you. Regardless of how angry you may get, resist the temptation to use the disclosures of others as weapons.

Guidelines for Resisting Pressure to Self-Disclose

You may, on occasion, find yourself in a position in which a friend, colleague, or romantic partner pressures you to self-disclose. In such situations, you may wish to weigh the pros and cons of self-disclosure, and make your own decision as to whether and what you'll disclose. If your decision is to not disclose and you're still being pressured, then you need to say something. Here are a few suggestions.

- **Don't be pushed.** Although there may be certain legal or ethical reasons for disclosing, generally you don't have to disclose if you don't want to. Realize that you're in control of what you reveal and of when and to whom you reveal it. Remember that self-disclosure has significant consequences. So if you're not sure you want to reveal something, at least not until you've had additional time to think about it, then don't.
- **Be indirect and move to another topic.** Avoid the question that asks you to disclose, and change the subject. If someone presses you to disclose your past financial problems, move the conversation to financial problems in general or change the topic to a movie or to your new job. This is often a polite way of saying, "I'm not talking about it" and may be the preferred choice in certain situations and with certain people. Most often people will get the hint.

- **Be assertive in your refusal to disclose.** If necessary, say, very directly, "I'd rather not talk about that now," or "Now is not the time for this type of discussion."

With an understanding of the self in human communication, we can explore perception, the processes by which you come to understand yourself and others (as well as the processes by which others come to understand you) and the way you manage the impressions you give to others.

PERCEPTION

Perception is your way of understanding the world; it is the process by which you make sense out of what psychologist William James called the "booming buzzing confusion" all around you. More technically, **perception** is the process by which you become aware of objects, events, and especially people through your senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound. Perception is an active, not a passive, process. Your perceptions result from what exists in the outside world and from your own experiences, desires, needs and wants, loves and hatreds. Among the reasons why perception is so important in communication is that it influences your communication choices. The messages you send and listen to will depend on how you see the world, on how you size up specific situations, on what you think of the people with whom you interact.

Perception is a continuous series of processes that blend into one another. For convenience of discussion we can separate perception into five stages: (1) You sense, you pick up some kind of stimulation; (2) you organize the stimuli in some way; (3) you interpret and evaluate what you perceive; (4) you store your perception in memory; and (5) you retrieve it when needed (Figure 3.4).

Stage 1: Stimulation

At the first stage of perception, your sense organs are *stimulated*—you hear a new CD, you see a friend, you smell someone's perfume, you taste an orange, you

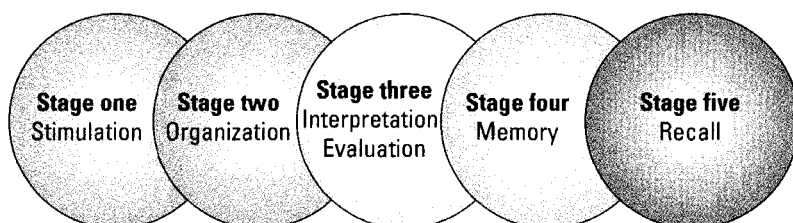


FIGURE 3.4 The Stages of Perception

Perception occurs in five stages: stimulation, organization, interpretation–evaluation, memory, and recall. Understanding how perception works will help make your own perceptions (of yourself and of others) more accurate.

feel another's sweaty palm. Naturally, you don't perceive everything; rather, you engage in selective perception, which includes selective attention and selective exposure.

In **selective attention** you attend to those things that you anticipate will fulfill your needs or will prove enjoyable. For instance, when daydreaming in class, you don't hear what the instructor is saying until he or she calls your name. Your selective attention mechanism focuses your senses on your name being called.

In **selective exposure** you tend to expose yourself to information that will confirm your existing beliefs, that will contribute to your objectives, or that will prove satisfying in some way. For example, after you buy a car, you're more apt to read and listen to advertisements for the car you just bought, because these messages tell you that you made the right decision. At the same time, you will tend to avoid advertisements for the cars that you considered but eventually rejected, because these messages would tell you that you made the wrong decision.

Stage 2: Organization

At the second stage of perception, you organize the information your senses pick up. Three interesting ways in which you organize your perceptions are (1) by rules, (2) by schemata, and (3) by scripts.

Organization by Rules

One frequently used rule of perception is that of **proximity**, or physical closeness. The rule says that things that are physically close together constitute a unit. Thus, using this rule, you would perceive people who are often together, or messages spoken one right after the other, as units, as belonging together. You also assume that the verbal and nonverbal signals sent at about the same time are related and constitute a unified whole.

Another rule is **similarity**, a principle stating that things that look alike or are similar in other ways belong together and form a unit. This principle leads you to see people who dress alike as belonging together. Similarly, you might assume that people who work at the same jobs, who are of the same religion, who live in the same building, or who talk with the same accent belong together.

You use the principle of **contrast** when you conclude that some items (people or messages, for example) don't belong together because they're too different from each other to be part of the same unit. So, for example, in a conversation or a public speech, you'll focus your attention on changes in intensity or rate because these contrast with the rest of the message.

Organization by Schemata

Another way you organize material is by creating **schemata (or schemas)**, mental templates or structures that help you organize the millions of items of information you come into contact with every day as well as those you already have in memory. Schemata may thus be viewed as general ideas about people (Pat and Chris, Japanese, Baptists, New Yorkers); about yourself (your qualities, abilities, and even liabilities); or about social roles (the attributes of police officers, professors, or multimillionaires).

You develop schemata from your own experience—actual experiences as well as vicarious experiences from television, reading, and hearsay. Thus, for example, you may have a schema that portrays college athletes as strong, ambitious, academically weak, and egocentric. And, of course, you've probably developed schemata for different religious, racial, and national groups; for men and women; and for people of different affectional orientations. Each group that you have some familiarity with will be represented in your mind in some kind of schema. Schemata help you organize your perceptions by allowing you to classify millions of people into a manageable number of categories or classes. As you'll soon see, however, schemata can also create problems—they can influence you to see what is not there or to miss seeing what is there.

Organization by Scripts

A **script** is a type of schema. Like a schema, a script is an organized body of information; but a script focuses on an action, event, or procedure. It's a general idea of how some event should unfold; it's the rules governing events and their sequence. For example, you probably have a script for eating in a restaurant with the actions organized into a pattern something like this: Enter, take a seat, review the menu, order from the menu, eat your food, ask for the bill, leave a tip, pay the bill, exit the restaurant. Similarly, you probably have scripts for how you do laundry, how you behave in an interview, the stages you go through in introducing someone to someone else, and the way you ask for a date.

Everyone relies on shortcuts—rules, schemata, and scripts, for example, are all useful shortcuts to simplify understanding, remembering, and recalling information about people and events. If you didn't have these shortcuts, you'd have to treat each person, role, or action differently from each other person, role, or action. This would make every experience totally new, totally unrelated to anything you already know. If you didn't use these shortcuts, you'd be unable to generalize, draw connections, or otherwise profit from previously acquired knowledge.

Shortcuts, however, may mislead you; they may contribute to your remembering things that are consistent

with your schemata (even if they didn't occur) and distorting or forgetting information that is inconsistent. Judgments about members of other cultures are often ethnocentric. Because you form schemata and scripts on the basis of your own cultural beliefs and experiences, you can easily (but inappropriately) apply these to members of other cultures. It's easy to infer that when members of other cultures do things that conform to your scripts, they're right, and when they do things that contradict your scripts, they're wrong—a classic example of ethnocentric thinking. As you can appreciate, this tendency can easily contribute to intercultural misunderstandings.

A similar problem arises when you base your schemata for different cultural groups on stereotypes that you may have derived from television or movies. So, for example, you may have schemata for religious Muslims that you derived from stereotypes presented in the media. If you then apply these schemata to all Muslims, you risk seeing only what conforms to your script and failing to see or distorting what does not conform to your script.

Stage 3: Interpretation–Evaluation

The **interpretation–evaluation** step (a linked term because the two processes cannot be separated) is

inevitably subjective and is greatly influenced by your experiences, needs, wants, values, expectations, physical and emotional state, gender, and beliefs about the way things are or should be, as well as by your rules, schemata, and scripts.

For example, when you meet a new person who is introduced to you as a college football player, you will tend to apply your schema to this person and may view him (perhaps) as strong, ambitious, academically weak, and egocentric. You will, in other words, see this person through the filter of your schema and evaluate him according to your schema for college athletes. Similarly, when viewing someone asking for a date, you will apply your script to this event and view the event through the script. You will interpret the actions of the suitor as appropriate or inappropriate depending on your script for date-requesting behavior and on the ways in which the suitor performs the sequence of actions.

Stage 4: Memory

You store in memory both your perceptions and their interpretations–evaluations. So, for example, you have in memory your schema for college athletes, and you know that Ben Williams is a football player. Ben Williams is then stored in memory with “cognitive tags” that tell you that he's strong, ambitious, academically

me•di•a lit•er•a•cy *noun*
ability to understand,
interact with, and create
media messages

Media Messages Are Constructed and Construct Reality

Media messages are constructed with very specific purposes in mind—first and foremost is to grab and hold your attention so that the media can sell your attention to the advertiser. It's a simple formula:

viewers attention + opportunity to sell this attention to advertisers = potential financial profit

Media messages are by design created to appear natural and uninfluenced by the media owners or special interests. Media literacy will help you see the construction behind the messages.

Media messages do not reflect reality so much as construct it. The image of the world, of a specific country or city, that the media present is not so much simply what exists in reality but rather that portion of reality that the media want you to see. But, since it is largely through the media that we come to know the world, we really come to know the world as the media construct it.

Media messages do not reflect reality so much as construct it.

One theory built around this notion is **cultivation theory** which holds, basically, that the media cultivate a view of the world in the mind of the viewer. For example, people who are heavy media viewers see the world existing as it is portrayed more than those who are light viewers; heavy viewers, for example, think there is more violence in the world than there really is.

Some media messages are accurate, and some are not; some messages are slanted, and most of them are overly simplified. Listen to the ways in which the media influence

how you see the world and to the ways they present distorted pictures of what is supposed to be reality.

Viewing the same event in a variety of different media is often a useful way of detecting possible biases. Another useful method is to ask yourself why this particular message was constructed as it was. Could the “same” event have been presented differently and given a totally different meaning or slant?



weak, and egocentric. That is, despite the fact that you've not witnessed Ben's strength or ambitions and have no idea of his academic record or his psychological profile, you still may store your memory of Ben along with the qualities that make up your script for "college athletes."

Now, let's say that at different times you hear that Ben failed Spanish I (normally an A or B course at your school), that Ben got an A in chemistry (normally a tough course), and that Ben is transferring to Harvard as a theoretical physics major. Schemata act as filters or gatekeepers; they allow certain information to be stored in relatively objective form, much as you heard or read it, but may distort or prevent other information from being stored. As a result, these three items of information about Ben may get stored very differently in your memory along with your schema for college athletes.

For example, you may readily store the information that Ben failed Spanish, because it's consistent with your schema; it fits neatly into the template that you have of college athletes. Information that's consistent with your schema—as in this example—will strengthen your schema and make it more resistant to change (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010). Depending on the strength of your schema, you may also store in memory (even though you didn't hear it) the "information" that Ben did poorly in other courses as well. The information that Ben got an A in chemistry, because it contradicts your schema (it just doesn't seem right), may easily be distorted or lost. The information that Ben is transferring to Harvard, however, is a bit different. This information also is inconsistent with your schema; but it is so drastically inconsistent that you may begin to look at this mindfully. Perhaps you'll begin to question your schema for athletes, or perhaps you'll view Ben as an exception to the general rule. In either case, you're going to etch Ben's transferring to Harvard very clearly in your mind.

What you remember about a person or an event isn't an objective recollection; it's more likely heavily influenced by your preconceptions or your schemata about what belongs and what doesn't belong. Your reconstruction of an event or person contains a lot of information that was not in your original experience and may omit a lot that was in this experience.

Stage 5: Recall

At some later date, you may want to recall or access information you have stored in memory. Let's say you want to retrieve your information about Ben because he's the topic of discussion among you and a few friends. As you'll see in the discussion of listening in the next chapter, memory isn't reproductive; you don't

simply reproduce what you've heard or seen. Rather, you *reconstruct* what you've heard or seen into a whole that is meaningful to you—depending in great part on your schemata and scripts—and it's this reconstruction that you store in memory. Now, when you want to retrieve this information from memory, you may recall it with a variety of inaccuracies. You're likely to:

- **Recall information that is consistent with your schema.** In fact, you may not even recall the specific information you're looking for (about Ben, for example) but actually just your schema (which contains the information about college athletes and therefore contains information about Ben).
- **Fail to recall information that is inconsistent with your schema.** You have no place to put that information, so you easily lose it or forget it.
- **Recall information that drastically contradicts your schema.** Because it forces you to think (and perhaps rethink) about your schema and its accuracy, it may even force you to revise your schema.

IMPRESSION FORMATION

With an understanding of the self and how perception works, we can look at the ways they are intimately connected first in impression formation and then in impression management—academic terms for what you do everyday.

Impression formation (sometimes referred to as **person perception**) refers to the processes you go through in forming an impression of another person. Here you would make use of a variety of perception processes, each of which has pitfalls and potential dangers.

Impression Formation Processes

How you perceive another person and ultimately come to some kind of evaluation or interpretation of him or her is influenced by a variety of processes. Here we consider some of the more significant processes: the self-fulfilling prophecy, personality theory, primacy-recency, consistency, and attribution. In addition to these five processes, recall from the previous chapter the discussion of stereotyping. This is another process many people use to help them form impressions of others.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

A **self-fulfilling prophecy** is a prediction that comes true because you act on it as if it were true. Put differently, a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when you act on your schema as if it were true and in doing so make it true. Self-fulfilling prophecies occur in such widely different situations as parent-child relationships,

the•o•ry noun statement of explanation, formulation of relationships, reasoned generalization

The Pygmalion Effect

A widely known example of the self-fulfilling prophecy is the **Pygmalion effect** (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). The effect is named after Pygmalion, a sculptor in Greek mythology who created a statue of a beautiful woman and then fell in love with it. Venus, the goddess of love, rewarded Pygmalion for his artistry and love by making the statue come to life as a real woman, Galatea. George Bernard Shaw used this idea for his play *Pygmalion*, the story of a poor, uneducated London flower vendor who is taught “proper speech” and enters society’s upper class. The musical *My Fair Lady* was in turn based on Shaw’s play.

In a classic research study, experimenters told teachers that certain pupils were expected to do exceptionally well—that they were late bloomers (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968, 1992). And although the experimenters selected the “late bloomers” at random, the students who were labeled “late bloomers” did perform at higher levels than their classmates. Like the beautiful statue, these students became what their teachers thought they were.

The expectations of the teachers may have caused them to pay extra attention to the students, and this may have positively affected the students’ performance. The Pygmalion effect has also been studied in such varied contexts as the courtroom, the clinic, the work cubicle, management and leadership practices, athletic coaching, and stepfamilies (Eden, 1992; Solomon et al., 1996; Einstein, 1995; McNatt, 2001; Rosenthal, 2002).

Working with Theories and Research

Findings such as those cited above have led one researcher to suggest that companies apply the Pygmalion effect as a way to improve worker productivity—by creating in supervisors positive attitudes about employees and by helping employees to feel that their supervisors and the organization as a whole value them highly (McNatt, 2001). In what ways might this Pygmalion effect be applied at your own workplace?

educational settings, and business (Madon, Guyll, & Spoth, 2004; Merton, 1957; Rosenthal, 2002; Tierney & Farmer, 2004). There are four basic steps in the self-fulfilling prophecy:

1. You make a prediction or formulate a belief about a person or a situation. For example, you predict that Pat is friendly in social situations.
2. You act toward that person or situation as if that prediction or belief were true. For example, you act as if Pat is a friendly person.
3. Because you act as if the belief were true, it becomes true. For example, because of the way you act toward Pat, Pat becomes comfortable and friendly.
4. You observe your effect on the person or the resulting situation, and what you see strengthens your beliefs. For example, you observe Pat’s friendliness, and this reinforces your belief that Pat is in fact friendly.

The self-fulfilling prophecy also can be seen when you make predictions about yourself and fulfill them. For example, suppose you enter a group situation convinced that the other members will dislike you. Almost invariably you’ll be proved right; the other members will appear to you to dislike you. What you

may be doing is acting in a way that encourages the group to respond to you negatively. In this way, you fulfill your prophecies about yourself.

Personality Theory

Everyone has a theory of personality (usually subconscious or implicit) that determines which characteristics of an individual go with other characteristics. Consider, for example, the following brief statements. Note the word in parentheses that you think best completes each sentence.

- Carlo is energetic, eager, and (intelligent, stupid).
- Kim is bold, defiant, and (extroverted, introverted).
- Joe is bright, lively, and (thin, heavy).
- Eve is attractive, intelligent, and (likable, unlikable).
- Susan is cheerful, positive, and (outgoing, shy).
- Angel is handsome, tall, and (friendly, unfriendly).

What makes some of these choices seem right and others wrong is your **implicit personality theory**, the system of rules that tells you which characteristics go with which other characteristics. Your theory may, for example, have told you that a person who is energetic and eager is also intelligent, not stupid—although

there is no logical reason why a stupid person could not be energetic and eager.

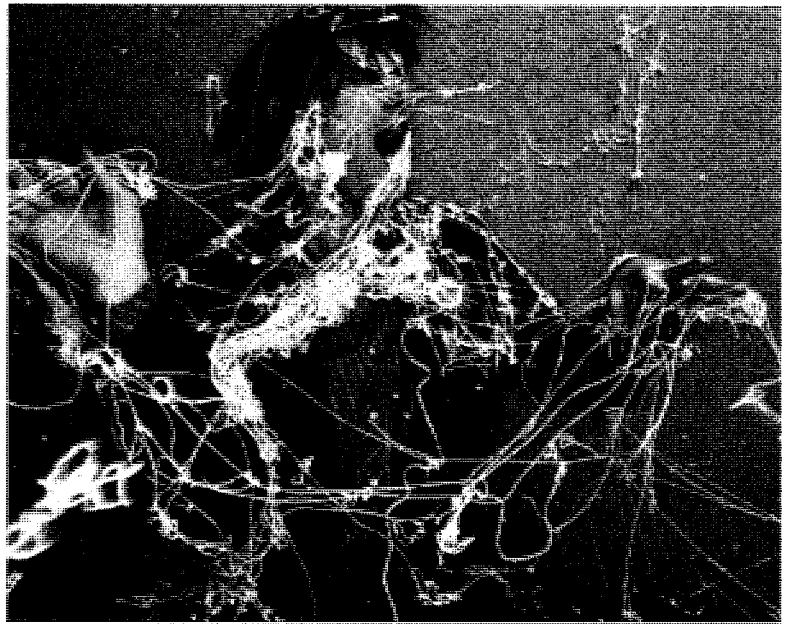
The widely documented **halo effect** is a good example of how this personality theory works. If you believe a person has some positive qualities, you're likely to infer that she or he also possesses other positive qualities. There is also a reverse halo (or "horns") effect: If you know a person possesses several negative qualities, you're more likely to infer that the person also has other negative qualities. For example, you're more likely to perceive physically attractive people as more generous, sensitive, trustworthy, and interesting than those who are less attractive. And the **horns effect** or **reverse halo effect** will lead you to perceive those who are unattractive as mean, dishonest, antisocial, and sneaky (Katz, 2003).

In using personality theories, apply them carefully and critically so as to avoid perceiving qualities in an individual that your theory tells you should be present but aren't or seeing qualities that are not there (Plaks, Grant, & Dweck, 2005).

Primacy-Recency

Assume for a moment that you're enrolled in a course in which half the classes are extremely dull and half extremely exciting. At the end of the semester, you evaluate the course and the instructor. Would your evaluation be more favorable if the dull classes occurred in the first half of the semester and the exciting classes in the second? Or would it be more favorable if the order were reversed? If what comes first exerts the most influence, you have a **primacy effect**. If what comes last (or most recently) exerts the most influence, you have a **recency effect**.

In the classic study on the effects of **primacy-recency** in perception, college students perceived a person who was described as "intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious" more positively than a person described as "envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent" (Asch, 1946). Notice that the descriptions are identical; only the order was changed. Clearly, there's a tendency to use early information to get a general idea about a person and to use later information to make this impression more specific. The initial information helps you form a schema for the person. Once that schema is formed, you're likely to resist information that contradicts it.



COMMUNICATION CHOICE POINT FIRST IMPRESSION CORRECTION

*You made a bad impression at work—you drank too much at an office party and played the clown. This is not the impression you want to give, and you need to change it fast. Although you know you can't erase that impression, you need to counteract it in some way. **What are some things you might say and do to help lessen the negative effects of that first impression?***

One interesting practical implication of primacy-recency is that the first impression you make is likely to be the most important—and is likely to be made very quickly (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004; Willis & Todorov, 2006). The reason for this is that the schema that others form of you functions as a filter to admit or block additional information about you. If the initial impression or schema is positive, others are likely (1) to readily remember additional positive information, because it confirms this original positive image or schema; (2) to easily forget or distort negative information, because it contradicts this original positive schema; and (3) to interpret ambiguous information as positive. You win in all three ways—if the initial impression is positive.

Consistency

The tendency to maintain balance among perceptions or attitudes is called **consistency**. You expect certain things to go together and other things not to go together. On a purely intuitive basis, for example, respond to the following sentences by noting your expected response.

1. I expect a person I like to (like, dislike) me.
2. I expect a person I dislike to (like, dislike) me.

3. I expect my friend to (like, dislike) my friend.
4. I expect my friend to (like, dislike) my enemy.
5. I expect my enemy to (like, dislike) my friend.
6. I expect my enemy to (like, dislike) my enemy.

According to most consistency theories, your expectations would be as follows: You would expect a person you liked to like you (1) and a person you disliked to dislike you (2). You would expect a friend to like a friend (3) and to dislike an enemy (4). You would expect your enemy to dislike your friend (5) and to like your other enemy (6). All these expectations are intuitively satisfying.

Further, you would expect someone you liked to possess characteristics you like or admire and would expect your enemies not to possess characteristics you like or admire. Conversely, you would expect people you liked to lack unpleasant characteristics and those you disliked to possess unpleasant characteristics. The downside here is that you might be wrong; your friend may possess negative qualities (which your friendship may lead you to miss) and your enemy may possess positive qualities (which your enmity may lead you to miss).

Attribution of Control

Another way in which you form impressions is through the **attribution of control**, a process by

which you focus on explaining why someone behaved as he or she did on the basis of whether the person had control over his or her behavior. For example, suppose you invite your friend Desmond to dinner for 7 p.m. and he arrives at 9 p.m. Consider how you would respond to each of these reasons:

- **Reason 1:** I just couldn't tear myself away from the beach. I really wanted to get a great tan.
- **Reason 2:** I was driving here when I saw some guys mugging an old couple. I broke it up and took the couple home. They were so frightened that I had to stay with them until their children arrived. The storm knocked out all the cell towers and electricity, so I had no way of calling to tell you I'd be late.
- **Reason 3:** I got in a car accident and was taken to the hospital.

Depending on the reason, you would probably attribute very different motives to Desmond's behavior. With reasons 1 and 2, you'd conclude that Desmond was in control of his behavior; with reason 3, that he was not. Further, you would probably respond negatively to reason 1 (Desmond was selfish and inconsiderate) and positively to reason 2 (Desmond was a Good Samaritan). Because Desmond was not in control of his behavior in reason 3, you would probably

the•o•ry noun statement of explanation, formulation of relationships, reasoned generalization

The Just World Hypothesis

Many people believe that the world is just: Good things happen to good people and bad things to bad people (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010; Hunt, 2000). Put differently, the **just world hypothesis** suggests that you'll get what you deserve. Even if you mindfully dismiss this assumption, you may use it mindlessly when perceiving and evaluating other people. Consider a particularly vivid example: In certain cultures (for example, in Bangladesh, Iran, or Yemen), a woman who is raped is considered by many (though certainly not all) to have disgraced her family and to be deserving of severe punishment—in many cases, even death. Although most people reading this book will claim that this is unjust and unfair, it's quite common even in Western cultures to blame the victim. Much research, for example, shows that people often blame the victim for being raped (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994). In fact, accused rapists' defense attorneys

routinely attack rape victims in court for dressing provocatively. And it's relevant to note that only two states—New York and Florida—currently forbid questions about the victim's clothing.

The belief that the world is just creates perceptual distortions by leading us to deemphasize the influence of situational factors and to overemphasize the influence of internal factors in our attempts to explain the behaviors of other people or even our own behaviors.

Working with Theories and Research

Take a look at your own behaviors. Do you act as you do because of your belief in a just world? For example, do you act fairly because you think you'll be rewarded for it? Do you know people who do act on the basis of this hypothesis—for example, doing good in anticipation of good things happening to them?


not attribute either positive or negative motivation to his behavior. Instead, you would probably feel sorry that he got into an accident.

In perceiving and especially in evaluating other people's behavior, you frequently ask if they were in control of the behavior. Generally, research shows that if you feel a person was in control of negative behaviors, you'll come to dislike him or her. If you believe the person was not in control of negative behaviors, you'll come to feel sorry for and not blame the person.

In your attribution of controllability—or in attributing motives on the basis of any other reasons (for example, hearsay or observations of the person's behavior) beware of several potential errors: (1) the self-serving bias, (2) overattribution, and (3) the fundamental attribution error.

- **Self-serving bias.** You commit the **self-serving bias** when you take credit for the positive and deny responsibility for the negative. For example, you're more likely to attribute your positive outcomes (say, you get an A on an exam) to internal and controllable factors—to your personality, intelligence, or hard work. And you're more likely to attribute your negative outcomes (say, you get a D) to external and uncontrollable factors—to the exam's being exceptionally difficult or to your roommate's party the night before (Bernstein, Stephan, & Davis, 1979; Duval & Silva, 2002).
- **Overattribution.** As noted in Chapter 2, **overattribution**—the tendency to single out one or two obvious characteristics of a person and attribute everything that person does to this one or these two characteristics—distorts perception. To prevent overattribution, recognize that most behaviors and personality characteristics result from lots of factors. You almost always make a mistake when you select one factor and attribute everything to it.
- **Fundamental attribution error.** The error occurs when you overvalue the contribution of internal factors (for example, a person's personality) and undervalue the influence of external factors (for example, the context or situation the person is in). The **fundamental attribution error** leads you to conclude that people do what they do because that's the kind of people they are, not because of



COMMUNICATION CHOICE POINT  **OVERATTRIBUTION** *Your partner over attributes your behavior, attitudes, values, and just about everything you do to your ethnic origins. What communication choices do you have for explaining the illogical nature of this overattribution but, at the same time, not insulting your partner? What would you say?*

the situation they're in. When Pat is late for an appointment, you're more likely to conclude that Pat is inconsiderate or irresponsible than to attribute the lateness to a possible bus breakdown or traffic accident.

Increasing Accuracy in Impression Formation

Successful communication depends largely on the accuracy of the impressions you form of others. We've already identified the potential barriers that can arise with each of the perceptual processes, for example, the self-serving bias or overattribution. In addition to avoiding these barriers, here are additional ways to increase your accuracy in impression formation.

Analyze Impressions

Subject your perceptions to logical analysis, to critical thinking. Here are two suggestions.

- **Recognize your own role in perception.** Your emotional and physiological state will influence the meaning you give to your perceptions. A movie may seem hysterically funny when you're in a good mood, but just plain stupid when you're in a bad mood.



- **Avoid early conclusions.** Formulate hypotheses to test against additional information and evidence (rather than conclusions). Look for a variety of cues pointing in the same direction. The more cues that point to the same conclusion, the more likely your conclusion will be correct. Be especially alert to contradictory cues that seem to refute your initial hypotheses. At the same time, seek validation from others. Do others see things in the same way you do? If not, ask yourself if your perceptions may be distorted in some way.

Check Perceptions

Perception checking will help you lessen your chances of misinterpreting another's feelings and will also give the other person an opportunity to elaborate on his or her thoughts and feelings. In its most basic form, perception checking consists of two steps.

- **Describe what you see or hear.** Try to do this as descriptively (not evaluatively) as you can. Sometimes you may wish to offer several possibilities, for example, "You've called me from work a lot this week. You seem concerned that everything is all right at home" or "You've not wanted to talk with me all week. You say that my work is fine but you don't seem to want to give me the same responsibilities that other editorial assistants have."
- **Seek confirmation.** Ask the other person if your description is accurate. Avoid mind reading. Don't try to read the thoughts and feelings of another person just from observing their behaviors. Avoid phrasing your questions defensively, as in "You really don't want to go out, do you? I knew you didn't when you turned on the television." Instead, ask supportively, for example, "Would you rather watch TV?" or "Are you worried about the kids?" or "Are you displeased with my work? Is there anything I can do to improve my job performance?"

Reduce Uncertainty

In every communication situation, there is some degree of ambiguity. There are a variety of **uncertainty reduction strategies** (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Brashers, 2007; Gudykunst, 1993).

- **Observe.** Observing another person while he or she is engaged in an active task, preferably interacting with others in an informal social situation, will often reveal a great deal about the person, as people are less apt to monitor their behaviors and

more likely to reveal their true selves in informal situations.

- **Ask others.** Learn about a person through asking others. You might inquire of a colleague if a third person finds you interesting and might like to have dinner with you.
- **Interact with the individual.** For example, you can ask questions: "Do you enjoy sports?" "What did you think of that computer science course?" "What would you do if you got fired?" You also gain knowledge of another by disclosing information about yourself. These disclosures help to create an environment that encourages disclosures from the person about whom you wish to learn more.

Increase Cultural Sensitivity

Recognizing and being sensitive to cultural differences will help increase your accuracy in perception. For example, Russian or Chinese artists such as ballet dancers will often applaud their audience by clapping. Americans seeing this may easily interpret this as egotistical. Similarly, a German man will enter a restaurant before the woman in order to see if the place is respectable enough for the woman to enter. This simple custom can easily be interpreted as rude when viewed by people from cultures in which it's considered courteous for the woman to enter first (Axtell, 2007).

Cultural sensitivity will help counteract the difficulty most people have in understanding the nonverbal messages of people from other cultures. For example, it's easier to interpret the facial expressions of members of your own culture than those of members of other cultures (Weathers, Frank, & Spell, 2002). This "in-group advantage" will assist your perceptual accuracy for members of your own culture but may hinder your accuracy for members of other cultures (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).

Within every cultural group there are wide and important differences. As all Americans are not alike, neither are all Indonesians, Greeks, or Mexicans. When you make assumptions that all people of a certain culture are alike, you're thinking in stereotypes. Recognizing differences between another culture and your own, and among members of the same culture, will help you perceive people and situations more accurately.

A summary of impression formation processes, the cautions to be observed, and some general strategies for increasing accuracy in person perception are presented in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1 Impression Formation

This table summarizes the major impression formation processes, some of the cautions to observe, and some general ways to increase accuracy in impression formation. Stereotyping, discussed in the previous chapter, is also included here since it is one of the processes we use in forming impressions of others.

Impression Formation Processes	Cautions to Observe	Increasing Accuracy General Guidelines
Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: you act on your prediction as if it were true, and it becomes true.	Beware of your predictions that come true; you may be influencing them in that direction.	Analyze your impressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ recognize your role in perception ■ avoid early conclusions
Personality Theory: you expect certain qualities to go with other qualities.	Personalities are much too complex to easily predict one quality on the basis of others; beware of always finding fault with those you dislike or good with those you like.	Check your perceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ describe what you sense ■ seek confirmation
Primacy-Recency: you are most influenced by what occurs first and by what occurs last.	Basing your impressions on the basis of early or late information, may bias your perceptions.	Reduce Uncertainty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ observe ■ ask others ■ interact
Consistency: you assume that people are consistent; if they're good people in your mind the things they do will be good and if they're bad, the things they do will be bad	People are not always consistent and to expect them to be is probably a mistake.	Increase cultural sensitivity
Attribution of control: you evaluate what a person did on the basis of the control you perceive this person to have had on his or her behavior.	Beware of the self-serving bias, overattribution, and the fundamental attribution error.	
Stereotyping: you form an impression of someone based on your racial, religious, or other stereotype	Beware of stereotypes; often they were learned without conscious awareness and are often misleading.	

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Impression management (some writers use the terms *self-presentation* or *identity management*) refers to the processes you go through to communicate the impression you want other people to have of you.

Impression management is largely the result of the messages communicated. In the same way that you form impressions of others largely on the basis of how they communicate, verbally and nonverbally, they also form impressions of you based on what you say (your verbal messages) and how you act and dress (your nonverbal messages). Communication messages, however, are not the only means for impression formation and management. For example, you also communicate your self-image and judge others by the people with whom they associate; if you associate with VIPs, then surely you must be a

VIP yourself, the conventional wisdom goes. Or, you might form an impression of someone on the basis of that person's age or gender or ethnic origin. Or, you might rely on what others have said about the person and form impressions. And, of course, they might well do the same in forming impressions of you.

Part of the art and skill of communication is to understand and be able to manage the impressions you give to others. Mastering the art of impression management will enable you to present yourself as you want others to see you—at least to some extent. The strategies you use to achieve this desired impression will depend on your specific goal. Here is a classification based on seven major communication goals and strategies. In addition to helping you communicate the impression you want to communicate, each of these strategies may backfire and communicate the opposite of your intended purpose.

To Be Liked: Affinity-Seeking and Politeness Strategies

If you're new at school or on the job and you want to be well liked, included in the activities of others, and thought of highly, you'd likely use affinity-seeking strategies and politeness strategies. Another set of strategies often used to increase likeability is immediacy strategies (these are discussed on pages 118–119).

Affinity-Seeking Strategies

Using the **affinity-seeking strategies** that follow is likely to increase your chances of being liked (Bell & Daly, 1984). Such strategies are especially important in initial interactions, and their use has even been found to increase student motivation when used by teachers (Martin & Rubin, 1998; Myers & Zhong, 2004; Wrench, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2008).

- Present yourself as comfortable and relaxed.
- Follow the cultural rules for polite, cooperative, respectful conversation.
- Appear active, enthusiastic, and dynamic.
- Stimulate and encourage the other person to talk about himself or herself.
- Communicate interest in the other person.
- Appear optimistic and positive.
- Appear honest, reliable, and interesting.
- Communicate warmth, support, and empathy.
- Demonstrate shared attitudes and values.

Not surprisingly, plain old flattery also goes a long way toward making you liked. Flattery can increase your chances for success in a job interview, the tip a customer is likely to leave, and even the credibility you're likely to be seen as having (Seiter, 2007; Varma, Toh, & Pichler, 2006; Vonk, 2002).

There is also, however, a potential negative effect that can result from the use of affinity-seeking strategies. Using affinity-seeking strategies too often or in ways that may appear insincere may lead people to see you as attempting to ingratiate yourself for your own advantage and not really meaning “to be nice.”

Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies are another set of strategies often used to appear likeable. We can look at them in terms of negative and positive types (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967; Goldsmith, 2007; Holmes 1995). Both of these types of politeness are responsive to two needs that we each have:

1. **positive face needs**—the desire to be viewed positively by others, to be thought of favorably, and
2. **negative face needs**—the desire to be autonomous, to have the right to do as we wish.

Politeness in interpersonal communication, then, refers to behavior that allows others to maintain both positive and negative face and impoliteness refers to behaviors that attack either positive face (for example, you criticize someone) or negative face (for example, you make demands on someone).

To help another person maintain positive face, you speak respectfully to and about the person, you give the person your full attention, you say “excuse me” when appropriate. In short you treat the person as you would want to be treated. In this way you allow the person to maintain positive face through what is called positive politeness. You attack the person's positive face when you speak disrespectfully about the person, ignore the person or the person's comments, and fail to use the appropriate expressions of politeness such as “thank you” and “please.”

To help another person maintain negative face, you respect the person's right to be autonomous and so you request rather than demand that they do something; you say, “Would you mind opening a window” rather than “Open that window, damn it!” You might also give the person an “out” when making a request, allowing the person to reject your request if that is what the person wants. And so you say, “If this is a bad time, please tell me, but I'm really strapped and could use a loan of \$100” rather than “Loan me a \$100” or “You have to lend me \$100.” If you want a recommendation, you might say, “Would it be possible for you to write me a recommendation for graduate school” rather than “You have to write me a recommendation for graduate school.” In this way you enable the person to maintain negative face through what is called negative politeness.

Of course, we do this almost automatically and asking for a favor without any consideration for the person's negative face needs would seem totally insensitive. In most situations, however, this type of attack on negative face often appears in more subtle forms. For example, your mother saying “Are you going to wear that?”—to use Deborah Tannen's (2006) example—attacks negative face by criticizing or challenging your autonomy. This comment also attacks positive face by questioning your ability to dress properly.

Politeness too may have negative consequences. Over-politeness, for example, is likely to be seen as phoney and is likely to be resented, especially if it's seen as a persuasive strategy.

skill noun ability, effectiveness, competence, proficiency

Using Impression Management Strategies

Try formulating impression management strategies for each of the following situations. In your responses, focus on one or two things you would say or do to achieve the stated goals.

- **To Be Liked.** You're new at work and want your colleagues to like you.
- **To Be Believed.** You're giving a speech on something you feel deeply about; you want others to believe you.
- **To Excuse Failure.** You know you're going to fail that mid-term and you need a good excuse.
- **To Secure Help.** You need some computer help on something that would take you hours to do; you can't bear doing it alone.

- **To Hide Faults.** You don't have as many computer skills as your résumé might indicate and you need to appear to know a great deal.
- **To Be Followed.** You want members of the group to see you as the leader and, in fact, to elect you group leader.
- **To Confirm Self-Image.** You want your colleagues to see you as a fun (but dedicated) worker.

All communication abounds with such strategies (not all of which are ethical); practicing with these strategies will help you understand the ways in which people (including yourself) manage the impressions they give to others.

To Be Believed: Credibility Strategies

If you were a politician and wanted people to vote for you, at least part of your strategy would involve attempts to establish your **credibility** (which consists of your competence, your character, and your charisma). For example, to establish your competence, you might mention your great educational background or the courses you took that qualify you as an expert. To establish that you're of good character, you might mention how fair and honest you are, your commitment to enduring values, or your concern for those less fortunate. And to establish your charisma—your take-charge, positive personality—you might demonstrate enthusiasm, be emphatic, or focus on the positive while minimizing the negative.

If you stress your competence, character, and charisma too much, however, you risk being seen as someone who lacks the very qualities that you seem too eager to present to others. Generally, people who are truly competent need say little directly about their own competence; their actions and their success will reveal their competence.

To Excuse Failure: Self-Handicapping Strategies

If you were about to tackle a difficult task and were concerned that you might fail, you might use what are called **self-handicapping strategies**. In the more

extreme form of this strategy, you actually set up barriers or obstacles to make the task impossible. That way, when you fail, you won't be blamed or thought ineffective—after all, the task was impossible. Let's say you aren't prepared for your human communication exam and you feel you're going to fail. Using this self-handicapping strategy, you might stay out late at a party the night before so that when you do poorly in the exam, you can blame it on the party rather than on your intelligence or knowledge. In a less extreme form, you might manufacture excuses for failure and have them ready if you do fail. For example, you might prepare to blame a poorly cooked dinner on your defective stove.

On the negative side, using self-handicapping strategies too often may lead people to see you as generally incompetent or foolish. After all, a person who parties the night before an exam for which he or she is already unprepared is clearly demonstrating poor judgment.

To Secure Help: Self-Deprecating Strategies

If you want to be taken care of and protected, or if you simply want someone to come to your aid, you might use **self-deprecating strategies**. Confessions of incompetence and inability often bring assistance from others. And so you might say, "I just can't fix that drain and it drives me crazy; I just don't know anything about plumbing" with the hope that the other person will offer help.

eth·ics noun morality, standards of conduct, moral judgment

REFLECTIONS ON ETHICS

The Ethics of Impression Management

Impression management strategies may also be used unethically and for less-than noble purposes. For example, people may use affinity-seeking strategies to get you to like them so that they can extract favors from you. Politicians frequently portray themselves as credible when they are not in order to win votes. The same could be said of the stereotypical used-car salesperson or insurance agent trying to make a sale. Some people use self-handicapping strategies or self-deprecating strategies to get you to see their behavior from a perspective that benefits them rather than you. Self-monitoring strategies are often deceptive, and are designed to present a more polished image than

one that might come out without this self-monitoring. And, of course, influence strategies have been used throughout history in deception as well as in truth. Even image confirming strategies can be used to deceive, as when people exaggerate their positive qualities (or make them up) and hide their negative ones.

Ethical Choice Point

You're interviewing for a job you really want and you need to be perceived as credible and likeable. What are your ethical choices for presenting yourself as both credible and likeable?

But, be careful: Your self-deprecating strategies may convince people that you are in fact just as incompetent as you say you are. Or, people may see you as someone who doesn't want to do something and so pretends to be incompetent to get others to do it for you. This is not likely to benefit you in the long run.

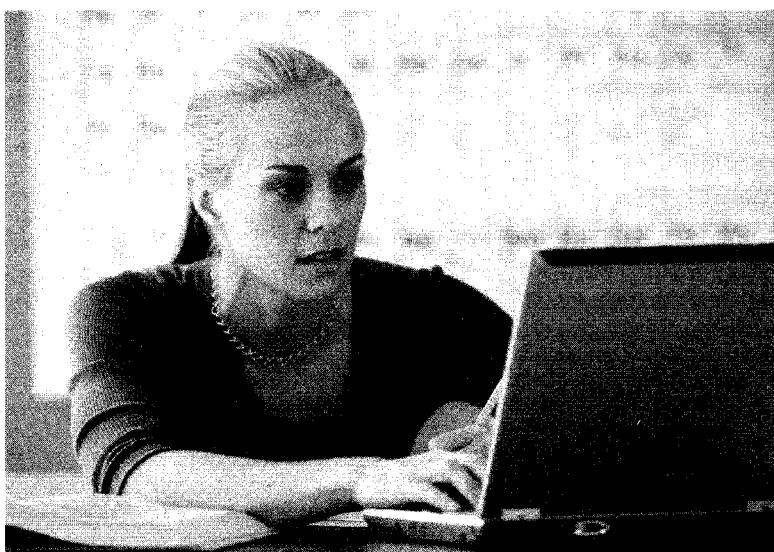
To Hide Faults: Self-Monitoring Strategies

Much impression management is devoted not merely to presenting a positive image, but to suppressing the negative, to **self-monitoring strategies**. Here you carefully monitor (self-censor) what you say or do. You avoid your normal slang to make your colleagues think more highly of you; you avoid chewing gum so you don't look juvenile or unprofessional. While you readily disclose favorable parts of your experience, you actively hide the unfavorable parts.

But, if you self-monitor too often or too obviously, you risk being seen as someone unwilling to reveal himself or herself, and perhaps as not trusting enough of others to feel comfortable disclosing. In more extreme cases, you may be seen as dishonest, as hiding your true self or trying to fool other people.

To Be Followed: Influencing Strategies

In many instances you'll want to get people to see you as a leader. Here you can use a variety of **influencing strategies**. One set of such strategies are those normally grouped under power— your knowledge (information power), your expertise (expert power), your right to lead by virtue of your position as, say, a doctor or judge or



COMMUNICATION CHOICE POINT  **MAKING THE RIGHT IMPRESSION** You've just joined a social networking site which your future employers might look at. **How might you write your profile and use the many features of the site to make yourself appear credible and a perfect future employee? What would you be sure not to do?**

accountant (legitimate power). Or, using leadership strategies, you might stress your prior experience, your broad knowledge, or your previous successes.

Influencing strategies can also backfire. If you try to influence someone and fail, you'll be perceived to have less power than before your unsuccessful influence attempt. And, of course, if you're seen as someone who is influencing others for self-gain, your influence attempts might be resented or rejected.

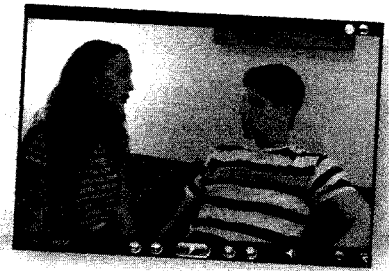
To Confirm Self-Image: Image-Confirming Strategies

You may sometimes use **image-confirming strategies** to reinforce your positive perceptions about yourself. If you see yourself as the life of the party, you'll tell jokes and try to amuse people. This behavior confirms your own self-image and also lets others know that this is who you are and how you want to be seen. At the same time that you reveal aspects of your-

self that confirm your desired image, you actively suppress revealing aspects of yourself that would disconfirm this image.

If you use image-confirming strategies too frequently, you risk being seen as too perfect to be genuine. If you try to project an exclusively positive image, it's likely to turn people off—people want to see their friends and associates as real people with some faults and imperfections. Also recognize that image-confirming strategies invariably involve your focusing on yourself, and with that comes the risk of seeming self-absorbed.

A knowledge of these impression management strategies and the ways in which they are effective and ineffective will give you a greater number of choices for achieving such widely diverse goals as being liked, being believed, excusing failure, securing help, hiding faults, being followed, and confirming your self image.



COMMUNICATION CHOICE POINTS

Revisit the chapter opening video, "My Brother's in Trouble." Recall from the Communication Choice Point video that Marisol and her older brother Jose have always been close, choosing to spend time together and confiding in each other. Lately, Jose's self-esteem has hit a new low and he and Marisol have drifted apart. Jose's long-term relationship ended, an expected A turned into a C, and a hoped-for job interview never materialized.

"My Brother's in Trouble" looks at some of the ways of dealing with self-esteem, especially the choices you have available for helping to raise someone's self-esteem and the relative effectiveness of each of your choices.

Log on to mycommunicationlab.com to view the video for this chapter, "My Brother's in Trouble," and then answer the related discussion questions.

SUMMARY The Self and Perception

This chapter explored the self, the ways you perceive yourself, and perception, the way you perceive others and others perceive you.

The Self in Human Communication

1. Self-concept, the image that you have of yourself, is composed of feelings and thoughts about both your abilities and your limitations. Self-concept develops from the image that others have of you, the comparisons you make between yourself and others, the teachings of your culture, and your own interpretations and evaluations.
2. The Johari window model of the self is one way to view self-awareness. In this model there are four major areas or selves: open, blind, hidden, and unknown. To increase self-awareness, analyze yourself, listen to others to see yourself as they do, actively seek information from others about yourself, see yourself from different perspectives, and increase your open self.
3. Self-esteem is the value you place on yourself. To enhance self-esteem, attack self-destructive beliefs, seek out nourishing others, work on projects that will result in success, and secure affirmation.

Self-Disclosure

4. Self-disclosure is a form of communication in which information about the self that is normally kept hidden is communicated to one or more others.
5. Self-disclosure is more likely to occur when the potential discloser (1) feels competent, and is sociable; (2) comes from a culture that encourages self-disclosure; (3) is a woman; (4) is talking to supportive listeners who also disclose; and (5) talks about impersonal topics and reveals positive information.
6. The rewards of self-disclosure include increased self-knowledge, the ability to cope with difficult situations and guilt, communication efficiency, and chances for more meaningful relationships. The dangers of self-disclosure include personal and social rejection and professional or material losses.
7. Before self-disclosing, consider the cultural rules operating, the motivation for the self-disclosure, the possible burdens you might impose on your listener or on yourself, the appropriateness of the self-disclosure, and the disclosures of the other person.
8. When listening to disclosures, take into consideration the cultural rules governing the communication situation, try to understand what the discloser is feeling, support the discloser, refrain from criticism and evaluation, and keep the disclosures confidential.
9. When you don't want to disclose, try being firm, being indirect and changing the topic, or assertively stating your unwillingness to disclose.

Perception

10. Perception is the process by which you become aware of the many stimuli impinging on your senses. It occurs in five stages: Sensory stimulation occurs, sensory stimulation is organized, sensory stimulation is interpreted-evaluated, sensory

stimulation is held in memory, and sensory stimulation is recalled.

Impression Formation

11. Five important processes influence the way you form impressions: (1) self-fulfilling prophecies (which may influence the behaviors of others); (2) personality theory which allows you to conclude that certain characteristics go with certain other characteristics; (3) primacy-recency which influences you to give extra importance to what occurs first (a primacy effect) or to what occurs most recently (a recency effect); (4) consistency influences you to see what is consistent and to not see what is inconsistent; and (5) attributions of controllability which may lead to the wrong conclusion through a self-serving bias, overattribution, or committing the fundamental attribution error.
12. To increase your accuracy in impression formation: Analyze your impressions and recognize your role in perception; check your impressions; reduce uncertainty; and become culturally sensitive.

Impression Management

13. Among the goals and strategies of impression management are: to be liked (affinity seeking and politeness strategies); to be believed (credibility strategies that establish your competence, character, and charisma); to excuse failure (self-handicapping strategies); to secure help (self-deprecating strategies); to hide faults (self-monitoring strategies); to be followed (influencing strategies); and to confirm one's self-image (image confirming strategies).
14. Each of these impression management strategies can backfire and give others negative impressions. And, each of these strategies may be used to reveal your true self or to present a false self and deceive others in the process.

KEY TERMS

affinity-seeking strategies 70	fundamental attribution error 67	influencing strategies 72	politeness strategies 70
affirmation 54	halo effect 65	interpretation-evaluation 62	primacy effect 65
attribution of control 66	hidden self 53	Johari window 52	primacy-recency 65
blind self 52	horns effect 65	just world hypothesis 66	proximity 61
consistency 65	image-confirming strategies 73	looking-glass self 51	Pygmalion effect 64
contrast 61	implicit personality theory 64	open self 52	recency effect 65
credibility 71	impression formation 63	overattribution 67	reverse halo effect 65
disinhibition effect 57	impression management 69	perception 60	schemata 61
dyadic effect 57		perception checking 68	script 61
		person perception 63	selective attention 61
			selective exposure 61

self-awareness 52	self-disclosure 55	self-handicapping strategies 71	self-serving bias 67
self-concept 51	self-esteem 53	self-interpretations 52	similarity 61
self-deprecating strategies 71	self-evaluations 52	self-monitoring strategies 72	uncertainty reduction strategies 68
self-destructive beliefs 54	self-fulfilling prophecy 63		unknown self 53

THINKING CRITICALLY About the Self and Perception

- 1. Self-Esteem.** Popular wisdom emphasizes the importance of self-esteem. The self-esteem camp, however, has come under attack from critics (for example, Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Bower, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Coover & Murphy, 2000; Hewitt, 1998). These critics argue that high self-esteem is not necessarily desirable: It does nothing to improve academic performance, it does not predict success, and it may even lead to antisocial (especially aggressive) behavior. On the other hand, it's difficult to imagine how a person would function successfully without positive self-feelings. What do you think about the benefits or liabilities of self-esteem?
- 2. Predictability and Uncertainty.** As you and another person develop a closer and more intimate relationship, you generally reduce your uncertainty about each other; you become more predictable to each other. Do you think this higher predictability makes a relationship more stable or less stable? More enjoyable or less enjoyable? Are there certain things about your partner (best friend, lover, or family member) that you are uncertain about, and do you want to reduce this uncertainty? What kinds of messages might you use to accomplish this uncertainty reduction?
- 3. Self-Disclosure.** Some research indicates that self-disclosure occurs more quickly and at higher levels of intimacy online than in face-to-face situations (Joinson, 2001; Levine, 2000). In contrast, other research finds that people experience greater closeness and self-disclosure in face-to-face groups than in Internet chat groups (Mallen, Day, & Green, 2003). What has been your experience with self-disclosure in online and face-to-face situations?
- 4. Your Public Messages.** Will knowing that some undergraduate and graduate admissions offices and potential employers may examine your postings on sites such as MySpace or Facebook influence what you write? For example, do you avoid posting opinions that might be viewed negatively by schools or employers? Do you deliberately post items that you want schools or employers to find?
- 5. Online Dating.** Online dating seems to be losing its stigma as an activity for introverts and the socially anxious. Why do you think perceptions are changing in the direction of greater acceptance of online relationships? What is your current implicit personality theory of the "online dater"?

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