

Interpersonal Communication Begins with the Self: An Introduction to Intrapersonal Communication

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Learning Objectives

In this chapter, readers will explore how our intrapersonal communication and who we are influences how we communicate with others. By the end of this chapter, readers will be able to

- Understand how communication is related to self-concept and define self-concept, self-esteem, and self-image and how they are created
- Explain how biological sex and gender orientation shape our identity
- Understand how we can develop communication competence
- Define strategies for improving our intrapersonal communication

Introduction

Whenever you communicate with others, your view of the world and who you are as an individual influence the interpersonal interaction. If you are asked to tell someone about yourself, to introduce who you are as an individual, what do you say? Try this short, simple exercise. Take out a piece of paper and a pen or open a blank document on your computer and write “I am . . .” Now set a timer for five minutes and complete this sentence by writing as many brief, different descriptions of yourself as possible. Try not to think too much about each description; just jot down what comes to mind.

When the five minutes are over, review the list of traits and characteristics you compiled. What kinds of categories emerged? Did you list physical qualities such as biological sex, ethnicity, or an aspect of your appearance (“I am tall”)? Did you include roles that you play, such as student, accountant, or parent? Did you associate yourself with a group such as a religious affiliation, community organization, or sports team, or with a hobby or activity that you enjoy? Were any of your descriptions about the relationships you have with others (“I am Carl’s girlfriend” or “I am Abby’s father”)? Did you describe any of your personality characteristics, talents, or abilities? Did you note an aspect of your online persona (“I am a food blogger”)?

As you will learn in this chapter, you create your own reality. Social scientists use many terms such as *self-concept*, *self-image*, and *self-esteem* to describe your “self.” **Intrapersonal communication** refers to the internal communication within and to yourself. You communicate with yourself in a number of ways, some of which are similar to the conversations you have with other people. Your thoughts are a form of intrapersonal communication. You also communicate with yourself when you send verbal messages to yourself, either out loud or silently. For instance, you might congratulate yourself with a message such as, “Wow, I did a great job on that project,” or scold yourself by saying, “I’m an idiot for doing that!” You also communicate by being a friend to yourself with statements such as, “You need a break,” or by encouraging yourself with statements like, “You can do this. I know it.”

Chapter 2 examines the conscious and unconscious factors that influence how you see yourself and how you communicate with yourself. In this chapter, you will attempt to answer “Who am I?” by exploring the terms *self-concept*, *self-image*, and *self-esteem* along with factors such as biological sex, gender orientation, online presentation of self, and communication competence that influence your communication with yourself and with others. You will also learn ways to improve your communication competence over your lifetime.

2.1 Communication and the Self-Concept

Consider again the exercise presented in the chapter introduction. The contents of this list differ for every person and represent their unique **self-concept**. Self-concept can be defined as one’s description or portrayal of him- or herself as a person, “based on an organized collection of beliefs and feelings about oneself” (Myers, 1993, p. 188). Self-concept is comprised of the qualities that are present in an individual (Bailey, 2003). The list that you created, which we will refer back to throughout this chapter, shows that you have several components to your self-concept. These components of “you” are shaped and altered by aspects of self-concept, including the looking-glass self, social comparisons, culture, and the self-fulfilling prophecy. Together, these components combine to create who you are and shape your self-concept over time.

How Self-Concept Is Created

Where does your concept of self come from? Most researchers believe that who you think you are is a complex mix of how you see yourself; how others see you; what parents, teachers, and peers have told you about yourself that you have recognized and internalized; and what your society or culture tells you that you are or that you should be. For example, psychologist Michael Argyle (1983) provided a summary of four key factors that contribute to development of self-concept:

- The reaction of others
- Your comparison with others
- The social roles you play in society (e.g., I am a mother/father and a teacher so I have to watch my language and behave in a certain way)
- The groups with which you identify

Your self-concept is learned; it is organized, it is dynamic, and it is changeable over time (Purkey, 1988). You construct this sense of self through communication with yourself and with others—by what you tell yourself and what others tell you about yourself. In other words, your self-concept is first externally imposed by others and then internally incorporated in your thoughts, feelings, actions, and communication.

When you were born, you had no clear concept of yourself. However, you expressed yourself by communicating with others through cries and other sounds, through facial expressions, and through bodily actions such as grabbing a finger that was extended toward you. At some point you realized that your behavior resulted in responses from others. You cried and received something to eat, or your diaper was changed. Then your behavior became purposeful: You made that cry or that facial expression because you had learned that doing so would elicit a response from others. You most likely did not think through this action and reason “If I cry, I will be fed or changed,” but, at a conscious or unconscious level, you communicated because you wanted to achieve a specific goal. As you matured, your behavior was more consciously planned to get your needs and desires met.

Throughout life, you have an infinite number of opportunities to express yourself and to interact with people. These people may express opinions about your behavior by smiling or frowning at you or by making verbal judgments about your behavior or appearance. “That baby sure cries a lot, doesn’t he?” “You are a very pretty child.” “She is stubborn and willful.” “He plays well with other children.” The opinions that other people express to you or about you affect you in ways you might not realize. They influence the way you see yourself, the way you respond to difficulties in life, and the way you interact with others.

Through your communication with others, with your words and your nonverbal behaviors, you can influence the perceptions others have of you (Yeung & Martin, 2003). In fact, part of the



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▲ The social roles you play and the groups you identify with can contribute to your self-concept.

way you construct your self-concept is by choosing to accept or reject what other people tell you about yourself. To grow and learn about yourself, you must be open-minded about other people's opinions. At the same time, you can also choose to disregard statements that others make about you, if you do not think they are valid. For example, if someone judges you in a way that you do not accept, try to respond by saying (to yourself or to someone else), "Thank you for your opinion. That's an interesting story, but it isn't my story. It is not true for me." How you evaluate your skills and abilities, how you perceive objects and situations in the world, your values, your vocabulary, and your ability to use language all influence how you communicate. Though self-concept is an internal process, it is learned, maintained, and can change through interpersonal communication. Now, let's look more at what contributes to our self-concept.

The Looking-Glass Self

Humans are social beings, and in the early twentieth century, American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley believed that people always see themselves in relation to other people. Your sense of self, he believed, is formed by imagining how you appear to other people. Cooley used the term **looking-glass self** to describe this view of your self-concept, and the looking-glass self is the first way that self-concept is created. He stated, "Each to each a looking-glass / Reflects the other that doth pass" (Cooley, 1902, p. 152).

Cooley's rhyme suggests that other people are like a looking glass, or a mirror, in which you can view yourself from others' perspectives. In other words, you are always considering how you look to other people. You might have a specific person in mind that you want to impress, or you might just have a general sense of "other people" and how they might judge you. In essence, we treat others' views of us as clues to who we are. These clues may be accurate or inaccurate, harmful or beneficial, temporary or enduring, but they should not be automatic. Look back at the "Who am I?" list that you created. How many of those descriptions are based on how you think others view you? To what degree do these descriptions reflect how you view yourself?

When you see yourself in a mirror, or think about yourself, you may be pleased or displeased by what you see, but not simply because it does or does not reflect who you want to be. You also imagine how other people will judge you. This judgment creates a feeling in you such as pride or embarrassment or humiliation. For example, in the presence of a person you think is beautiful, you may feel ugly. In the presence of someone who seems to be less fashionable than you, you may feel sophisticated and in vogue. According to Cooley (1902), you are most likely to be affected by the judgments of people who have authority over you such as parents, teachers, and bosses.

You might argue that you, or someone you know, are not affected by what other people think. However, when you say, "I am not ashamed" or "I don't care about other people's opinions," that does not mean that you have not considered them. In fact, to come to this decision, you had to make a conscious choice to disregard the judgment of others. Instead of shame about an action you took, for example, you might choose an attitude of apathy and not allow yourself to be bothered by the opinion of others, or you might even feel pride at disobeying the rules of society. However, Cooley (1902) believed that the thoughts of other people are always there.

Social Comparison

According to social psychologist Leon Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, humans have a fundamental impulse to evaluate their abilities and opinions. When there is no objective assessment such as a test or a numerical evaluation available, we rely on **social comparisons** and evaluate our abilities and opinions by comparing ourselves to other people. In particular, Festinger's (1954) theory specifies that this act of social comparison is more likely to occur in relation to a

particular group that is important or central to you in some way, called a **reference group**. The results of these social comparisons—whether you conclude that you compare favorably or unfavorably to members of a group on a particular characteristic—is the second element that contributes to your self-concept. For example, you may think that you must have certain possessions because others in your reference group have them, or you must communicate in a certain way to fit in with a group you want to impress. Comparisons to certain reference groups can explain why teenagers adopt the dress and the slang expressions of their peers.

Research has consistently found that individuals who compare themselves to images in different forms of media such as magazine advertisements, television shows, and commercials also feel dissatisfied with their own bodies (Nabi, 2009). Such findings support Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. Online interactions are also a source of social comparison. For example, one research study examined how the content of others' social networking profiles could impact users' social comparison processes (Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011). Using fictitious social networking profiles, the researchers found that users who viewed profile pictures of individuals who were very attractive had a more negative image of their own bodies than those who viewed unattractive profile photographs. When male participants viewed profiles of successful male users, they perceived a larger discrepancy between their ideal and their current career paths compared with men who viewed profiles of less successful males (Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011). It is thus likely that the size and number of our reference groups will expand as use of social networking increases, making social comparisons even more significant in shaping self-concept.

Culture

At the broadest level, the culture in which we are raised is a third source of self-concept. Culture, as we discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3, is inherently interrelated with how we communicate. The impact of culture is reflected in what others—including our parents, authority figures, peer groups, and larger social structures such as the media and political parties and organizations—tell us about ourselves. Culture also influences what its members consider socially significant. For example, psychologist Bella DePaulo (2007) calls American cultural bias against individuals who are not in romantic relationships “singlism,” and this prevailing cultural belief could make individuals who are single feel as if they do not measure up to those who are in relationships, thus contributing to a more negative self-concept. Because culture is such a major part of who we are, it can also have an impact on self-concept.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Your interpretation of situations, as well as the messages that you use to describe them, can affect your approach to particular situations and, subsequently, your behavior in these situations. Your experiences condition you to see the world in a particular way, and such **perceptions** are difficult to change. Thus, in a very real way, you create your own reality. You approach communication encounters with certain expectations and, through your perception and your symbolic use of language, you can create a **self-fulfilling prophecy** in which you see what you expect to see and hear what you expect to hear. For example, when college students enter a conflict interaction expecting that it will be intense, they later report that it indeed involved a number of intense components, including the use of personal attacks, and they experienced emotional upset and subsequent interference with their day-to-day activities (DiPaola, Roloff, & Peters, 2010).

Health communication researchers also describe a self-fulfilling prophecy that can occur in doctor–patient interactions (Perloff, Bonder, Ray, Berlin Ray, & Siminoff, 2006): If a patient believes that the doctor will not respect him or the questions that he asks, he is likely to make fewer inquiries during an appointment. The doctor will then think the patient is not motivated

or interested in his health and will provide less information, or information that uses too much confusing medical jargon. The doctor's response affects the patient's understanding, influences the likelihood that he will follow treatment recommendations, and confirms his belief that the doctor does not respect him and did not provide the best treatment. The best method for addressing such self-fulfilling prophecies is to keep in mind that your expectations about a person or situation should not control how you communicate in an interaction.

Self-Image

Self-concept, as you just learned, refers to your view of yourself in particular situations or with respect to specific traits. Self-image, on the other hand, is a more general, broad view of yourself; you might say that it is all the characteristics of your self-concept rolled into one complete picture of yourself. Psychologist Dennis Coon (1994) defines **self-image** as “the total subjective perception of oneself, including an image of one's body and impressions of one's personality, capabilities, and so on” (p. 471). Your self-image is more permanent than your self-concept; it is the combination of both your internal view of yourself and the evaluation of others, as well as your physical appearance, and the integration of your experiences, desires, and feelings (Bailey, 2003). For example, let's say that when you were a child, you were laughed at when you tried to dance or failed to catch a fly ball in a baseball game. So on the list of traits that make up your self concept, which you created at the beginning of the chapter, you may have listed that you are a poor dancer or are a bad baseball player. If you have many negative concepts such as these, you may form a generally negative self-image of yourself as uncoordinated or unathletic.

Your self-image is formed and transformed, over time, again through your interactions and communication with other people, as you internalize what you learn about your strengths and weaknesses. This transformation, however, is very slow and gradual. You continually receive evaluative messages from others about you and your abilities, and through this information you form a mental image of your physical appearance, of your successes and failures, of your adequacy, and of your worth. Self-image tends to be an either-or set of opposites. Either you think you are pretty or you see yourself as ugly; you are smart or you are dumb. When you have a positive

self-image, you appreciate your assets and your potential, while being realistic about your imperfections and limitations. When you have a negative self-image, you focus on your faults and weaknesses, distorting failures and imperfections and minimizing your successes and talents (Cleveland Clinic, 2009). Remember, though, that you can change your self-image by refusing to accept or believe what others have told you.

Body image is an important part of your self-image. Your body image involves how you think, feel, and respond to your physical attributes (Cleveland Clinic, 2009). Research on body image is most prevalent with regard to women; however, men have personal body image issues as well. In recent years, diagnosed eating disorders



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▲ How you think about yourself, at every age, affects your physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It can also influence your interactions with others.

among men are on the rise, and steroid and supplement use to improve appearance or strength has increased dramatically. These issues seem to be associated with men's preoccupation with their weight, their dissatisfaction with their bodies, poorer attitudes about health, and also the growth of men's fitness magazines (Tager, Good, & Morrison, 2006).

All societies have ideals for body image of both men and women, and these ideals are reflected in the judgments of family and peers as well as in art, literature, and the media. *Sports Illustrated* magazine's annual swimsuit edition and *People* magazine's annual "Sexiest Man Alive" list are examples of how media promote ideals of female and male bodies. Research confirms this relationship: A meta-analysis found that, across 25 published experiments, the more females are exposed to media messages that depict a thin body ideal, the lower their satisfaction with their own bodies (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002).

Plastic surgery and body art such as tattoos are other ways in which some people choose to alter their bodies in hopes of changing their self-image. Cosmetic surgery, once an activity that people hid from others, is now performed at elite medical institutions (Elliott, 2004). According to the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2013), Americans underwent over 10 million cosmetic medical procedures in 2012. Cosmetic procedures, particularly ones that are minimally invasive such as injections and collagen fillers, also increased 87% from 2000 to 2011 (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2012). Individuals also spent a staggering \$11 billion for cosmetic procedures in 2012, striving for a "perfect look," a figure that includes \$6.7 billion for surgeries and \$4.3 billion on nonsurgical procedures such as injections and laser treatments (American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2013).

Self-image is important because how you think about yourself affects your physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being and how you respond to events in your life. Self-image can also determine the quality of your relationships because you carry that self-image into all your interpersonal interactions with others. Weight reduction and plastic surgery can be positive steps to improving your view of yourself. However, your self-image is not what you look like but what you tell yourself that you look like. Changing your exterior self also requires internal changes in how you see yourself. Changing self-image takes time and work. It requires you to think and feel differently about yourself, and it means you must alter how you respond to your body. People who thought they were fat, for example, and lost a considerable amount of weight might continue to think of themselves as fat, even if they would no longer be considered so by others.

Whatever image you now hold about yourself, your self-image is not permanently fixed. Self-image can even shift in elderly individuals as their circumstances change. In one study of elderly persons who had recently moved into a retirement home, this change impacted their self-image in three ways: (1) They felt that their bodies, over which they now had less control compared to when they were younger, had become less recognizable; (2) they experienced greater physical and psychological fragility and less freedom to make decisions or come and go as they pleased; and (3) they looked to small events, such as helping at mealtimes and looking at photographs of family, to provide them with inner strength and dignity (Franklin, Ternestedt, & Nordenfelt, 2006).

As you age, every stage of your life is thus associated with changes, but you can learn to accept these changes and to develop a healthy view of yourself. If you have a negative self-image, you can learn to develop a more accurate view of yourself (Cleveland Clinic, 2009). A positive self-image begins by accepting and loving yourself and allowing yourself to be accepted and loved by others. The list below provides some strategies for improving your self-image suggested by a premier medical facility, the Cleveland Clinic:

- Review your self-concept list.
- Identify negative childhood labels.
- Challenge distorted thinking about yourself.
- Accept and love yourself as you are today.
- Refuse to accept media assumptions about the ideal body appearance.
- Stop comparing yourself to others.
- Define some realistic personal goals and objectives about your self-image.
- Develop your strengths.
- Give yourself positive affirmations.
- Remember that you are unique.
- Learn to laugh and smile at yourself.
- Remember how far you have come. (Cleveland Clinic, 2009)

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem consists of your broad sense of self-worth and the level of satisfaction you have with yourself; it is how you evaluate and judge yourself (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). A good self-image is associated with increased self-esteem; a poor self-image often is linked to poor self-esteem, lack of confidence, and insecurity. Some researchers argue that self-esteem is central to how we view the world and to our quality of life, indicating the importance of this aspect of self (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Although it is desirable to have high self-esteem, some individuals have such a high opinion of their self-worth that they believe they are better, more deserving, or more special than others. An inflated self-image or extremely high self-esteem can negatively impact your friendships, work relationships, and romantic relationships. Researchers have found that people who keep trying to prove their worth focus excessively on themselves and have less successful relationships (Park, Crocker, & Vohs, 2006).

On the other hand, people who have low self-esteem tend to engage in excessive attempts to seek reassurance of their self-worth from others. They look for affirmation to make themselves feel more secure. However, the attempts frequently backfire, and they end up pushing away the people they most want close to them. Because a person with low self-esteem needs constant reassurance, other people begin to feel frustrated and irritated and often socially reject the person (Van Orden & Joiner, 2006). In these and other types of interactions, self-esteem can influence interpersonal communication. For example, the more we perceive that our romantic partners are committed to us and to our relationship, and the more we ourselves experience this relationship commitment, the higher our self-esteem (Rill, Baiocchi, Hopper, Denker, & Olson, 2009). We can also use communication to provide others with **esteem support**, which “is a form of social support that is provided to others with the intent of enhancing how they feel about themselves and their attributes, abilities, and accomplishments” (Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011, p. 326). Amanda Holmstrom’s (2012) research has found that esteem support is particularly helpful to others when it is offered as praise, as a comparison of the situation to someone or something that is worse, or as an expression of caring and affirmation that the situation will ultimately end well. Providing others with praise, affirmation, and acceptance in these ways can then assist in raising those individuals’ self-esteem (Vonk, 2006).

In fact, Roos Vonk (2006) argues that being accepted and affirmed by those we are close to is the best path to truly raising our self-esteem; this acceptance from others allows us to feel

comfortable and on solid ground. Because we feel this comfort and stability, we then become more open and less defensive with others, and we start to feel relaxed and in control. This feeling translates into our increased ability to grow and to be more determined to better ourselves. This, in turn, reinforces our increased self-esteem (Vonk, 2006). Thus, the relationship between self-esteem and how we relate to others is crucial for building and maintaining increased self-esteem.

Healthy self-esteem means thinking highly of yourself and that you can easily create and sustain the confidence that is essential to your successes in life. You have to work to develop your self-esteem. When you are successful at something, you create confidence in yourself. This confidence enables you to take on new challenges, and each new success leads to further self-confidence and increased self-esteem (see *Web Field Trip* for more on how social media can build sense of self).

WEB FIELD TRIP

Social Media Use and Our Sense of Self

Researchers Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell have coined the term *narcissism epidemic* to reflect the broad cultural aspects that might play a role in an excessive sense of self-interest and entitlement. Social media use is one such aspect of this self-involvement. In an opinion piece for the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/>), Twenge deciphers the possible connections between social media use and positive self-views. Conduct a search on the *New York Times* website for Twenge's article, "It's a Narcissism Enabler," and then take a moment to read about the premise of *The Narcissism Epidemic* (<http://www.narcissismepidemic.com/index.html>). Then consider the questions provided.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you agree with the assessment that individuals who are more self-interested tend to thrive on social media? Why or why not?
2. What connections does the author find between social media use and self-esteem?

2.2 Self-Expression and Interpersonal Communication

Now that you have a better understanding of the self and the factors that create your self-concept, self-image, and self-esteem, how do these aspects of the self affect your communication with other people? Refer back to the "Who am I?" list that you created at the beginning of this chapter. Do any of the categories or descriptions of who you are influence how you communicate with others? If so, why are these categories so central to how you communicate with people? Has your communication from others shaped which descriptions are most important to who you are?

So far in this chapter, we have focused on how the messages from others throughout your life affect your view of the self. However, a great deal of research in the fields of communication and psychology has determined that just as your interpersonal communication with other people affects your view of yourself, the way in which you communicate internally also has an effect on your ability to build positive relationships with other people. A consistent set of attitudes that define who you are—your identity—affect your communications with yourself and with others and will be discussed in Chapter 3, but two other important ways in which intrapersonal and interpersonal functions are interrelated are described next.

Biological Sex and Gender

One of the most controversial topics in communication concerns the communication styles of men and women and the question of whether the two sexes really communicate differently. This question is best answered by focusing on *how* communication scholars characterize sex. If we only measure how males and females biologically differ—which the majority of communication researchers do by simply comparing how males and females communicate—the differences are almost nonexistent. In fact, a landmark analysis of over 1,000 research studies that compared males' and females' communication patterns based on their biological makeup found that biological sex differences only provide 1% of an explanation for how and why we communicate the way that we do (Canary & Hause, 1993). In other words, according to this analysis, whether we are born and live biologically as a male or a female has little to no influence on how we communicate interpersonally. But researchers can also consider male and female differences in communication by focusing on socially and culturally constructed ideas of sex and gender.



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▲ Unlike biological sex, which is physiologically determined, gender orientation is a social construction based upon a combination of several different individual, societal, and relational factors.

Gender Orientation

Biological sex and gender orientation are related but different. Biological sex is physiologically determined. **Gender orientation**, on the other hand, is psychologically created and is based partially upon a combination of one's biological sex, group membership, and culture, and a host of other individual, relational, and societal factors. Specifically, one's gender orientation is a "social, symbolic construction that expresses the meanings a society confers on biological sex" (Wood & Dindia, 1998, p. 20). In fact, some researchers argue that gender orientation can be a problematic way to consider differences between males and females because it is at least partially based on a society's gender stereotypes (Canary & Hause, 1993). Others note that gender orientation involves identifying with norms for feminine and masculine sex roles (Wheeless & Duran, 1982). This means that some people's gender orientation can be more influenced by traditional roles and social norms than others. However, because gender orientation takes into

account an individual's physiological makeup and his or her environment, it is typically a better representation of males and females than biological sex alone.

When directly comparing biological sex and gender orientation in relation to different aspects of interpersonal communication, gender orientation is consistently a better predictor. For example, researchers found that gender orientation was a more useful concept than biological sex for understanding how romantic partners express jealousy (Aylor & Dainton, 2001). Specifically, masculinity was associated with destructive, antisocial methods of expressing jealousy, and femininity was linked to a direct, constructive form of jealousy expression called integrative communication. In addition, gender orientation is a better predictor than biological sex when understanding how individuals maintain their relationships (Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000).

Like biological sex, we all possess a particular gender orientation. Gender orientation should not be considered as on a continuum, with masculinity and femininity at each extreme and androgyny at the midpoint. Instead, each gender orientation is an individual construct or dimension

that is uniquely related to behavior (Stephen & Harrison, 1985). For example, a masculine gender orientation is consistently linked to the increased use of instrumental and assertive communication in interactions, including accomplishing goals, influencing others, or finishing a job or task, whereas a feminine orientation is more closely associated with expressive and affiliation messages such as focusing on relational communication, closeness with others, and emotions (Aylor, 2003; Palomares, 2012). An androgynous individual, who possesses aspects of both masculine and feminine gender orientations, could have more satisfying relationships than either masculine or feminine individuals because he or she has the advantage of being able to employ both communication styles with some degree of skill (Ickes, 1985). Androgynous individuals also are best able to adapt and be flexible, as well as focus on and be positive toward others, during interpersonal interactions (Wheeless & Duran, 1982). If you are curious about your own gender orientation, one of the most popular assessments of this concept, Sandra Bem's (1974) Sex-Role Inventory is provided in the *Self-Test* feature.

Different Cultures versus Gender Similarities Hypotheses

Another way to consider whether males and females are more alike or different in how they communicate is by understanding two competing ideas: the different cultures and the gender similarities hypotheses. Linguist Deborah Tannen's (2001) work, which includes the bestselling book *You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation*, argues that men and women have different communication styles because they grow up in different worlds or cultures. Tannen supports the **different cultures hypothesis of gender**, as does John Gray, whose book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, takes this notion quite literally. According to this hypothesis, although young boys and girls occasionally play together, they spend most of their time playing in groups of the same sex. Tannen notes boys' and girls' favorite games are different, and their ways of using language in their games are different as well. She states:

Boys tend to play outside in large groups that are hierarchically structured. Their groups have a leader who tells others what to do and how to do it. . . . It is by giving orders and making them stick that high status is negotiated. . . . Boys' games have winners and losers and elaborate systems of rules that are frequently the subjects of arguments. (Tannen, 2001, p. 43)

Girls, on the other hand, says Tannen, engage in games such as jump rope, hopscotch, or playing house, where everyone gets a turn, cooperation is required, and there are no winners or losers.

In contrast, Janet Shibley Hyde (2005) and Kathryn Dindia (2006) are two of many proponents of the **gender similarities hypothesis**, which states that males and females are much more alike than different in terms of how they think, feel, and communicate. Though there are some differences between males and females, the differences are quite small and generally inconsequential. Dindia amusingly portrays the rather minimal size of these differences by titling a book chapter based on this position, "Men Are from North Dakota, Women Are from South Dakota." If we consider which hypothesis the bulk of scholarly research supports, in both communication and psychology, the gender similarities hypothesis is overwhelmingly upheld (e.g., Canary & Hause, 1993; Hyde, 2005). Thus, though biological sex is a central aspect of the self, being male or being female does not fundamentally alter how we think, feel, or communicate.

Overall, we must be cautious about attributing communication differences solely to biological sex or even gender orientation. However, when you communicate across gender lines, keep in mind that, like culture, socialized gender roles or orientation may slightly predispose women and men to interpret messages differently in certain circumstances. As you have learned thus far in this text, in interpersonal communication, it is important to check your perceptions with the other person to determine if he or she interprets a message in the same way that you do.

SELF-TEST

Bem's Sex-Role Inventory

To complete this self-test, use the following scale to rate yourself on each item:

- 1 for *never or almost never true*
- 2 for *slightly not true*
- 3 for *somewhat not true*
- 4 for *neither true nor untrue*
- 5 for *slightly true*
- 6 for *somewhat true*
- 7 for *always or almost always true*

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. self-reliant | 22. analytical | 43. willing to take a stand |
| 2. yielding | 23. sympathetic | 44. tender |
| 3. helpful | 24. jealous | 45. friendly |
| 4. defends own beliefs | 25. has leadership abilities | 46. aggressive |
| 5. cheerful | 26. sensitive to the needs of others | 47. gullible |
| 6. moody | 27. truthful | 48. inefficient |
| 7. independent | 28. willing to take risks | 49. acts as a leader |
| 8. shy | 29. understanding | 50. childlike |
| 9. conscientious | 30. secretive | 51. adaptable |
| 10. athletic | 31. makes decisions easily | 52. individualistic |
| 11. affectionate | 32. compassionate | 53. does not use harsh language |
| 12. theatrical | 33. sincere | 54. unsystematic |
| 13. assertive | 34. self-sufficient | 55. competitive |
| 14. flatterable | 35. eager to soothe hurt feelings | 56. loves children |
| 15. happy | 36. conceited | 57. tactful |
| 16. strong personality | 37. dominant | 58. ambitious |
| 17. loyal | 38. soft-spoken | 59. gentle |
| 18. unpredictable | 39. likable | 60. conventional |
| 19. forceful | 40. masculine | |
| 20. feminine | 41. warm | |
| 21. reliable | 42. solemn | |

Scoring

Add up your ratings for items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, 46, 49, 55, and 58. Divide the total by 20: This is your masculinity score.

Add up your ratings for items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38, 41, 44, 47, 50, 53, 56, and 59. Divide the total by 20: This is your femininity score.

Female sex-typed: If your masculinity score is less than 4.9 (the approximate median for the masculinity scale) and your femininity score is above 4.9 (the approximate femininity median)

(continued)

Male sex-typed: If your femininity score is less than 4.9 and your masculinity score is above 4.9

Androgynous: If both your masculinity score is above 4.9 and your femininity score is above 4.9

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Consider Your Results

Use the table below and take another moment to evaluate your scores. Then consider the following questions.

Sex type	Masculinity score	Femininity score
Female	below 4.9	above 4.9
Male	above 4.9	below 4.9
Androgynous	above 4.9	above 4.9

1. Based on your score, are you classified as more female sex-typed, more male sex-typed, or more androgynous? Are you surprised by your score and your gender orientation based on this self-test?
2. Do you think that the individual items accurately reflect the specific gender orientation they represent in the test?
3. Do you think these scores illustrate the distinctions between gender orientation and biological sex?

The Self Presented Online

As mediated interactions continue to increase and become more central in our interpersonal communication, we are more aware of how we present ourselves online. For example, Facebook, which was launched about a decade ago in 2004, has 1.15 billion monthly and 699 million daily users, as of June 2013 (Facebook Key Facts, 2013). In addition, the number of Internet users on Twitter doubled from 8% in 2010 to 16% in 2012 (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Such exponential growth of these social networking sites also means that we have new online arenas to help us craft and showcase to others who we are as individuals. What is unique about how we present ourselves online versus offline? According to Catalina Toma (2012), the nature of Facebook self-presentation is shaped by the following technological parameters, all of which could be applied to other social networking sites as well:

- There is a large audience, including family members, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers.
- The asynchronous nature of social networking provides extended time to think about and create claims about the self.
- The ability to edit the content of one's social networking profiles allows users to continually alter or refine presented information.
- These unique online parameters create a highly controllable and selective presentation of the self and should motivate users to design desirable, yet honest, self-presentations.

Three-quarters of students reported that their Facebook profile pages accurately represented who they were (Stern & Taylor, 2007). A review of college students' Facebook use determined that the majority of student users posted personal information, such as their birthdays, hometowns,

sexual orientation, and relationship status (Foon Hew, 2011). By reporting this type of information, Facebook users establish an online identity by categorizing themselves as members of specific demographic groups—such as by ethnicity, gender, or sexuality—and even co-cultures—such as fans of specific types of music, movies, or teams (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). These online identities can be carefully constructed to reflect cultural and social norms and values and are accomplished by using positive language to describe the user as being outgoing and socially desirable (Zhao, Grasmuch, & Martin, 2008). In fact, a positive image of one's self on Facebook significantly boosted students' self-esteem (Toma, 2012).

However, online identity construction can also be less direct and explicit. For example, the number and quality of one's online friends is a more direct method for examining online identity construction (e.g., Utz, 2010; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). Researchers can also get a glimpse of users' online personalities via images, status updates, and posts on friends' walls (Zhao et al., 2008). These indirect sources of information about an individual's online self continue to expand. Facebook, for example, now includes the Ticker, which allows users to view their friends' Facebook activities in real time; there are also image-based social networking sites such as Pinterest and Instagram (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

What do these findings tell us about our online selves? First, though we believe our online identities closely reflect who we are offline, there is evidence that we have the motivation and ability to craft slightly different, and likely better, versions of ourselves online. These positive and selective self-presentation options can improve our job prospects, as well as our self-esteem. Second, it is difficult to fully monitor and alter our online identities because there are many direct and indirect messages that can provide information about the self. Finally, we don't yet know how newer sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest help to create and shape online identities because researchers have focused almost exclusively on the role of Facebook. But because these newer sites are either image-based or focused on a limited number of characters, they are likely different from Facebook in how they create the online self and so require further study. Take a look at *IPC in the Digital Age* to learn more about your Facebook self.

IPC IN THE DIGITAL AGE

What Does Your Facebook Profile Say about How You See Yourself?

When you set up an online profile, you try to identify how you see yourself and how you want others to see you. You ask yourself basic questions: What core things should people know about me? Is it helpful or necessary to share my gender, birthday, or occupation? Do I have a religious or political view, and if so, is it important enough to my identity to list it online? After you've set up your online profile, you choose the people you want to associate with and the groups you want to join; you decide which of your hobbies and interests to include, based upon how they affect and reflect how you see yourself. And finally, you decide if you should post pictures on your profile and which pictures send specific messages about who you are and what you value. Do you want to post a professional portrait where every hair is in place, a photo acting silly with friends, or a photo of you hiking a particularly impressive mountain? Social networking sites like Facebook prompt you to contemplate such questions from a unique perspective. The combination of items you post on your page, including comments and images, is a representation of you.

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A research study conducted by undergraduates in communication at Chapman University was the first known to formally analyze young college students' Facebook profile photographs. These student researchers, led by Noelle Hum, argue that group affiliations, hobbies, and other self-categorizations on Facebook allow each user to construct an image of the self, or an online identity, that is communicated to other online users. A Facebook profile photograph, along with a cover photograph feature added in 2011, is "one of the most telling pieces of self-disclosure or image construction" (Hum et al., 2011, p. 1828). An analysis of 150 college student profile photos revealed that these images tended to be posed, were appropriate for all audiences to view, depicted little to no physical activity, and contained only the profile user. The content of these profile pictures was also consistent for both male and female users. Hum and her colleagues (2011) conclude that users likely select their profile photographs with the goal of portraying a professional, appropriate image in anticipation of a postgraduation job search. Now apply these findings to your online identity.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Look at your Facebook profile photograph and think about what it might convey to others. Is your photo posed or candid? Does it show you engaged in a physical activity or sitting or standing still? Is it appropriate (i.e., would you be embarrassed if your 6-year-old nephew or your grandmother saw it)? Are you alone in the photo or are there others with you?
2. Think about these questions for other public online images of yourself, including your Facebook cover photograph, your Twitter photo, and the photos you post if you have Instagram or Pinterest accounts. Do these images offer information about different parts of your identity? Did you make a conscious choice to convey these different identities?
3. Consider again the different photos associated with your separate online networks. If each site is meant to convey a different element of your identity, what is the purpose of these separate online identities? Why are they different?

2.3 Developing Communication Competence

Before you read this chapter, many aspects of your self-concept, self-image, self-esteem, and self-expression were already an unconscious part of your life. By focusing on and consciously considering these factors, you have already taken the first step to improving your intrapersonal communication and your communication competency. What is communication competence? *Competent* sometimes has a connotation of "good enough" or "passable." However, as it relates to interpersonal communication, the word can have an entirely different meaning: Competence is what we think of when we envision the qualities of a skilled communicator (Spitzberg, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Communication researchers Brian Spitzberg and William Cupach introduced the concept of communication competence nearly 30 years ago, and their definition of the essential aspects of communication competence is our focus here. Though Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) believe that being interpersonally skillful is essential for developing interpersonal relationships, they also estimate that 7–25% of adults are not interpersonally competent. Yet with some guidance, communication competence is an important interpersonal skill that many individuals can improve.

Recall from the previous chapter that effectiveness and appropriateness are both essential parts of communication competence. However, these two concepts can conflict, and learning to successfully balance them can be a challenge. The following sections will elaborate on both concepts, briefly describe three factors that can improve your communication competence, and introduce a test that you can complete to determine your current level of communication competence.

Communication Effectiveness

Being an effective communicator means, quite simply, achieving your goals. **Effectiveness** is linked to your ability to get what you want from an interaction. This can be as simple as achieving shared meaning with another person; when the message you encode is decoded in a similar manner. Effectiveness can also involve specific goals, or intentions, that you bring to and take part in during an interaction. For example, you might make an appointment with your boss at work to ask for a raise, and, in this case, you would not classify the communication as effective simply because you and your boss both understand what the meeting is about. Instead, you would feel that the interaction is effective only if your boss agrees to increase your salary. Thus, effectiveness can be assessed at multiple levels of an interaction, but we tend to focus on the immediate goal of the conversation.

Though being an effective communicator seems simple, it becomes more complicated when you acknowledge that there are two communicators with separate but interdependent communication goals. In other words, is it possible for both individuals to be effective communicators, to achieve multiple outcomes? The answer to this question depends on a number of factors. Consider again the meeting you scheduled with your boss at work. If the communicators' goals conflict—you seek a raise but your boss's goal is to not agree to one—then it is difficult to achieve mutual communication effectiveness. However, if you and your boss compromise, each giving up something in order to reach an agreement that works for both of you, then you and your boss will likely leave the interaction feeling as if you at least somewhat accomplished your goals. However, if both communicators have similar goals—you and your boss both want you to get a raise—it is much easier for everyone to feel as if they are effective. Further, it is possible to still feel you are effective even if you do not achieve all of your initial goals. Communication is a process, which means that your goals might change over the course of an interaction or that a new goal might become more important. Thus, if your boss responds to your request for a raise by telling you that the company is actually in trouble and that they are struggling just to keep you on as an employee, your goal will likely switch from seeking more money to making a strong case to keep your job.



Jupiterimages/BananaStock/Thinkstock

▲ Social norms can help you determine what is appropriate in a specific communication interaction. In U.S. culture, for example, shaking hands with a new acquaintance is a customary behavior in professional contexts.

Communication Appropriateness

Communication competence is also linked with **appropriateness**, or taking into account the rules, norms, and expectations of others in an interaction. For example, communicators are appropriate when they learn and follow **rules** during an interaction, which are directions indicating the obligated, preferred, and prohibited behaviors in certain contexts and situations (Shimanoff, 1980). These rules take into account the broader context of the interaction, and the context of the interaction assists in determining which appropriateness standards are to be met (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011).

Some rules are established by a society or culture in the form of social norms. For

example, in U.S. culture, it is a customary social norm to shake hands when you first meet someone in a professional context. Rules or norms can also be unique to a relationship, such as monogamy when in an exclusive relationship with a romantic partner. Some rules can even be specific to an individual. For example, a professor might ask students to refrain from using laptops or tablets during class. Such rules and expectations are often implicit, meaning that they are not directly and clearly stated, yet we are aware of them. In fact, we are often most mindful and conscious of rules and expectations when they are broken.

As noted above, sometimes it is difficult to balance effectiveness and appropriateness during an interaction, but both are necessary elements of communication competence. The ability to be both effective and appropriate takes practice and shows that you have interpersonal skill, which Spitzberg and Cupach define as “repeatable goal-directed behaviors, behavioral patterns, and behavior sequences that are appropriate to the interactional context” (2011, p. 489). You might get what you want if you are effective but not appropriate, yet doing so will likely upset, hurt, or damage your relationship with the other person. Conversely, if you follow the rules and act the way you are expected to—if you are appropriate but not effective—you might not get what you want. However, communicators who make an effort to get along and treat others with respect are more likely to achieve their goals.

Factors that Facilitate Communication Competence

How can we become competent communicators? According to Spitzberg and Cupach’s **model of communication competence**, there are three things that can assist us in being more competent: (1) knowledge, (2) motivation, and (3) skill (1984). **Knowledge** is the necessary awareness of which behaviors or messages are best in a particular situation. This knowledge can be about content, such as the topic of the conversation or the other communicator. For example, you might have knowledge about someone’s food or movie preferences. But knowledge can also be about procedure, such as how an interaction should or could proceed. For example, you might know how to best solve a problem or predict someone’s reaction to a message. Both content and procedural knowledge can improve communication competence.

The second factor that facilitates competence is **motivation**, which Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) define as a force that energizes and guides us to approach or avoid in a social situation. In other words, we have to actually *want* to be effective and appropriate in order to be competent. We may have the knowledge that we need to be competent, but choose to not use it. Conflict is an example of an interpersonal situation where communicators often are not motivated to be competent. If you are engaged in a conflict with a close relational partner, you might get so upset and frustrated by the topic and the messages exchanged that you intentionally decide to insult your partner, punch a hole in a wall, or storm out—all of which display limited communication competence.

Finally, skill is a factor that facilitates competence and is similar to the general notion of interpersonal skill discussed above. **Skill** is the ability to demonstrate the behaviors deemed most competent in a particular situation or context. Skill is dependent on knowledge and motivation; we must possess both before we can develop skill. However, even if we are knowledgeable and motivated, there is no guarantee we will be skilled in an interaction. For example, you might know how to behave and be motivated to act accordingly in a specific situation, but perhaps you still perform poorly. This type of response can happen in a job interview, a public speaking situation, and even a first date.

Complete the communication competence scale provided in the *Self-Test* here. Communication competence is an important interpersonal skill, and it requires awareness of our individual

communication patterns. Try to be honest with yourself as you complete the scale, or even ask a trusted friend, family member, or romantic partner to complete it on your behalf. Then evaluate your results and reflect on areas you could improve. The next sections will discuss techniques for improving your intrapersonal communication and developing your communication competence.

SELF-TEST

Interpersonal Communication Competence

The following self-test is based on Spitzberg and Cupach's model of communication competence (1984). Answer each item honestly as it currently applies to you in typical conversations with others. Use a 5-point scale for your responses to each item. Rate each question according to the following scale:

- 1 for *strongly disagree*
- 2 for *slightly disagree*
- 3 for *unsure*
- 4 for *slightly agree*
- 5 for *strongly agree*

1. I act in ways that meet situational demands for appropriateness.
2. I successfully achieve my interpersonal goals.
3. I show my understanding of others by reflecting their thoughts and feelings to them.
4. It is easy for me to manage conversations the way I want them to proceed.
5. I show my engagement in conversation both nonverbally and verbally.
6. I use a wide range of behaviors, including self-disclosure and humor, to adapt to others.
7. I am aware of the rules that guide social behavior.
8. Once I set an interpersonal goal for myself, I know the steps to take to achieve it.
9. I know that empathy means to try to see it through others' eyes and feel what they feel.
10. I know how to change topics and control the tone of my conversations.
11. I know how to respond because I am perceptive and attentive to others' behaviors.
12. I have enough knowledge and experiences to adapt to others' expectations.
13. I want to communicate with others in an appropriate manner.
14. I am motivated to obtain the conversational goals I set for myself.
15. I want to understand other people's viewpoints and emotions.
16. I want to make my conversations with others go smoothly.
17. I want to be engaged in the conversations I have with other people.
18. I want to adapt my communication behavior to meet others' expectations.

Scoring

Now we will identify your separate and overall communication competence scores. To do this, we will do a bit of math to determine your average score based on the categories outlined in the sections below. This will give you a score, out of 5, where

- Higher values (generally 3.5 to 5) indicate greater communication competence.
- Middle values (generally 2.5 to 3.5) indicate moderate communication competence.
- Lower values (generally 1 to 2.5) indicate less communication competence.

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Your possible overall score will be between 18 and 90. Scores for each of the nine subscales (*skill, knowledge, motivation, adaptability, conversational involvement, conversation management, empathy, effectiveness, and appropriateness*) can be averaged to obtain the communication competence total score, or you can add up each of your question ratings and divide the total by 18.

Subscales and Criteria

One dimension includes three subscales that are measured via the following identified questions:

- Skill—questions 1–6
- Knowledge—questions 7–12
- Motivation—questions 13–18

Instructions: For each of the separate dimensions, determine your score by calculating the average (add up your ratings for each question assigned to the dimension and then divide the total by 6).

A second dimension includes six criteria that are measured via the following identified questions:

- Adaptability—questions 1, 7, & 13
- Effectiveness—questions 2, 8, & 14
- Empathy—questions 3, 9, & 15
- Conversational management—questions 4, 10, & 16
- Conversational involvement—questions 5, 11, & 17
- Appropriateness—questions 6, 12, & 18

Instructions: For each of the separate dimensions, determine your score by calculating the average (add up your ratings for each question assigned to the dimension and then divide the total by 3).

Sources: Self-test adapted from the eTrees Consortium (2013, July 31), *Needs Analysis Report* (2013, July 31); originally based on data from Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1984). *Interpersonal communication competence*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Consider Your Results

As noted earlier, a higher score indicates a greater overall communication competence. If one or more of your scores are relatively low, these may be areas that you need to be aware of, and you should attempt to increase your skill in such areas when communicating with others. Now take a moment to evaluate your scores and consider the questions below.

1. A high score indicates that you have some degree of skill regarding that factor. Which factor that facilitates competence did you score highest in? Which score was lowest?
2. After reviewing the specific items that you rated the lowest, are there specific elements of competence that you can improve upon?
3. Based on what you have read in this chapter, how can you improve one or more specific factor that facilitates your communication competence?

2.4 Improving Your Intrapersonal Communication

The relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal communication can be explained as follows: Who we are as individuals is inextricably linked with how we see the world, how we communicate with others, and with how others see us. Thus, understanding the different aspects of self—self-concept, self-image, and self-esteem—can help you become a more competent communicator. Below, we offer some specific strategies to improve your intrapersonal communication.

Increase Your Self-Awareness

There are two techniques you can use to increase your self-awareness. The first is to be conscious about how you interpret your world. Take a step back and evaluate how you communicate with yourself and with others. Pay attention to what you choose to focus on, and ask yourself what internal factors, such as past experiences and self-esteem, influence how you approach and perceive a situation. Look for differences between past experiences and present circumstances. Why might such differences exist?

Education is the second technique you can use to increase your self-awareness. Some people perceive and understand significant differences or nuances in a given scenario; elements that are not noticed by people whose senses are not trained to perceive the same things. For example, music sounds different to a trained musician than it does to an untrained ear, and wine connoisseurs can perceive subtle flavors in wines that are indistinguishable to someone who has not trained his or her palate to recognize flavor nuances. As you continue to study interpersonal communication, the knowledge you gain about the communication process will increase your awareness of how you and others communicate. Learning to use critical thinking and learning to differentiate among facts, opinions, observations, and inferences can help you strengthen your self-awareness and recognize that your view is one of many. See *Everyday Communication Challenges* to learn more about understanding how you communicate at the office.

EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Workplace Feedback—Honestly Getting to Know Your Career Self

It is difficult to objectively evaluate your own work performance, as well as the image you convey. However, you are often very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the people you work with every day. So how do you learn to identify your value and perceived image as an employee? You can ask your coworkers and supervisor if they would be willing to evaluate you. In fact, many employers already use a form of employee evaluation known as 360-degree feedback. This type of evaluation allows individual employees, like you, to get a direct assessment of their work-related performance from their employers as well as the people in their personal lives. By using a multi-rater feedback system, you can learn more about your own strengths and weaknesses as an employee.

Even if your workplace does not offer 360-degree feedback, you likely receive some formal type of feedback. For example, many companies conduct an annual review of their employees according to a number of factors, as well as offer comments about each employee's strengths and weaknesses. Getting the honest opinions of coworkers, supervisors, customers or clients, and even the people who know you best outside of work may help you discern what kinds of tasks you enjoy, are most skilled at, and what areas of your job you can learn to grow into. If the feedback includes constructive criticisms, resist the urge to immediately discount such comments. Remember that you have a particular view of yourself and that others might view you differently. Openly and honestly consider all forms of feedback that you receive—both positive and negative—and determine how you might integrate this feedback into your future workplace interactions to improve your overall performance. This sort of feedback mechanism can help give you a better picture of yourself. So if you want to be

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a better communicator, seek out and consider the advice of people who know you in each of your different communication contexts.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Review any formal feedback you have received for your work performance. What were you praised for? What were some suggested areas of improvement?
2. If you seek formal or informal feedback from coworkers or your superior, what self concepts from this chapter do you find to be most relevant to how you responded to this feedback?
3. How can others' feedback of your professional performance uniquely inform how you communicate and do your job in the future?

Accept Yourself

Review the “Who am I?” list you created at the beginning of this chapter. Which of the items in your list are positive and which are negative? Are there many aspects you would like to change or improve? Do you like yourself? If you accept and like yourself, despite your faults and failings, you are more likely to carry a positive attitude into your interpersonal communication with others. If you accept yourself as you are, you are more likely to accept others as they are too. If you can admit and forgive yourself for mistakes, you are more likely to allow others to make mistakes and to forgive them as well.

One way to build acceptance of yourself is to look at how you interpret your own behavior and consider how realistic you are in appraising your abilities and behavior. Do you rationalize or make excuses for unacceptable behavior or, on the other hand, do you fail to give yourself credit? For example, if you do well on a test, do you tell yourself that it was just luck or that the test was easy, or do you attribute your success to your hard work and study? Another way you can better accept yourself is to pay attention to and internalize the positive feedback that you receive from others.

Remember that you can choose what you will accept and “own” about yourself and what you will reject. Some people who received negative feedback about themselves from other people when they were children carry these negative self-images throughout their lives. You do not have to be a victim of other people's opinions. You can, as an old southern expression says, “Rise above your raising.” You are not what others think of you, and you are not necessarily what others have told you that you are. You have the ability to create your own identity.

Practice Your Skills and Be Adaptable

Finally, to improve your intrapersonal communication, you must practice the communication skills you are learning about in this text. Completing the exercises and activities in this text, and employing the tools you acquire, can help you be a more competent communicator. In addition, learning to be more aware and mindful of what works in your interactions with others, and what doesn't, can build your knowledge, which then contributes to increased competence. Adaptability, however, is also an important skill you can develop to increase communication competence. You should strive to be flexible and tailor your messages to each specific person and interaction; realize that one message or way of communicating will not work in every, or even most, situations. Reflect on an interaction as it occurs and adjust how you encode and decode messages.

Summary and Resources

The self is a critical component in communication. It affects the way you interact with other people and the way they interact with you. Intrapersonal communication occurs when we communicate with ourselves, via our thoughts, or internal dialogue. Your self-concept is a collection of the traits and characteristics you use to describe yourself. Most researchers believe that who you think you are is a complex mix of how you see yourself; how others see you; what parents, teachers, and peers have told you about yourself; and what your society or culture tells you that you should be. Your self-concept is learned, organized, and dynamic, or changeable. You develop your self-concept through interactions with other people who act as a mirror reflecting to you the way others see and judge you. This is known as your looking-glass self. You internalize these viewpoints of other people, and they affect the way you act today as an adult and the way you communicate with yourself and with others. You also compare your abilities and opinions to those of other people (social comparison). Culture has the ability to shape how you see yourself. However, you have the ability to view yourself objectively, to change your self-concept, and to make choices about what judgments of others you will accept or reject.

Your self-concept gives rise to a broad, more permanent view of yourself, your self-image. The self-image is the overall mental picture you have of yourself—the combination of both your internal view of yourself and the valuation of others, as well as your physical appearance and body image, and the totality of your experiences, desires, and feelings. Self-image is important because how you think about yourself affects your physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It also influences how you respond to life and can determine the quality of your relationships with others.

Your self-image, in turn, results in your level of self-esteem, the beliefs and feelings you have about yourself. Self-esteem is tied to your interaction with others. Esteem support from another person can help you build your self-esteem. In addition, being accepted and affirmed by others can raise your confidence in yourself, which then helps to enhance your self-esteem. However, your self-concept, self-image, and self-esteem are not destiny. You can build your self-image and your self-esteem by successful experiences. Your successes create self-confidence, which enables you to take on new challenges and to increase your self-esteem in an upward spiral of success. You can also enhance your self-esteem through affirmations and positive self-talk.

Aspects of your identity can also influence how you communicate with others. Your biological sex, which is the physiological difference between males and females, is traditionally thought to have a large influence on how we communicate. However, research finds that this is not so. Rather, our gender orientation, or our socially constructed expression of how society views biological sex, is a better predictor of how we communicate than our biological sex. This viewpoint is also consistent with the gender similarities hypothesis, which states that males and females are more alike than different in how they communicate. In contrast, the different cultures hypothesis of gender states that males and females fundamentally differ in how they communicate with one another.

One way to improve your intrapersonal and interpersonal communication is to develop your communication competence. Being competent involves balancing your effectiveness with your appropriateness. This ability to balance is a skill that can be developed by acquiring knowledge about how to be competent, being motivated to be a competent communicator, and further working to develop and refine competence skills. Overall, you can learn to change the way you view the world and the way you communicate with yourself and with others by increasing your

self-awareness, building an identity around acceptance of yourself, and practicing the skills of communication competence that you are learning in this text.

Key Terms

appropriateness A communicator's consideration of the other individual's expectations during an interaction.

different cultures hypothesis of gender Theory stating that males and females are believed to be much more different than alike in terms of how they think, feel, and communicate.

effectiveness A concept linked to a communicator's ability to achieve a desired result in an interaction.

esteem support Social support provided to others that helps improve how they feel about themselves.

gender orientation An individual's psychologically constructed gender identity, which is based on a combination of social, cultural, and personal factors.

gender similarities hypothesis Theory stating that males and females are believed to be much more alike than different in terms of how they think, feel, and communicate.

intrapersonal communication Internal communication within and to the self.

knowledge Awareness of which behaviors or messages are best in a particular situation.

looking-glass self An early theory about self-concept, conceptualized by Charles Horton Cooley, that states one's sense of self is formed by imagining how he or she appears to other people.

model of communication competence A concept identified by Spitzberg and Cupach that identifies knowledge, motivation, and skill as three factors that facilitate communication competence.

motivation An inherent force that drives a communicator to either approach or avoid an interaction during a social situation.

perception The process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing sensory information during experiences, which conditions us to see the world in a particular way.

reference group Groups we identify as important or central to us in some way and that can have a significant influence on our sense of self.

rules Directions, which are usually implicit, that indicate the obligated, preferred, and prohibited behaviors in certain contexts and situations.

self-concept One's description or portrayal of him- or herself as a person.

self-esteem The beliefs and feelings we have about our self-worth; how we feel about ourselves.

self-fulfilling prophecy The tendency to see what we expect to see and hear what we expect to hear based on preconceived expectations.

self-image The total subjective perception we have of ourselves including body image and impressions of our personality and capabilities.

skill The ability to demonstrate the behaviors deemed more competent in a particular context or situation.

social comparison A concept, identified by Festinger, that pinpoints the human impulse to evaluate our abilities and opinions by comparing ourselves to others.

Critical Thinking and Discussion Questions

1. Which aspect of the self—self-concept, self-image, or self-esteem—do you find most challenging or are you most negative about in your own intrapersonal communication? What can you do to improve how you view that aspect of self?
2. How much do you think that others' impressions of you affect how you view yourself? What can you do to combat the effect of negative external messages on your view of yourself?
3. How much does your online self reflect who you are offline? How much effort do you put into how others view who you are online?
4. How much do you believe that your gender orientation contributes to how you communicate? Are there particular situations or conversational topics where your gender orientation becomes particularly important?
5. Which component of communication competence—effectiveness or appropriateness—do you tend to focus on in your interactions with others? How can you improve your communication competence using the concepts of knowledge, motivation, and skill?