Introduction

> Not sure if this will work but thought I'd give it a try. I met you in line at the Ralph's on Sunset near La Brea Tuesday evening. You were in front of me and I commented on some of the food items you were purchasing. You told me you were on your way home to cook dinner. I wanted to chat more but you left before I had the chance to say anything. If you're reading this, feel free to send me an email and let me know what food item I commented on. It'd be cool to continue our conversation. (Craigslist.org anonymous post, "Missed Connections," October 2013, Los Angeles)

Even the first few minutes of the initial interaction with another person can be powerful: The fact that people place ads to reconnect with relative strangers is an example of just how powerful. The above excerpt is a "Missed Connections" advertisement posted on Craigslist. Such missed connections occur when individuals meet each other, exchange glances, exchange smiles, or initiate a conversation. At least one person finds the other attractive or memorable, even in that brief interaction, but the interaction abruptly ends, for one reason or another, before contact information is shared or future plans are made. "Missed Connections" ads also indicate that interpersonal communication does not just happen: For people to communicate, one person must take the initiative and make contact with another person. The other person must then respond in some way for a connection to occur. And sometimes, even that initial connection is broken, often to one communicator's regret.

Earlier in this text, we defined communication as a process—a series of steps in which an idea is formed, a message is encoded, and this message is sent via a channel to a receiver who decodes or interprets the message and responds to it along with some type of verbal or nonverbal feedback. Now we turn our attention to how we first make these connections with other people, engage in conversations to get to know them better, listen and share information, and begin to form and initiate close relationships. In Chapter 7, we will discuss how relationships are initiated. **Relationships** are the important and close connections or associations that we forge and maintain with other people via communication. These relationships include our romantic partners, friends, and family members. We explore the importance of first impressions and perceptions, how we carry on conversations with others, and theories that describe how and why we are attracted to others. We also take an in-depth look at the important concepts of self-disclosure and the stages of interpersonal relationships and their contributions to the interpersonal communication process.

7.1 First Impressions Matter: Perceptions and Impressions

When you initially meet someone, you almost immediately form an impression of the person—and the person forms an impression of you. These impressions are formed based on how individuals look, including their physical attractiveness and what they are wearing, what they say, and how they sound. As you learned in Chapter 2, when you interact with others, each person presents an image of himself or herself. We each have a self that we display in social situations, a public personality that we show to other people. Others form initial impressions of us by way of the self that we present to the world, and we form similar impressions of others based on their self-presentations. To make sure that you create the most positive impression possible when you first meet someone, you need to understand the process of creating first impressions and the ways you can manage the impression you create with others. We make assumptions and create

expectations of other people using the four perceptual methods of selective perception, schemas, stereotypes, and prototypes, as well as the principles of implicit personality theory. ese perception concepts, as well as impression management, formation, and the four defining components of impression, are discussed in the next sections.

Perceptions

At the most basic level, when we communicate we must first perceive others and the world before us. Perception is a dynamic process that involves selecting, organizing, and interpreting the world around us. We do not objectively see things that are external to us; rather, we become aware of objects, events, people, and messages by perceiving them via one or more of our five senses. We cannot process and attend to everything we are exposed to in our daily lives, but perception allows us to make sense of and organize what we do encounter by way of our senses. e process of perception involves three general stages:

1. **Selection**, which occurs when something stimulates our senses in some way, and we respond by focusing on or attending to it

2. **Organization**, which occurs when we arrange the information that we have perceived in a manner that makes sense to us

3. **Interpretation**, which is a subjective process that occurs when we explain and assign meaning to the thing that we have selected and organized

Within these stages, there are four specific concepts that we employ when we perceive something, and we describe each below.

Selective Perception

Consider the room or area that you are in right now. Look around you and try to take in everything that you can. ough you may attempt to perceive each and every thing that surrounds you at any given time, doing so is impossible. ere are too many stimuli. us, in the selection part of the perception process, we engage in *selective perception*, directing our attention to the task of perceiving some stimuli and thus ignore or disregard other stimuli. e stimuli that we choose to perceive catch our attention in any number of ways. It may be appealing to the eye, such as a physically attractive individual or an adorable puppy. It may be the most dominant thing in your presence, like extremely loud music from the apartment next door. It may be something that you personally relate to, such as a vase just like the one that your grandmother displayed in her living room. Or it may be something that aligns with your beliefs, values, or preferences, such as a pennant on the wall that is associated with a sports team that you root for. You are likely to notice these types of stimuli first in the selection process, and then continue on to organize them in the next step of the process of perception.

Schemas

Assume that you have been invited to attend a music concert at a local venue. You have been to that theater before, and you remember that the acoustics are wonderful, and all the seats o er great views of the stage. You know that parking is very convenient, and several restaurants are nearby where you can go to grab a bite to eat before the concert or to relax afterward. You also own an album, produced by the musical group that is performing, and you like their music very much. You are excited about attending the concert, and you expect to have a terrific evening.

Your expectation that the upcoming concert should be fun is based on the operation of a **schema**. Schemas are organized collections of information about a subject that are stored in your memory

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▲ We have schemas for social situations, objects, and people and their social roles. One person can occupy several of these social roles at the same time, such as grandmother, teacher, and community leader.

from past experiences. These mental structures or templates help you process and categorize new information quickly, rather than starting from a blank slate every time you encounter a new situation. As such, schemas are a significant part of the organization process of perception because they are based on your own experiences. You tend to believe strongly in the validity of your schemas, and they create expectations about a situation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

You have schemas about social situations, objects, and people and their social roles. We all assume roles in our lives—functions or positions that we have in our society. We may occupy several of these social roles at the same time. For example, someone may simultaneously be a wife, mother, daughter, doctor, and community volunteer, but each of these roles has a different set of expected behaviors. A **person schema** is an expectation about what a specific person will be like, based on certain characteristics he or she has. For example, you are referring to a person schema when you say something like, "Every person I've known named Jose has been a nice guy!" A **role schema** is a set of opinions you have about how someone in a certain role should look or behave. For example, you might state, "Parents should not swear in front of their children!" These person schemas and role schemas are mental images based on your personal experiences or on the behavior of other people in your life who have played these roles. You make judgments about people based, in part, on whether they conform to these opinions, and your impressions contribute to your decision about whether to get to know this person better.

For example, let's assume that all the librarians you have known have been women, have worn glasses, and have liked classical music. If you were about to meet someone and were told that this person was a librarian, you would most likely expect this person to possess these traits. When you saw this person, you would tend to look for characteristics and behaviors that confirmed your expectations about librarians and to remember those traits if they were present. What schemas do you carry with you about people and the roles they play? Can you identify schemas you have about students? Teachers? Think about how your schemas might influence your judgments when you meet new people who assume these roles.

Stereotypes

When we use stereotypes, we are answering the question "What can I expect it to do?" by relying on predictive, broad generalizations. As discussed earlier in this text, stereotypes are a specific type of schema, and are preconceived opinions you hold about someone or something. A stereotype assumes that all members of a particular group possess the same or similar characteristics. Whereas schemas are based on your own experiences, stereotypes are usually not based on reason, fact, or past experiences. You may form stereotypes based on what others have said, images portrayed by the media, or mistaken beliefs you have about people. Stereotypes can also be guided or determined by cultural beliefs.

Schemas are more likely to be related to individual characteristics of a person, but stereotypes ignore the individual characteristics and assume that the person possesses personality traits or holds attitudes that are typical of an entire group. Stereotypes are often negative and reflect prejudices, preconceived opinions of dislike, hostility, or unjust behavior. Schemas, on the other hand, do not necessarily have negative connotations (Pennington, 2000).

Prototypes

Another way to organize the perceptions that you select is by using prototypes. Like a stereotype, a **prototype** is a generalization—a broad, sweeping statement that may or may not be based on facts or experience. Prototypes represent a mental image you have about the attitudes and behaviors of the ideal person in a specific role. Your prototype of a best friend, for example, would probably include what you think his or her personality should be like, what interests and beliefs he or she should have, and what attitudes he or she should hold about certain subjects.

is prototype is the epitome of what you envision a best friend to be.   e person who actually becomes your best friend will probably have a great deal in common with your prototype of a best friend. However, if your friend changes and develops new interests and di erent attitudes, the gap between the prototype and the actual person will grow. If that happens, the relationship might change, and, although you might still be friends, you are no longer best friends (Pennington, 2000).

Prototypes, like stereotypes and schemas, are obviously oversimplifications and generalizations. To some extent, we need to generalize across the many perceptions we select each day in order to categorize them in a useful and e cient way. You thus carry these mental images into your interactions with other people, but these ways to organize your perceptions become problematic when you start to rely on them as your only source of information about something. When you meet people, it is important that you keep an open mind and guard against letting your preconceived ideas unduly influence your early judgments of others. In that way, you can get to know the other person as the unique individual that he or she is based on how that person acts and the interactions that you share. If you build a relationship with that person, over time some of your initial impressions will be confirmed and others will be discarded (Zunin, 1986).

Implicit Personality Theory

How do these perceptions work together to form a general impression or perception of someone? ;_ b^[U f bWia` S^[fk fZWdk provides an explanation of how perceptions are predicted to fit together. According to this theory, once we know a small amount about someone's characteristics or traits, we use that small bit of information to help fill in our general expectation about that person with other similar qualities. Which personality characteristics go together is typically determined by our previous experiences and interactions with others.

For example, research (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Langlois et al., 2000) has consistently found that people who perceive that someone is very physically attractive will also think that he or she is kind, friendly, generous, and smart as well, even if they have no direct evidence for the existence of those personality traits. Grouping together positive personality characteristics in this way is called the ZS^a WWf. In contrast, the dWhWdWZS^a WWf, also called the *horn effect,* describes the grouping of negative characteristics on the assumption that the individual only has other negative traits as well. As with stereotypes and prototypes, we use implicit personality theory to organize and interpret our interactions with others.   e danger associated with this theory occurs when we do not check our perceptions via communication or are unwilling to learn more about the person in order to more accurately understand who the individual is.

Impressions

At the broadest level, an **impression** is the overall effect of someone or something, which is based to some extent on your experience with it. There are three important aspects of impression that researchers consistently study: how we form impressions of other people, how long these impressions last, and how we attempt to manage the impressions that others form of us. Interpersonal communication is instrumental in assisting us in forming impressions of others and managing others' impressions of us.

Impression Formation

The old saying, "You never get a second chance to make a good first impression" is true. Not only do we form impressions and make judgments and decisions about people quickly, but also these split-second impressions are often long lasting and difficult to change. With **impression formation**, you are decoding, or interpreting, dimensions of another person's image. For example, when you first meet someone, studies have shown that you form general impressions of the person based on facial appearance alone—and you form these impressions in less than a tenth of a second. Based on that split-second impression, you immediately judge the attractiveness, trustworthiness, and likeability of the other person, and you also form impressions of specific traits, such as competence or aggressiveness, that you believe the person possesses (Willis & Todorov, 2005).

Researchers have found that you usually approach new people with preconceived ideas about their personalities, attitudes, and beliefs as well as certain expectations of how they should behave (Uleman, 1999). Any number of things can aid in forming these impressions. For example, wearing the color red in a job application context led participants in one study to form impressions that the job candidate was less intelligent and would be less likely to be hired in comparison to applicants wearing blue or green items of clothing (Maier et al., 2013). In this way implicit personality theory and stereotypes can come into play when you form impressions of others.

But in many ways, the ability to make quick assessments of other people is a valuable trait to possess; the judgments you make can help you detect potential threats and keep you safe. You continually encounter strangers as you walk down the street, sit next to them in a crowded movie theater, or pass by them in a grocery store parking lot. Your safety may depend on your ability to judge the personalities and accurately predict the behavior of people you encounter. This ability to form accurate impressions of others can help you sense if it is a good idea to give your number to someone that you have just met, or if you can trust the person you are talking to via an online dating website enough to meet in person.

Impression Management

At the same time that we are forming long-lasting impressions of others, we also trying to influence the impressions that others form of us. The act of encoding, or creating, dimensions of your own image is called **impression management**. When you are preparing to go out on a first date with someone, for example, you probably pay particular attention to your appearance. You take special care with your grooming, the clothing you choose to wear, and other aspects of your physical appearance. When you see the other person, you are most likely on your best behavior, and you do your best to smile and convey a positive impression. These are all attempts to create a good first impression.

Social psychologists have identified two techniques that people commonly use for impression management: **self-enhancement** and **other-enhancement**. Self-enhancement includes behaviors, such as paying attention to how you dress, describing yourself in positive ways, and playing up your accomplishments, which help you present yourself in the best way possible. Researchers

have found that people who used self-enhancement techniques when trying to make a date with another person were more successful than people who were more honest or modest about their accomplishments (Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1998).

Other-enhancement attempts to create a favorable impression by making the other person feel good. e most obvious method is by flattering the other person, but flattery should not be overdone because it can backfire and seem insincere. Agreeing with another person, being interested in what the other person has to say, and asking for advice on issues are other-enhancement techniques that can create positive impressions in others. In addition, complimenting another person is an other-enhancement technique that has been found to increase the likelihood that the other person will comply with a request that you make of him or her (Grant, Fabrigar, & Lim, 2010).

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▲ We can use other-enhancement, a type of impression management, to create a favorable impression in an interaction by making the other person feel good.

It might seem as if these techniques and methods are manipulative or insincere. However, e ective use of impression management relies on one's ability to identify when and how to best apply such techniques. e key is to avoid manipulative use and overuse. We all want to put our best foot forward, yet our impression management should not create a false impression. We should present the best aspects of who we are.

Four Components of Impressions

When we form an impression of someone, we may evaluate him or her by one or more distinct individual components. According to Dale Leathers and Michael Eaves (2008), there are four components, or dimensions, of impressions:

1. Credibility
2. Likeability
3. Interpersonal attractiveness
4. Dominance

When we work to manage others' impressions of us, these dimensions are often the most important aspects that we want to showcase. **Credibility** emphasizes believability and trustworthiness. Someone who is perceived as credible will likely have more influence over others. **Likeability** emphasizes our determinations about how a able and friendly someone is, and **[` fWbWa`S^ attractiveness** describes how sociable, interesting, and emotionally expressive an individual is. Finally, an individual's level of power and assertiveness is described as **dominance**.

Depending upon the situation, one of the dimensions of impression may be more important than others (Leathers & Eaves, 2008). For example, during a job interview, the candidate will likely focus more on managing his or her credibility and likeability dimensions. In addition, we may base these impressions on a number of di erent communication cues, including what individuals verbally say and how they look and speak. For example, surgeons who used a more dominant

tone of voice with their patients were more likely to have been involved in malpractice suits than surgeons with less dominant vocal tones (Ambady et al., 2002). (See *Everyday Communication Challenges* for a look at how impressions of others and ourselves are interpreted online.)

Overall, it is important to remember that your impressions of others are not necessarily complete and accurate. ese impressions can be wrong, especially if the other person is actively trying to manage the impression you receive. But how do we know if your impressions are correct or incorrect? You can test your first impressions in one of three ways:

1. By communicating your impressions to the other person and asking if he or she agrees with your judgment
2. By communicating with other people about the person and asking if their opinions are similar to yours
3. By observing their actions to see if their behavior matches your prediction (Pennington, 2000)

EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Is the Grass Always Greener on Your Friends' Facebook Pages?

The introduction and growth of Facebook has changed the way that we communicate in many ways, but has it also altered our perceptions and impressions of ourselves? Has it changed how we perceive others? As we discussed in Chapter 2, social media users will often consciously craft an image of themselves online that is positive and that will garner favorable impressions from others. These positive social media selves have been found to improve users' perceptions of themselves and other peoples' perceptions of the user.

For example, a study by Hui-Tzu Grace Chou and Nicholas Edge (2012) sought to determine if the online selves of others affect users' impressions of themselves. This research considered these general ideas:

- Were users comparing the status of their own lives to what they saw on their Facebook friends' pages?
- Did they perceive that they were as happy as and having as much fun as their Facebook friends, based on the posts they read and the pictures that they viewed of them?
- If they did not perceive themselves as happier than their Facebook friends, how did such a comparison make the users feel?

Chou and Edge (2012) surveyed 425 college students and examined variables such as years since joining Facebook and hours spent on Facebook in relation to perceptions that others are happier and have better lives than the participants. Results indicated that the more hours a user spent on Facebook, the more he or she felt that others had a better life. In addition, participants who had been Facebook users for longer were more likely to believe that others were happier and less likely to feel that life was fair. Interestingly, the opposite was the case when participants spent time with their friends in a face-to-face context: Individuals were less likely to perceive that others were happier and had better lives.

Chou and Edge (2012) argue that Facebook users may remember positive photos and information seen on Facebook more readily and then conclude from such information that others are better off. This was not the case during in-person interactions—where there are more cues and messages about the person and less ability to manage one's impression compared with Facebook—which

(continued)

indicates that social networking sites are a unique context for forming and managing impressions and perceptions. Apply these findings to your own perceptions of your online friends, and then consider the following questions. Remember that most users are likely trying to project a positive image of themselves online and that these depictions are only partial glimpses of each individual life. Spending face-to-face time with your friends will give you a more accurate impression and allow you to see that the grass is not always greener on the other side!

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you ever compare yourself to your online friends in relation to what they post about themselves online? Does doing so make you feel better or worse about your own life?
2. How might these research findings impact what you post about yourself online? Will you consider how others might perceive what you post?
3. How can social network users enjoy the content posted by others without allowing it to negatively impact them?

7.2 Conversation Management

We often tend to take everyday conversations for granted because they are such a common part of our lives, but conversations are the means through which we share facts and information as well as our ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people. Sometimes your connections with other people are simply ritualistic and fleeting encounters with people you will probably never see again, such as when you say "hi" to a passerby on the sidewalk or comment about the long lines to a fellow traveler at the airport. At other times, these encounters are brief such as when you talk with a supermarket clerk about the cost of groceries, chat with a neighbor while you walk your dog, or carry on a friendly conversation with a friend at a potluck dinner. ese conversations might also occur in the context of an employment interview, where your ability to communicate competently may determine whether you are hired for a job or passed over for a promotion. However, a brief encounter with another person also has the potential to be the beginning of a new relationship.

Connecting with other people is an integral part of daily life, and your ability to competently engage in everyday conversations is crucial to your well-being and success. Some people are **gregarious**; they enjoy meeting people, getting to know them, asking them questions, and exchanging information. However, many other people are just the opposite. ey have di culty initiating a conversation with a stranger; they are shy; they get tongue-tied, self-conscious, or embarrassed in social situations; or they never know what to say when they have to engage in conversations. In this section, we will examine the importance of everyday conversations when initiating interpersonal relationships with others.

The Conversation Process

Even everyday activities put us in close proximity with other people in our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and our social organizations. In every situation, there is a process we use to meet and engage in conversations with others. In the next sections, we discuss the main components in the conversation process.

Meeting People

e environment in which you live and work plays a major role in your chances of meeting other people, which is the first necessary part of the conversation process. Early, seminal research of

housing developments, for example, found that neighbors whose houses had adjacent driveways had more frequent conversations with one another than with people whose driveways were farther away, and people in houses in the middle of the block tended to have more frequent contact with other people on that block than with those whose houses were at the end of the block (Whyte, 1956). Other researchers found that people who lived in apartments tended to have greater social contact and more friendships with people in the same building and particularly from the same floor of the building.   ey also tended to converse with people whose doors of their apartments, homes, or o   ces face theirs rather than with those whose doors were next to theirs or some distance away (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1963). In a more recent study, individuals who own dogs were found to spend more time outside, be more recognizable to their neighbors, and serve as a source of conversation (Power, 2013), thus decreasing their physical distance from others.

e reason for these results seems fairly obvious: You tend to get to know the people you see or run into most often, due to simple geographic proximity. However, meeting people can be regarded as a numbers game—similar to sending resumes when you look for a job. You are more likely to meet other people if you put yourself in situations that allow you to interact with others. If you find it is di   cult to meet people, make an honest e   ort to seek out situations where you can interact with other people, be it in person or through mediated channels. Engage in social activities, join colleagues in the break room at work, join a club or civic group, or walk around your neighborhood. If you prefer to interact with others online, join an online group for a hobby or cause that interests you or enlarge your circle of friends on the social networking sites that you already belong to.

Establishing Rapport

Once you meet someone, how do you put your best foot forward and improve your chances of making a favorable first impression? After the initial contact, the idiom "breaking the ice" describes the second step in the conversation process: establishing **rapport**. Having rapport with someone means that the two of you connect or communicate well and understand each other. In other words, rapport means that your interactions with another person are smooth and harmonious (Spencer-Oatey, 2005). If you desire, this initial rapport is the basis or foundation upon which the two of you can build a close and harmonious relationship. Rapport is an important aspect of building and maintaining satisfying relationships in the workplace as well, as rapport is an essential component of e   ective face-to-face business and professional interactions (Pullin, 2010).

Establishing rapport occurs during the initial phases of interactions; one way that this rapport can be accomplished is via small talk (Pullin, 2010), an additional aspect of the conversation process that we discuss below. As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, we form first impressions of other people in less than a second. However, psychiatrist Leonard Zunin (1986) argues that when we meet people, we have about four minutes to establish rapport. He suggests that at a typical party, if the host or hostess introduces two strangers, they will tend to converse for a minimum period—on average, about four minutes—before they decide to continue the conversation or to move on to new contacts. If a relationship continues, it is by mutual consent; if one person is unwilling, the potential relationship is lost for that moment. At the core of establishing rapport, says Zunin (1986), are four key principles:

- Conveying *confidence*. Choosing not to exude confidence—the belief that you can be successful or excel at something—may create a temporary sympathy from the other person in the conversation, but most people do not respond favorably if they perceive the other person lacks confidence or is self-demeaning or overly apologetic.

- Being *creative.* Making contacts means finding ways to tune into the feelings of others. Humor may be used, but you can also notice and comment on something interesting about

the other person, and using your strengths and interests can help you find ways of initiating conversation with others.

- Showing that you *care.* Asking appropriate questions about personal interests, giving your total attention, and being a good listener show the other person that you care. Indeed, Dale Carnegie, author of the best-selling book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, said, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you" (1990, p. 54).

- Being *considerate.* Being sensitive and aware that you are relating to another unique individual is one way to show consideration. Zunin (1986) describes consideration best by saying that some people we meet leave us feeling a little better about ourselves after we talk with them. Listening skills are some of the most important ways in which you express consideration for other people—by making good eye contact, appropriately smiling, being engaged with the other person, and responding with meaningful questions and comments.

  e feeling of consideration is thus a combination of the other three factors: confidence, creativity, and caring.

e first step in breaking the ice is simply to greet the other person. Culture can help determine the best way to initiate a conversation. In the United States, for example, a smile, a handshake, or a simple "hello" and an introduction are all ways to initiate a conversation.   e next step is to ask a nonthreatening question, to comment about some element of the occasion or the environment in which the two of you are talking, or to listen carefully and to respond to

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▲ When establishing rapport during the initial phase of an interaction, we can use open-ended questions to encourage the other person to share information.

what the other person says in response to your greeting. For example, you might ask general questions such as, "Where are you from?" or "Have you been in this area long?" Questioning the other person is a useful strategy many people employ because it allows them to avoid focusing on themselves, and it gives the other person the opportunity to take the initiative to share information. When you ask a question or make a comment, stick to facts rather than opinions and focus on noncontroversial subjects. Try to phrase **abWŽWWW cgWf[a` e** that ask who, what, where, when, why, and how. Such questions require more than a yes or no answer and encourage the other person to talk.

You might also use a technique called **ebWWZ_ [dbad`Y** to help you establish and build rapport with another person. To do this, pay attention to how the other person is speaking—how fast and how loudly the person talks and the pattern of give and take in the conversation.   en try to match your speech with the pace and characteristics of the speech set by the other person.   is technique can help both of you feel more comfortable with each other.

e first two steps we have discussed will generally get you through the crucial first four minutes and avoid disagreement, during which time you and the other person will decide to end the conversation or to continue. If you both desire to continue the conversation, you will worry less about establishing and maintaining rapport in the conversation from that point on. It should naturally and comfortably unfold on its own.

Turn-Taking

An important but often overlooked aspect of the conversation process is **turn-taking**. A conversation requires that both communicators act as speakers and as listeners, and the transition between these two roles should occur very fluidly and naturally. Recall from Chapter 4 that we use many nonverbal messages to regulate when each communicator takes turns during an interaction, and a conversation is no different. Indeed, when one communicator dominates the interaction by speaking the majority of the time, it becomes less of a conversation and more of a monologue. Both individuals need to contribute, and take their turns when appropriate, for the conversation to be maintained.

Listening

One of the most neglected interpersonal communication skills, and a core competence we must master to be an effective communicator, is listening. If you do not listen during an interaction, then you cannot understand others, respond appropriately to what they say, or provide helpful feedback. Parents and teachers help teach children to speak, read, and write, but very few people have had formal lessons about listening. This gap in education is particularly troubling because some research shows that we engage in listening more than any other form of communication activity. One study estimated that 45% of all communication time is spent listening, compared with 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing (Hayes, 1991). Listening is also an important aspect of the conversation process.

Though most people think they are good listeners, studies show that the majority of people listen poorly and inefficiently (Lee & Hatesohl, 1993). Minimal training to build listening skills is one possible explanation, but another reason is that people think faster than they can speak. Humans have the mental capacity to hear and understand words spoken at 400 to 500 words per minute; however, most people speak at about 100 to 125 words per minute. While someone is speaking to you, you have a great deal of extra time to let your mind wander and to think of things other than what the speaker is saying.

We sometimes confuse hearing with listening. Listening involves hearing, but it is much more than just the physiological act of your ears perceiving a sound and transmitting the auditory sensation to your brain. **Listening** is a complex psychological process of physically hearing, interpreting, and understanding the significance of a sound (Hayes, 1991). As we learned earlier in this text, listening is essential to the symbolic process of creating meaning (encoding) and attempting to discern the meaning that other people give to a message (decoding). Effective listening is a process that requires six distinct components:

1. Motivating yourself to listen—approaching the situation with an open mind and an expectation of gaining something from the speaker
2. Clearly hearing the message without internal or external noises or distractions
3. Paying attention to or focusing on the verbal and nonverbal messages
4. Correctly interpreting the message by attempting to know what the symbols mean to the person who is using them
5. Evaluating the message by deciding what you think and feel about the information, which will determine how you respond
6. Remembering and responding appropriately (Adair, 2003)

Your methods of meeting other people and engaging them in conversation are familiar to you, and for this reason such patterns may be hard to change, even if your behaviors are ineffective

or difficult for you in some ways. Do you have difficulty walking up to strangers and talking with them? Do you think you come on too strong or are too talkative, or have you been told that you need to assert yourself more? Do you feel you need to sharpen your conversational skills or to feel more comfortable making small talk? Improving your conversational competency is not difficult; it simply requires that you learn and use the above methods of making contact with other people—striking up conversations with them, establishing a rapport, and learning to listen effectively. (*IPC Research Applied* addresses a specific communication challenge when one or both of the partners are in the military.)

IPC RESEARCH APPLIED

Conversations and Topic Avoidance in Military and Nonmilitary Romantic Relationships

Perhaps one of the biggest relationship challenges a couple can face is when one or both partners are enlisted in the military. The great lengths of time spent apart during deployment, concerns regarding the safety of the military partner, frequent relocation, and the physical and mental stress that both partners can go through are unique experiences that few nonmilitary couples consistently face. It is no surprise, then, that military spouses are more likely to divorce than couples with no military spouse. There are almost 1.4 million active duty U.S. service members who have over 1.9 million family members (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of Defense, 2012). For these reasons, the communication between military couples has become a new and growing area of interpersonal communication research.

A recent study by Brandi Frisby and her colleagues from West Virginia University (Frisby, Byrnes, Mansson, Booth-Butterfield, & Birmingham, 2011) sought to learn more about and compare everyday conversation patterns and the act of avoiding discussion of certain topics (called **topic avoidance**) in military and nonmilitary couples. They specifically examined the types of topics that each couple avoided, the frequency in which they engaged in everyday talk with each other, the importance of such talk to their relationships, and how each topic is related to the participants' individual stress.

The sample included 118 military and 94 nonmilitary participants, each of whom was currently involved in a romantic relationship. These participants completed a written survey about their topic avoidance, everyday conversation patterns, and stress. Frisby and her colleagues (2011) found that military and nonmilitary romantic partners were just as likely to avoid most of the topics they examined, including prior dating relationships, negative relationship behaviors, and topics that spark conflict. However, nonmilitary romantic partners were more likely than military partners to avoid talking about religion, the status of their relationship, marriage, and living together. Overall, nonmilitary couples avoided more topics than did military partners. However, though military and non-military participants engaged in the same amount of everyday conversation and experienced the same levels of stress, military couples rated their everyday talk as more important. In addition, higher levels of topic avoidance and a lower frequency of everyday conversation each contributed to the stress levels of only the military participants.

These findings show that there are both similarities and differences regarding specific communication patterns for nonmilitary and military romantic partners. Frisby and her colleagues (2011) speculate that military partners may uniquely recognize the importance of everyday conversation because they spend less time together and have fewer opportunities to interact than nonmilitary

(continued)

couples. This may also explain why military partners experience more stress when there is greater topic avoidance and less everyday conversation. Learning more about the everyday communication patterns between military romantic partners can hopefully help to ease the stress and difficulties that they must deal with on a regular basis. Doing so can benefit their relationships as well as their individual well-being.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What resources can be provided to service members and their families to help them communicate with one another more frequently?
2. Do you think these findings may also extend to service members' other family members, such as their parents, siblings, and children? How might everyday communication patterns be different for these different types of relationships?
3. If you had the opportunity to conduct research on service members' communication with their family members, what would you study and why?

Small Talk and Phatic Communication

A final important component in the conversation process is the act of small talk (also known as *phatic communication*). **E_ S^^fS'|** is defined as "the phase of conversation that follows the exchange of greetings but precedes the discussion of more serious topics" (Knutson & Ayers, 1986, p. 5). Examples of small talk topics include the weather, current events, and comments about the event or environment where the individuals are talking (for example, "   is restaurant is really nice. I hear they have great shrimp cocktails"). Many people dislike small talk, or view it only as a necessary (and sometimes even unnecessary) evil in their conversations with others. However, one research study (Knutson & Ayers, 1986) analyzed the conversations of 17 friendship pairs.   e research determined that small talk has a number of important functions. Namely, small talk serves as a conduit for

- Information exchange
- Discussions about more intimate and serious topics
- Relationship validation
- Self-presentation in interactions with others
- Nonthreatening behaviors that help in killing time (Knutson & Ayers, 1986)

 ese functions of small talk show that it is not only an important way to transition to other parts of the conversation, as the first two functions show, but it is also a key form of communication in and of itself (Knutson & Ayers, 1986).

Small talk can also serve a purpose beyond its immediate functions in a two-person conversation. For example, small talk is an important method for building rapport, solidarity, and trust between work colleagues and is thus an essential gateway to productive and e ective business and professional interactions (Pullin, 2010). Specifically, small talk can create a relaxing atmosphere, di use tensions and power di erentials, and even provide insight into the di erent views and backgrounds of employees. Patricia Pullin (2010) thus recommends that companies value and create a space for small talk. In addition, in initially identifying the importance of small talk in our communication with others, communication scholar Mark Knapp (1978) argued that small talk helps us maintain a sense of community and fellowship with one another, and thus helps build acceptance and social cohesion. In this way, if a culture approves of small talk, its members know that it is an acceptable way to initiate a conversation with a stranger. Overall, despite its

bad reputation, small talk does indeed possess many benefits at the interpersonal, professional, and even societal level. (See the *Web Field Trip* for a perspective on the impact of technology on connecting with others.)

WEB FIELD TRIP

Connected but Not Connecting

In an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, MIT psychology professor Sherry Turkle considers the effects of our increased technological connectivity on our ability to connect with others. Though we can constantly be in touch with others via digital means, such as e-mails or text messages, our in-person relationships are suffering. Turkle emphasizes the importance of the "messy and demanding" conversations, which often occur face-to-face, that help us understand one another on a deeper level (Turkle, 2012, para. 11). Visit the *New York Times* website (http://www.nytimes.com/) and search for Turkle's article, "The Flight from Conversation." Review the content, and then take a moment to consider the following questions.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How might our increased connectivity affect our small talk and phatic communication skills? How might it affect self-reflection skills?
2. Consider the following statement: "In the silence of connection, people are comforted by being in touch with a lot of people—carefully kept at bay" (Turkle, 2012, para. 9). Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

7.3 Attraction and Relationship Development

Researchers in social psychology and communication have long been interested in understanding exactly how and why we are attracted to and develop relationships with others. What factors contribute to wanting to meet and spend time with one individual, but not another? As you can imagine, there is not just a single explanation of our attraction and relationship initiation behaviors; rather, a variety of related components come into play. In this section, we briefly introduce and describe four different perspectives that are intended to explain how we come to know other people and why we decide to form (or not form) relationships with them:

- Attraction theory
- Relationship dialectics theory
- Uncertainty management
- Predicted outcome value theory

Each perspective takes a unique position on attraction and relationship development, and, together, they paint a detailed picture of these intricate and often complicated processes.

Attraction Theory

When you begin to interact with others, you probably find that you are very interested in getting to know some people better, while others do not interest you to the same degree. This interest and desire to get to know someone better is known as **attraction**. What attracts you to some individuals and not to others? After decades of research, researchers are still not entirely sure. The

elusive factor of attraction between people, sometimes referred to as chemistry, is not completely understood. However, one theory proposes that several factors can combine to influence you to be more attracted to certain people than to others. According to **attraction theory**, the three factors that best influence attraction are physical proximity, physical attractiveness, and similarities and differences (Hartley, 1999). Let's briefly explore each of these factors.

Physical Proximity

If you are in close physical proximity to other people—whether it is in the community where you live, at school, at church, or at work—then you are more likely to develop friendships or romantic relationships within that group of people than with individuals who live a great distance from you. However, the centrality of physical proximity, at least initially, is changing with the growth of online dating and long-distance relationships. We are able to meet other people online and keep up with our relationships through mediated means such as social networks and mobile phones. Over time, though, individuals in romantic relationships will likely need to be in proximity to each other for some period of time for their relationship to truly grow.

Physical Attractiveness

Physical attractiveness is another powerful influence on your likelihood to be attracted to and form a relationship with someone. Psychologists have found that we are strongly influenced by prototypes of the ideal male and female form as portrayed by media in our culture (Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas, & Williams, 2000). However, according to the **matching hypothesis**, everyone does not pursue the most attractive individuals, as doing so means there is a relatively small chance of actually forming a relationship with them. Rather, in our friendships and romantic relationships, we instead gravitate toward those who "match" our own physical attractiveness levels, including our body type, facial features, overall physical attractiveness, and even how we dress. Other factors, such as power or wealth, can be more important than physical attractiveness, but decades of research have consistently supported the matching hypothesis.

Similarities and Differences

You have probably heard the saying, "Birds of a feather flock together." Another popular adage is, "Opposites attract." Which saying is true? According to researchers, both are accurate (Hartley, 1999). You are likely to notice and perhaps even be attracted to people who appear to come from a social background similar to yours or who have interests, attitudes, and values like your own. When you meet strangers, you may look for verbal and nonverbal clues such as regional accents, dress, and mannerisms that you recognize or for common interests, attitudes, and values. The matching hypothesis, discussed above, is an example of the similarity of physical attractiveness levels being relevant to attraction.

You might also be attracted to people who possess traits you do not have. For example, if you are shy, you might enjoy being with someone who is outgoing and makes friends easily. The other person's gregarious personality might fill a need you have and help bring you out of your shell. In this way, your personalities complement each other, and you may feel as though you fit together well.

Relationship Dialectics Theory

Communication scholars Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery viewed relationship initiation and continuation as a process. Specifically, in their relationship dialectics theory, they propose that relating is a contradiction-ridden dialogue where relationship partners continuously face and struggle with opposing tensions (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). These **dialectics**

tensions represent the push and pull of divergent ends of a continuum between the self and the relationship. Dialectical tensions are present in romantic, friend, and family relationships, as well as in long-distance relationships (Sahlstein, 2004). Namely, there are three primary pairs of relationship dialectics that should be consistently attended to and managed in relationships: autonomy and connection; novelty and predictability; and openness and closedness.   ese pairs are each discussed in the sections below.

Autonomy and Connection

A relationship where the partners are constantly together or always apart is not healthy and cannot be sustained. Instead, it is best for relationships to involve both partners negotiating time together and time on their own.   e **autonomy and connection** dialectic acknowledges the push and pull between seeking to be independent and focusing on the self versus wanting to feel connected to your partner.   e struggle between autonomy and connection is typically the primary dialectic in romantic relationships and can even be a reason for romantic dissolution (Sahlstein & Dun, 2008).

Novelty and Predictability

Always being unsure about what is going to happen in the relationship is uncomfortable and tiring, and being able to predict your partner's every move can become tedious and boring.   e **novelty and predictability** dialectic reflects the tension between wanting to be surprised and to experience newness and wanting to be able to predict routine patterns in a relationship. Relational partners tend to prefer that novelty be in the form of small gestures, such as surprise gifts, and predictability occur in relation to larger relational patterns, such as making and keeping dates and future plans. Research has also found that this tension can be prominent in the experiences of the cultural adjustment of immigrants (Erbert, Perez, & Gareis, 2003). Specifically, immigrants were particularly attuned to the di erences between their old and new cultures and found that adjusting to one's new culture involves learning about and adapting to these unfamiliar and surprising experiences (Erbert et al., 2003).

Openness and Closedness

If you are constantly open, disclosing information about yourself, this can create vulnerability, but not sharing any information and maintaining privacy prevents the development of intimacy.

    e final major dialectical tension is **openness and closedness**, a continuum between sharing and concealing information. We may choose particular times or situations in which to be open or closed, or instead we may alternate between specific topics that we want to discuss versus keep private. For example, divorced and stepfamily members often struggle with this tension, and they manage it by segmenting information into safe and unsafe topics (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006).

    is was a particular issue for children communicating with a parent with whom they did not live (i.e., the nonresidential parent). More specifically, these children sought open communication with their nonresidential parent, but these children had di culty achieving this openness because the parent was not privy to the children's everyday life and activities and because they did not want to hurt the nonresidential parent's feelings, particularly when it came to the relationship the child had with the stepparent (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006).

Uncertainty Management

When you first meet someone, when you begin to talk, what is your goal? What do you hope to get out of the interaction?   ese questions are at the heart of uncertainty reduction theory (URT), which was introduced by communication theorists Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in 1975. URT predicted that the primary motivation in an initial interaction is to reduce uncertainty

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▲ Scholars now focus on learning more about how we manage uncertainty during our interactions in both new and established relationships.

about the other person and the relationship that you may develop. You experience **uncertainty** when "details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general" (Brashers, 2001, p. 478).

URT is laid out via a series of specific predictions, called axioms, which state that uncertainty will decrease during first meetings as messages such as verbal communication, information-seeking, and nonverbal expressiveness increase (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Initially, URT was significant because it was intuitive and was also the first authentic interpersonal communication theory, but subsequent research failed to consistently support URT's predictions. Indeed, a set of research studies found that certain communication situations such as romantic infidelity and forming new friendships with others could actually *increase* your uncertainty about your partner (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988). Such findings led to a fundamental shift in uncertainty research. Instead of focusing exclusively on the reduction of uncertainty in relation to how we interact with others, uncertainty scholars now concentrate their efforts on understanding how we *manage* our uncertainty. The notion of **uncertainty management** acknowledges that interpersonal communication can increase, decrease, or maintain our uncertainty about the other person, our relationship with that person, and even how we view ourselves. Thus uncertainty management is a broad concept that allows us to study uncertainty in both new and established relationships.

Predicted Outcome Value Theory

To determine what motivates us when we communicate in initial interactions, Michael Sunnafrank (1986) developed **predicted outcome value (POV) theory.** Unlike the other theories previously introduced in this section, POV theory states that our communication is not guided by a desire to decrease uncertainty, but instead, when we first meet someone, we are motivated by a desire to maximize relationship outcomes. Predicted outcome value is thus identified as the belief that, based on the initial meeting, a future relationship will likely be either positive or negative. Individuals strive to form relationships with others so that they can achieve positive relational outcomes (Sunnafrank, 1986). If both communicators perceive that the interaction was positive, they likely will believe that future interactions will also be positive and will both try to spend more time together. For example, the individual who wrote the "Missed Connections" ad presented in the beginning of the chapter believed their brief first meeting held the possibility of a rewarding relationship. However, when both partners perceive an interaction as negative, they are likely to have a less positive POV about the relationship and will not pursue a future relationship.

When we consider the larger implications on relationship development, how does research about POV compare with research about uncertainty? In three separate studies, Sunnafrank found evidence that supported POV theory (Sunnafrank, 1988, 1990; Sunnafrank, & Ramirez, 2004).

In these studies, an individual's POV about his or her partner was positively related to amount of verbal communication, nonverbal affiliation, intimacy, liking, attraction, perceived similarity, and information seeking. In essence, the more individuals communicated with, and experienced intimacy, liking, attraction, and similarity with their conversation partners, the greater their POV regarding a future relationship with that individual. Further, when uncertainty and POV in initial interactions are directly compared to one another, research has consistently found that POV is a more important motivator than uncertainty and is more strongly related to how the individuals interact with one another (Grove & Werkman, 1991; Sunnafrank, 1990). POV theory has also been extended to understanding more established relationships. In such relationships, unexpected events could cause one or both individuals to reevaluate the value of their relationship (Ramirez, Sunnafrank, & Goei, 2010). POV theory also applies in online contexts. One research study (Young, Kelsey, & Lancaster, 2011) found that the frequency and immediacy of e-mails between college students and their professors can contribute to the students' predicted outcome value of developing a student–teacher relationship.

Take a moment to consider each of the perspectives. Although attraction theory highlights the basic elements that contribute to a relationship forming and blossoming, POV theory adds an additional piece to the puzzle by arguing that we communicate to maximize relationship outcomes. In addition, uncertainty management can help us understand how we communicate to reduce and manage our uncertainty when in developing and established relationships. Finally, relationship dialectics theory presents the major tensions that individuals must face and manage as relationships form and grow. Each of these theories provides a unique perspective to help us understand our attraction toward one another and our interest in developing relationships with others.

7.4 Self-Disclosure and Relationship Development

You cannot form or maintain authentic relationships without self-disclosure. Often when you engage in conversation, you must make decisions about how much personal information to share—how much to reveal about your thoughts, feelings, fears, likes, dislikes, and personal experiences. Have you had the experience of meeting someone for the first time and having him or her tell you personal information that you did not particularly want to hear? Have you opened up to someone and shared your thoughts or feelings but then regretted it later? The intentional act of sharing private and personal aspects of you with other people is called **self-disclosure** (Wheeless, 1978). This definition of self-disclosure specifies the type of information that is catalogued under self-disclosure. According to this definition, basic information about you, such as your name, biological sex, or age, would not be classified as self-disclosure because this type of information is relatively easy to find or observe. Lawrence Wheeless's (1978) definition of self-disclosure refers to information that is private and would likely not be revealed by anyone other than you. Self-disclosure from this perspective is thus an intentional choice.

Self-disclosure is important for building rapport with other people, but it also helps you learn more about yourself. If you meet and continue to develop a relationship with another person, over time you gradually disclose more information about yourself. Identifying, understanding, and then verbalizing your ideas, beliefs, and experiences are processes that enable you to better explore and analyze yourself. As you disclose more to others, you may become aware of previously untapped issues or feelings. Even as you analyze your present conversation, new memories and thoughts come to mind. For example, imagine that you are becoming close friends with someone at work, and you are both building that friendship by sharing things about yourself. You tell your new work friend about the different responsibilities that you have—that you have a full-time job,

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▲ Self-disclosure can help us build rapport with others and help us learn more about ourselves.

are in school, are raising a daughter, and take care of your elderly father. Your work friend replies, "Wow.   at is a lot to take on. I really admire you." When you hear that response, it makes you realize that you do indeed juggle a lot of important tasks, and that your ability to do that makes you stronger than you had given yourself credit for. You also realize that it is important to carve out time for yourself, even in light of everything that is on your plate.

Although self-disclosure can have many positive benefits, such as finding out that you have something in common with another person, it is also risky. Sharing private information about yourself makes you vulnerable. When others know you well, they have information that they might use against you in some way, such as by telling others, and you may fear being taken advantage of (Farber, 2006). You might also want to protect yourself from criticism or rejection. For example, based on the other person's disclosures, you might assume that another person would react negatively to something you reveal about yourself. For example, how might you react if a new romantic partner disclosed that she had cheated on one of her previous partners? Would you be less likely to trust her or would you want to hear more about the situation to determine exactly what happened? Would you be willing to listen to your partner's explanations about why it happened and how it will not happen in your relationship? You may never know unless you test that assumption and disclose information, and unless you are also receptive to others when they disclose risky information about themselves to you.

Social Penetration Theory

In 1973, social psychologists Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor proposed a theory of self-disclosure called **eaU[S^bWWtdSf[a` fZWdk** In this theory, Altman and Taylor compared the disclosure process to peeling an onion layer by layer. When you first meet someone, you usually discuss obvious or nonthreatening subjects, thus remaining only at the surface or peripheral outer layers of the onion. At this peripheral level, you might compliment someone about things that are easily observed such as a person's clothing, jewelry, or hairstyle or discuss mundane topics such as the weather, a local sports team, or an activity in which you are both engaged. Your conversation at this level usually involves learning more than you tell by asking questions to reduce uncertainty about the other person and to try to find some common ground.

As a relationship progresses, people begin to reveal more details about themselves and their lives to the other person.   is type of information forms the middle layers of the onion. You might ask about the other person's family, interests, social activities, and other such topics. Continued progression of the relationship will depend, in part, on the responses you get to such inquiries because this type of disclosure enables you to pinpoint commonalities that can help you determine if you want to get to know this person further. Self-disclosure allows you to reduce uncertainty about each other and to predict how costly or how rewarding future interactions with the other person will be. Once you mutually determine that you want to establish some type of relationship, disclosure gradually and systematically continues to more personal topics (Svennivig, 2000). As this happens, according to social penetration theory, more and more layers of the onion

are being peeled back and revealed. e central layers of the onion represent the most personal or private details about you, such as your values, fears, and feelings, and are revealed only to a few close relational partners.

Self-Disclosure in Person

e vast majority of self-disclosure occurs in face-to-face contexts. In such situations, there are two important things to consider: reciprocity and appropriateness.

First, Sidney Jourard (1971) emphasized that disclosure must be **reciprocal**; both parties must disclose the same degree of information. Face-to-face self-disclosure is most beneficial for a relationship when it is reciprocated at fairly equal amounts between both partners. So when you self-disclose to another person, in a sense you are placing a burden on him or her to share information with you to approximately the same degree. If you continue to share personal information with someone, and he or she does not reciprocate, then you may decide to disclose less or not at all. If the relationship is ongoing, conflict usually results because one person may feel that he or she is doing all the giving and getting little in return. On the other hand, if you are not interested in developing a relationship with the person who is disclosing to you, the shared information can make you uncomfortable because you now know things about this person you did not care to know, and the other person has an unspoken assumption that you will divulge personal information as well.

Second, in-person disclosures must also be appropriate. ink back to the appropriateness dimension of communication competence, which indicates that individuals should strive to follow rules and consider the context or situation surrounding the interaction. For example, sharing intimate details about your relationships or discussing personal issues in professional situations such as the classroom or the workplace is inappropriate in most circumstances. Disclosure that is inappropriate to the context is referred to as **overdisclosure**. To determine what is appropriate, you must consider the communication context, which will impact your decisions about appropriateness:

- *Amount:* how much information you disclose
- *Depth:* the level of detail you disclose
- *Duration:* how long you talk
- *Target:* the nature of you relationship with the other person
- *Situation:* the time and place of the disclosure (Brockbank & McGill, 2006)

As with all communication, self-disclosure must be appropriate to the context in which the communication occurs.

Self-Disclosure Online

Opportunities for self-disclosure have expanded exponentially with the growth of the Internet, emerging technologies, and social networking sites. Individuals have been able to disclose about themselves online for the past two decades, and this outlet for self-disclosure is unique and thus distinct from face-to-face self-disclosure in two important ways. First, self-disclosing on social networks can be done either exclusively, that is, directed privately to only the receiver by private message, or nonexclusively, by posting to many individuals in their networks via public Twitter comments, status updates, or wall postings.

e extent to which a self-discloser provides information to a receiver exclusively is referred to as **V[eU˵aⅇgⅾⅤbWⅇa`S˅[e_** (Bazarova, 2012). For example, exclusive disclosures about both positive and negative topics on Facebook were viewed as more intimate and personal than

Erik Palmer/FogStock/Thinkstock

▲ Technology offers additional opportunities for self-disclosure. On the Internet, for example, the information we share with others can be either exclusive, via personal messages, or nonexclusive, via postings on message boards.

nonexclusive disclosures (Bazarova, 2012). Further, when disclosures were exclusive to a particular individual rather than shared with one's broader network, there were also greater perceptions of relationship intimacy and liking of the discloser (Bazarova, 2012). Such research indicates that sharing intimate information with large groups of social network users is an efficient way to disclose but can sometimes have unintended results depending on how the message and the relationship are perceived.

The honesty of self-disclosure is the second factor that differs in online contexts. In face-to-face disclosures, honest and intentional self-disclosure is positively related to relationship intimacy, but in certain online contexts there is no such relationship. For example, researchers (Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011) found that honest self-disclosure on Facebook is not positively related to relationship intimacy. As we discussed in Chapter 2, on social networking sites such as Facebook users are easily able to create and change their self-images. Being honest and conscious of what is disclosed may not be as important in this context as it is in face-to-face disclosures.

However, one study reveals an important similarity between online and offline self-disclosures. Individuals report that they disclosed a similar degree of information and were as honest and intentional about those disclosures, both in person and via social networking channels (Chen & Marcus, 2012). Though sharing information about oneself to a group of people via mediated channels has a certain appeal, it is important to remember that this form of self-disclosure is less private and more permanent than face-to-face disclosures. Potential employers could access these online self-disclosures, or those who view this information could use it against you, or use it to form a negative impression of you. As we discussed in Chapter 6, exercise caution when you post about yourself online, and verify which other users can access the information.

Self-Disclosure and Health

Jourard (1971) argued that self-disclosure is linked to individual well-being. Specifically, those who actively avoid disclosing to others increase their vulnerability to stress, which then increases the likelihood of compromising personal physical health (Jourard, 1971). Based on Jourard's idea, psychologist James Pennebaker (1989) formally theorized that disclosure and mental and physical health are interrelated. His **fZW`\dkaX]`Z[T[f]a` S`VUa`Xda`fSf]a`** posits that there is a clear relationship between disclosure and health: Namely, keeping important psychological experiences to yourself, or inhibition, can increase stress levels. That stress can then lead to the development of other health issues. Conversely, when you disclose your deep personal experiences, when you decrease inhibition, you also lower your stress levels. This decrease in stress can then benefit overall health.

In one study that tested the theory of inhibition and confrontation, students who wrote about their traumatic experiences visited the university health center less frequently than did those who did not disclose via writing (Pennebaker, 1989). In addition, individuals who were less emotionally

expressive were more likely to experience health issues such as headaches, asthma, heart disease complications, and even early cancer death (Pennebaker, 1993). Research that tests the theory of inhibition and confrontation, as well as research that generally links self-disclosure with health, has overwhelmingly found evidence of a positive association between the sharing of private information about oneself and individual health and well-being (e.g., Tardy, 2000). Overall, research shows that self-disclosure can be good for the body and the soul and has at least six positive consequences, as illustrated in Table 7.1 (Farber, 2006).

Table 7.1: The positive consequences of self-disclosure

Positive Consequence	Implied Statement
Feeling emotionally closer to another person (intimacy)	"Being able to talk with you like this makes me feel closer to you."
Feeling validated or affirmed by the other person	"I'm telling you this because I want you to tell me that what I did was right."
Strengthening your identity	"He got mad at me when I said that, but I don't care."
Exploring your feelings	"The more I talk about this, the more I understand the different feelings I have."
Achieving a greater sense of authenticity—being true to yourself	"It feels so good to be able to talk about this honestly with someone."
Relieving the burden of painful or shameful experiences	"It is such a relief to get this off my chest."

Source: Adapted from Farber, B. A. (2006). *Self-disclosure in psychotherapy.* New York, NY: Guilford.

However, self-disclosure can sometimes be painful and even harmful. Some of the negative consequences of self-disclosure identified by Robin Kowalski (1999) are summarized in Table 7.2. It is also important to keep in mind that although self-disclosure has an impact on relationships, on individuals, and on health, it is not always or entirely beneficial, as we discussed in our evaluation of self-disclosure in both face-to-face and online interactions.

Table 7.2: The negative consequences of self-disclosure

Negative Consequence	Outcome
Being rebuffed by the other person	Feeling rejected
Burdening another person with your secrets so that he or she might worry about it, feel responsible for doing something, or identify with your pain	Feeling guilt
Creating undesired impressions about yourself or being seen as different because of the disclosure and perhaps changing the way the other person sees you	Feeling regret
Increasing your feelings of vulnerability or feeling that you have given away too much of yourself	Feeling vulnerable and perhaps wanting to close up again to feel safe
Facing undesirable parts of yourself and acknowledging that you are not the person you wish to be	Feeling shame
Giving the other person power over you and being in danger of the other person's using that information against you	Feeling violated or fearful

Source: Adapted from: Kowalski, R. M. (1999). Speaking the unspeakable: Self-disclosure and mental health. In R. M. Kowalski & M. R. Leary (Eds.), *The social psychology of emotional and behavioral problems* (pp. 225–248). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
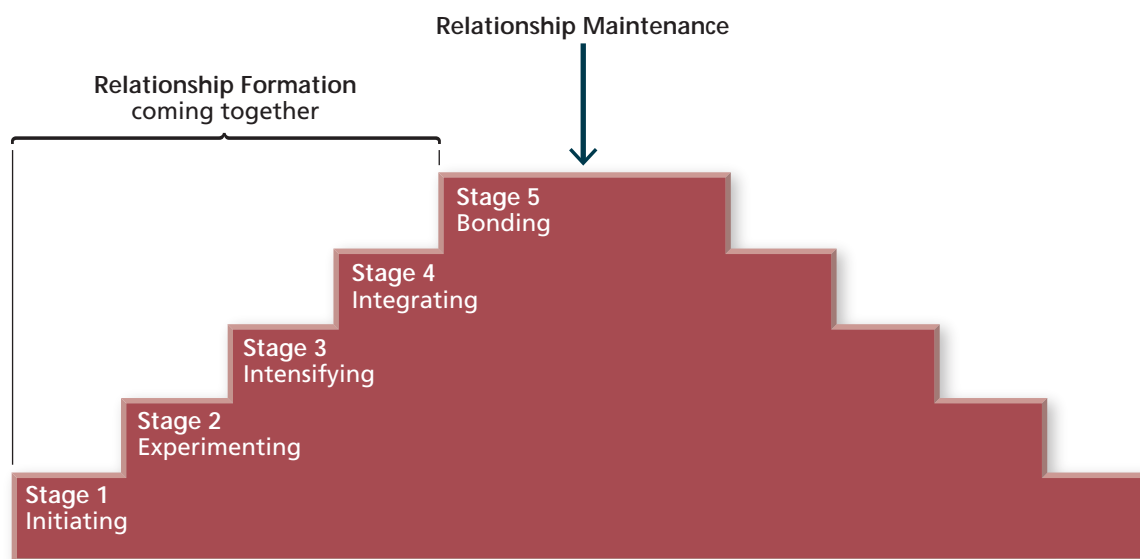
7.5 Stages in Forming Close Relationships

In 1978, communication scholar Mark Knapp first presented his **stage model of relationships**. This model attempted to answer the question of how relationships progress through the phases of formation and termination. In this model, Knapp presented 10 sequential stages: 5 for coming together, and 5 for breaking apart. In between these stages, the relational partners are in a state of relationship maintenance, which we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8. Since its introduction, the stage model has been widely used to understand how individuals go through the process of beginning and ending relationships, leading some researchers to call it "a full treatment of the relational life-cycle" (Avtgis, West, & Anderson, 1998, p. 281). Further, the structure of Knapp's stage model has been validated in multiple research studies (e.g., Avtgis et al., 1998; Welch & Rubin, 2002).

Overall, Knapp's stage model of relationships offers a useful way to chart how relationships grow and wither away. However, there are some caveats to this model to keep in mind. First, though we can conceive of friendships as progressing through these stages, the stage model is best applied to romantic relationships. Second, the stage model does not account for what happens in a relationship once bonding has occurred. Relationship maintenance, discussed in the next chapter, thus is not considered in Knapp's stage model. Third, the stage model assumes that relationship partners proceed sequentially through the stages, when in reality some partners may remain stuck in one stage or may move back and forth between stages.

The next sections will describe the first five stages of relationship formation (Figure 7.1). The final five stages (coming apart) will be discussed in Chapter 10. Remember to keep in mind that though this model provides a general framework for understanding how relationships initiate and develop, it should not be viewed as a required checklist for all relationships. Always remember that every relationship is a bit different and progresses in a different way.

Figure 7.1: The five stages of relationship formation

Knapp's stage model of relationships can help explain how relationships form and, in some cases, deteriorate. During the stages shown here, the partners begin to come together and establish a relationship.

Source: Adapted from Knapp, M. L. (1978). *Social intercourse: From greeting to goodbye.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Initiating

In the **[`[f]Sf[`YefSYW** we set eyes on, or become aware of, the other person for the very first time. It is our initial point of contact and is usually very brief, typically lasting less than a minute.

ere are brief nonverbal messages, such as eye contact or smiling, and there may also be short verbal exchanges where basic, demographic, and superficial information is exchanged. If the first contact takes place online, such as through an online dating site, the first message exchanged between two individuals would constitute the initiation stage. In this stage, we use only a limited amount of information to determine if we wish to interact more with this person.

ink back to the "Missed Connections" ad introduced at the beginning of the chapter. e individual took part in the initiating stage with the person he or she was trying to locate. ey chatted about the food that they were purchasing at the grocery store and learned basic demographic information while out shopping, and the person who placed the ad would like to move on to the next stage of relationship formation.

Experimenting

If the interaction continues beyond a minute or so, the pair has moved into the **WbWd_Wf[`Y stage**. In this stage, according to URT and POV theory, we first assess our uncertainty and the reward value of pursuing a relationship with the other person. We seek to gain more information from this person so that we can make such decisions. We also seek to make a good impression on the other person (Avtgis et al., 1998). e small talk, or phatic communication, that we discussed earlier in this chapter is a hallmark of the experimenting stage, as it allows the communicators to look for similarities and di erences that help them determine if they want to pursue a relationship. Knapp (1978) emphasizes that most interactions we have with others never progress beyond the experimenting stage. In other words, we move from the initiating to the experimenting stage, and then one or both individuals elects to not pursue the relationship any further. But if both individuals decide to pursue the relationship, they progress to the next stage.

Intensifying

e third stage in Knapp's model is known as the **[`fWe[Xd[`YefSYW** when a true interpersonal relationship between two individuals first develops. Intimacy and closeness grow in this stage and are exhibited via multiple verbal and nonverbal messages. Self-disclosure begins in earnest in this stage, and the pair may engage in more intimate nonverbal behaviors such as standing closer together, engaging in more eye contact, or physically touching each other. As the pair moves further into this stage, they also engage in more in-depth disclosures and even more intimate nonverbal behaviors. By and large, this stage often includes the most excitement and joy experienced by the partners: After all, they have found each other and are embarking on an exciting new relationship.

Integrating

In the **[`fWcdSf[`YefSYW** the relationship partners come to see themselves as a social unit. e pair may use more joint pronouns such as "we" and "our" rather than singular pronouns like "I" and "my." ey may introduce each other to their friends; others begin to consider them a couple as well. For example, friends may invite both individuals to hang out informally or send them a wedding invitation that includes both of their names. In these ways, the integrating stage involves personal and social declarations that the two share a relationship. ey are integrating each other

into their lives more as the relationship progresses. Yet at this stage the individuals may also observe dialectical tensions, such as a struggle between autonomy and connection, as both partners fully settle into the growing seriousness of the relationship.

Bonding

Knapp's final coming together stage is also the most serious and committed stage of a new relationship. As a couple's relationship grows, they may reach the **Ta`V[`YefSYW,** where there is a formal or ritualistic declaration of their commitment to each other and to the relationship. Family and friend relationships are blended together, and communication between the partners is at its most advanced level (Welch & Rubin, 2002).

In romantic relationships, bonding can include getting engaged or married, but examples can also include buying a house and moving in together or having a child together. Friends can also make formal declarations of bonding, and examples of this type of bonding may include serving as bridesmaids or groomsmen in a wedding or as a child's godparent. us bonding involves some significant level of commitment that is acknowledged by social or legal institutions and that is above and beyond what occurs in the integrating stage. (See *IPC in the Digital Age* for a description of Knapp's relational stages on Facebook.)

IPC IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Knapp's Relational Stage Model on Facebook

We know that Knapp's relational stage model (1978) assists in explaining how we develop our face-to-face relationships, but does the model translate to our online interactions as well? Recent research conducted by communication scholars from Ohio State University and Wittenburg University explored how Knapp's relationship development stages are experienced via Facebook. Specifically, Jesse Fox, Katie Warber, and Dana Makstaller (in press) conducted a series of focus groups with male and female college students, asking questions about how the students used Facebook to declare a relationship status. The answers provided by participants were than transcribed into written form and examined for consistent patterns and themes.

Fox and colleagues identified a number of themes regarding Facebook and Knapp's relationship stages. The main themes uncovered in this research (Fox et al., in press) are as follows:

- First, Facebook has altered how relationships are initiated because it provides a new way to continue communicating with others after initial in-person and online encounters.
- Second, Facebook can help individuals seek information and reduce uncertainty about a potential partner.
- Third, Facebook provides the option to identify relationship status.
- Fourth, Facebook also allows relationship status to include the name of the individual with whom the participant shares a relationship.

Facebook can be an important tool in the initiating, experimenting, intensifying, and integrating stages of Knapp's relational stage model. Facebook can provide a nonthreatening and indirect way to continue contact, seek information, and reduce uncertainty. It also allows users to make a public declaration about their relationship status. From these findings, Fox and colleagues (in press) concluded that there are elements of Facebook that clearly reflect Knapp's stages of coming together, thus providing further support for the model in an online context.

(continued)

> **Critical Thinking Questions**
>
> 1. Apply these findings to your own experiences on Facebook. Do you screen potential romantic partners on Facebook? Have you ever decided not to pursue a relationship with someone after viewing his or her Facebook profile?
> 2. How have you and your partner negotiated making formal relationship declarations on Facebook? Do you consider doing so a significant step or no big deal?
> 3. Which other Facebook features do you think reflect Knapp's relationship stages?

7.6 Strategies for Communicating Competently When Forming Interpersonal Relationships

roughout this chapter, you have explored ways to improve your competency for perceptions and impressions, making contact and conversing with other people, initiating relationships, and determining when and how much to disclose to another person. To conclude our discussion of these important interpersonal communication skills, learn to apply the following strategies for competent communication when you are initiating interpersonal relationships.

Manage Others' Perceptions and Impressions of You

ough we unconsciously work every day to shape and form how others perceive us, research has helped identify a number of specific communication behaviors that can help us make a more favorable impression on others. According to Leathers and Eaves (2008), personal appearance cues and vocal communication cues are both key to impression management. Personal appearance cues that are beneficial include meeting the clothing expectations of the individuals with whom you will be interacting and being formal and conservative in your dress when you first meet someone, especially in a business and professional context. Helpful vocal cues include speaking at a moderate rate of 125 to 150 words per minute, not using a monotone voice, articulating and pronouncing words correctly, and using deliberate pauses. Being conscious of and employing these specific messages can be advantageous in multiple impression management situations. You can learn to test your intended first impression in the same way that you learned to test the first impressions you receive from others: by verifying if what is sent is the same as what is received. Communicate the impression you intend to send with someone you already know and trust, asking for honest feedback about your behaviors. Your friend can help you identify if your behaviors match the impression you intend to make.

Consider Your—and Your Partner's—Relationship Stage and Dialectical Tensions

Now that you know about relationship dialectics and relationship stages, you can consider how these work in your own close relationship. You should think about your partner and his or her relationship perspective, as well as your own. One particular thing to consider is whether you and your partner are in the same relationship stage or are experiencing a similar dialectic tension. Are you in the bonding stage while your partner remains in the integrating stage? Are you experiencing the openness side of the dialectic while your partner is more on the closed side? Being in two di erent stages or being on opposite ends of a particular dialectic could be a reason that you are experiencing problems or issues. Table 7.3 summarizes each of five stages of relationship formation discussed in this chapter. Keep each of these stages in mind when you evaluate a

relationship. Overall, having a shared vision of what the relationship is and where it is headed is important to its success, and considering these aspects of your relationship can help you and your partner move closer together.

Table 7.3: Relationship formation: The first five stages of Knapp's model of interpersonal relationships

Stage	Explanation	Example
Initiating	The first stage of formation: One individual becomes aware of the existence of the other individual for the first time.	Making initial eye contact and smiling
Experimenting	The second stage of formation: The individual first assesses his or her uncertainty or the reward value of pursuing a relationship with the other individual.	Starting to learn more about the other person and forming an impression of the person
Intensifying	The third stage of formation: A true relationship develops between the two individuals.	Engaging in more in-depth self-disclosures and more intimate behaviors such as touching
Integrating	The fourth stage of formation: The partners come to see themselves as a social unit.	Others beginning to see them more as a couple rather than as individuals
Bonding	The fifth stage of formation: The partners undergo a formal or ritualistic declaration of their commitment to each other and to the relationship.	Becoming engaged or getting married

Source: Adapted from Knapp, M. L. (1978). *Social intercourse: From greeting to goodbye.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Engage in Competent Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is a key factor in developing and maintaining close relationships.   ough there are some risks when disclosing, doing so competently can make all the di erence. How can you learn to exercise competent self-disclosure? First, identify the appropriate information to self-disclose. Tailor your disclosures to the person, setting, and topic, and do not disclose too much in a public setting or to someone you don't know. Second, strive to disclose in a reciprocal manner; this means that you should disclose at about the same rate and amount that your partner does. Do not disclose significantly more or less than the other person because doing so could damage your relationship. Finally, be aware of what and how you self-disclose online. Do not overshare and remember that many people may see your disclosures—including those to whom you may not have wanted to self-disclose.   ese suggestions will help others to form a positive impression of you and will help you have more satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Summary and Resources

Perceptions and impressions are important when we first meet other people. Perceptions occur when we select, organize, and interpret the world around us through our senses. Selection stimulates our senses in some way, and we respond by focusing on or attending to specific messages, organizing information in a way that makes sense based on our past experiences and our expectations. We form impressions about others when we first meet them, and we simultaneously manage others' impressions of us in our interactions with them. Conversations allow you to share information, ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people. You may sometimes take

everyday conversations for granted because they are such a common part of your life. However, it is through these conversations that you connect with people and begin to build relationships, and engaging with other people in competent conversations is crucial to your well-being and to your success.

Someone must take the first step to initiate the conversation and to make contact, which involves meeting people, forming first impressions, managing impressions, and breaking the ice during the initial phase of interaction. Once the initial contact has been made and both people have decided to continue the conversation, a primary goal of both parties is to build rapport and to find commonalities and di erences between them. During these interactions, listening is a crucial element of communication competence; you cannot understand others, respond appropriately to what they say, and provide helpful feedback if you have not listened.

When you converse with other people, you decide how much personal information to share and to what degree. Self-disclosure, the process through which you come to know the other person and to know yourself better as well, is usually intentional, but you can also unconsciously disclose via your nonverbal actions. Self-disclosure can have many positive benefits, but it can also be risky or have negative consequences. Sharing information about yourself makes you vulnerable, and others can use the information to take advantage of you. However, it is an important process if you want to develop meaningful relationships. Open and appropriate communication, contingent on each unique relationship, can help a relationship progress through Knapp's first five stages of interpersonal relationship development.

Key Terms

Attraction e interest and desire to get to know someone better.

Attraction Theory A theory of attraction that predicts there are three factors that best influence attraction: physical proximity, physical attractiveness, and similarities and di erences.

Autonomy Connection A dialectic that acknowledges the push and pull between being independent and wanting to feel connected to one's partner.

Bonding Stage e fifth stage of Knapp's relational stage model where there is a formal or ritualistic declaration of the partners' commitment to each other and to the relationship.

Credibility e component of impression that involves believability and trustworthiness.

Dialectical Tensions e In relationship dialectics theory, these represent the push and pull of divergent ends of a continuum between the self and the relationship.

Disclosiveness/Exclusiveness e extent to which a self-discloser provides information to a receiver exclusively.

Dominance e component of impression that involves a person's level of power and assertiveness.

Experimenting Stage e second stage of Knapp's relational stage model where we first assess our uncertainty and/or the reward value of pursuing a relationship with this individual.

Extroversion e personality trait of being sociable, friendly, and fond of the company of others.

Halo Effect A part of implicit personality theory that asserts that we group together positive personality characteristics.

Implicit Personality Theory A theory about perceptions that predicts that once we know a small amount about someone's characteristics or traits, we use that small bit of information to "fill in" our general expectation about that person with other similar qualities.

Impression e overall e ect of someone or something, which is based to some extent on one's experience with it.

Impression Formation e act of decoding or interpreting dimensions of another person's image.

Impression Management e act of encoding or creating dimensions of one's own image.

Initiating Stage e first stage of Knapp's relational stage model, where we first become aware of the existence of the other person.

Integrating Stage e fourth stage of Knapp's relational stage model, where the relationship partners come to see themselves as a social unit.

Intensifying Stage e third stage of Knapp's relational stage model, where a true interpersonal relationship between two individuals first develops.

Interpersonal Attractiveness e component of impression that involves how sociable, interesting, and emotionally expressive an individual is.

Interpretation e third step of the perception process in which we explain and assign meaning to the thing that we have selected and organized.

Likeability e component of impression that involves making determinations about how a able and friendly someone is.

Listening A complex psychological process of physically hearing, interpreting that sound, and understanding the significance of it.

Matching Hypothesis In our friendships and romantic relationships, we gravitate toward those who "match" our own physical attractiveness levels.

Novelty-Predictability A dialectic that reflects the tension between wanting to be surprised and wanting to be able to predict routine patterns in a relationship.

Open-Ended Question A question that asks for a comment rather than a yes or no answer.

Openness-Closedness A dialectic that reflects the continuum between sharing and concealing information.

Organization e second step in the perception process in which we arrange the information that we have perceived in a manner that makes sense to us,

Other-Enhancement An attempt to make a favorable impression by making the other person feel good.

Over-Disclosure Providing too much information that is inappropriate to the context of the communication.

bWka`eUZWS An expectation one has about what a specific person will be like, based on the person's characteristics.

bdW[UfWagfUa_WAS'gWBAHfZWadk A theory that predicts that we communicate when we first meet someone in a way that will maximize relationship outcomes.

bdafafkbW A generalized mental image one has about the attitudes and behaviors of the ideal person in a specific role.

dSbbadf A close and harmonious relationship in which individuals understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well. According to Zunin, rapport involves four principles: confidence, creativity, caring, and consideration.

dWU[bdaUS^ In a relationship, when we disclose to others at the same degree that they disclose to us.

dWSf[a`eZ[be Important and close connections or associations that we forge and maintain with other people via communication.

dWiWdeWZS^aWWWf A part of implicit personality theory that asserts that we group together negative personality characteristics; also known as the horn e ect.

da^WeUZWS A set of opinions one has about how someone in a certain role should look or behave.

eUZW_Se Organized collections of information about a subject that are stored in one's memory from past experiences.

eWWUf[a` e first step in the perception process in which something stimulates our senses in some way, and we respond by focusing on or attending to it.

eWXŽ[eU^aegdW e act of revealing private or personal information about the self to other people.

eWXŽbdWeW`fSf[a` e presentation of the self in the best way possible.

e_S^^fS^] e second stage of a conversation that is characterized by surface-level conversation, which precedes discussions about more serious topics.

eaU[S^bW`WfdSf[a`fZWadk A theory that suggests that self-disclosure deepens, in stages, as relationships develop.

ebWWUZ_[ddad[`Y A technique to help one establish and build rapport with another person, involving paying attention to how the other person is speaking and trying to match one's speech with the pace and characteristics of the other's speech.

efSYW_aVW^aX[`fWdbWdea`S^dW^Sf[a`eZ[be Knapp's model that identifies and describes 10 sequential stages, 5 for coming together and 5 for breaking apart, of relationship formation and termination.

fZWadkaX[`Z[T[f[a`S`VUa`Xda`fSf[a` Pennebaker's theory that disclosure is related to mental health and physical well-being.

fab[USha[VS`UW e act of avoiding discussion of certain topics in conversation.

fgd ŽS][`Y A communicative act that involves switching o between speaking and listening during an interaction.

g`UWfS[`fk A cognitive state that occurs when there is limited knowledge or uncertain information about a situation.

g`UWfS[`fk_S`SYW Wf A perspective that states that interpersonal communication can increase, decrease, or maintain our uncertainty about the self, the other person, or the relationship.

Critical Thinking and Discussion Questions

1.   is chapter discusses several di erent perceptions and impressions that can influence first impressions. What can we do to reduce the impact of stereotypes, prototypes, and halo and reverse halo e ects on our perceptions of others?

2.   ink about a recent interaction that you had when managing the other's impression of you was particularly important. How did you adjust your communication to manage that person's impression? Which of the four components of impression were more important in that situation and why?

3. Consider the two di erent self-disclosure environments discussed in this text. How does self-disclosure in person di er from self-disclosure online? Are there di erent risks and benefits for each of these communication channels?

4. When you first interact with someone, which do you think is more central: reducing or managing your uncertainty or predicting what the relational outcome will be? Why do you think that is?

5. Consider one of your own close relationships. How do the stages of Knapp's relationship stage model apply to your relationship's development? How would you revise the model to improve its application to the progression of relationships?